

SECTION B: EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

CHAPTER TEN: STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The previous section captured the literature study of the research conducted. The empirical research conducted is covered by Chapters 10 to 12 which include various structured interviews with planning professionals and discussions on South African case studies.

Chapter 10 captures structured interviews held with professionals to gain an expert view on the challenges faced and opportunities presented by the South African housing context. Interviewees included:

10.1 Mr Dirk Larsen and Mr Ryan Thomas of NuPlan Africa, Durbanville

10.2 Mrs Ilette Swanevelder of the ProPlanning Academy in Potchefstroom

10.1 NuPlan Africa

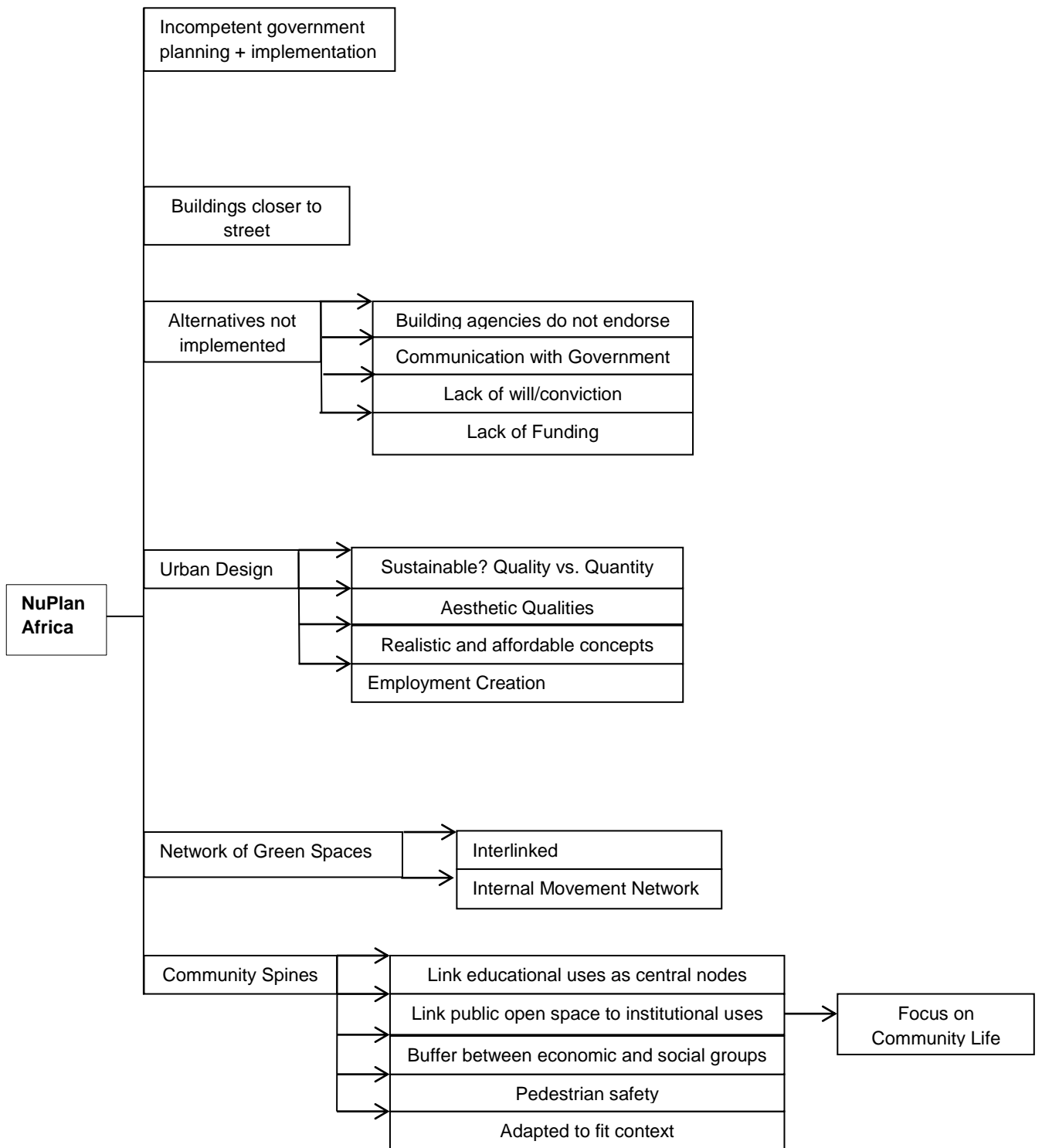


Figure 27: Summary of Chapter 10: NuPlan Africa interviews

Source: Own construction (2012)

Structured interviews were held with the urban planners of NuPlan Africa Durbanville on 26 June 2011. Dirk Larsen and Ryan Thomas, directors at NuPlan Africa, provided valuable insight into the urban planning context in the Western Cape, with specific reference to the firm's approach to low-cost housing development in the past. This chapter provides some interesting perspectives on the efforts of planning professionals in the private sector to improve housing delivery in alternative and innovative ways.

According to Dirk Larsen the problem with providing alternatives in the low-cost housing sector lies not in a lack of will or conviction that change is needed, but in a lack in planning and funding commitments from government (Larsen, 2011). NuPlan Africa has encountered the same problems in various housing developments, where they, as discussed with government, designed many alternative layout configurations, which implemented different typologies and various public open spaces. When it came down to implementing the ideas inspired by the official mandates for these projects, government funding had decreased drastically, leading to the implementation of more traditional layouts and to the planned, but undelivered open spaces being used as dumping sites.

Where an initial commitment to the delivery of more sustainable neighbourhoods is made by authorities and private consultants, maladministration and the mismanagement of financial resources often leads to the delivery of traditional RDP type developments. It is therefore important to communicate with government and its implementation agencies throughout the planning phase to ensure that adequate and realistic design takes place. The importance of sourcing and securing adequate funding to provide the desired quality of life for all is stressed. Private sector involvement and foreign investment should always be sought in conjunction with adequate planning and realistic objectives and delivery timetables. The problem does not lie in an atmosphere of satisfaction with the current housing approach, but in incompetent governmental planning and implementation agencies. Pragmatic solutions must be found to relate utopian concepts into realistically implementable, low-cost, sustainable human settlements (Thomas, 2011).

According to Larsen (2011), the implementation of alternative construction materials remains a challenge in the Cape Town Metro, as two main housing agencies, ASLA and Power Construction, are responsible for housing provision in the Metro. These agencies follow different construction methods and approaches and are set in their ways. These construction agencies do not fully endorse alternatives such as mud brick construction because of the initial training costs and capital investments involved. Serious intervention is thus needed in the form of persistence from government that alternative building materials should be slowly introduced.

It is thus clear that government in all its spheres should be the catalyst for change in the housing sector and that sustainable and large scale change can only occur once government manages its resources in a more effective way. Once this takes place, the private sector must be willing and able to commit to the design and implementation of new concepts which breach the gap between ideals and rational thinking.

According to Larsen (2011) the provision and establishment of a network of green and communal spaces which create both aesthetic qualities and an internal movement network for pedestrians is a tool which can be utilised in low-cost housing projects. This concept can be successfully introduced by designing layouts which contribute to a flow of interlinked open spaces and institutional uses, as illustrated by Figure 28.

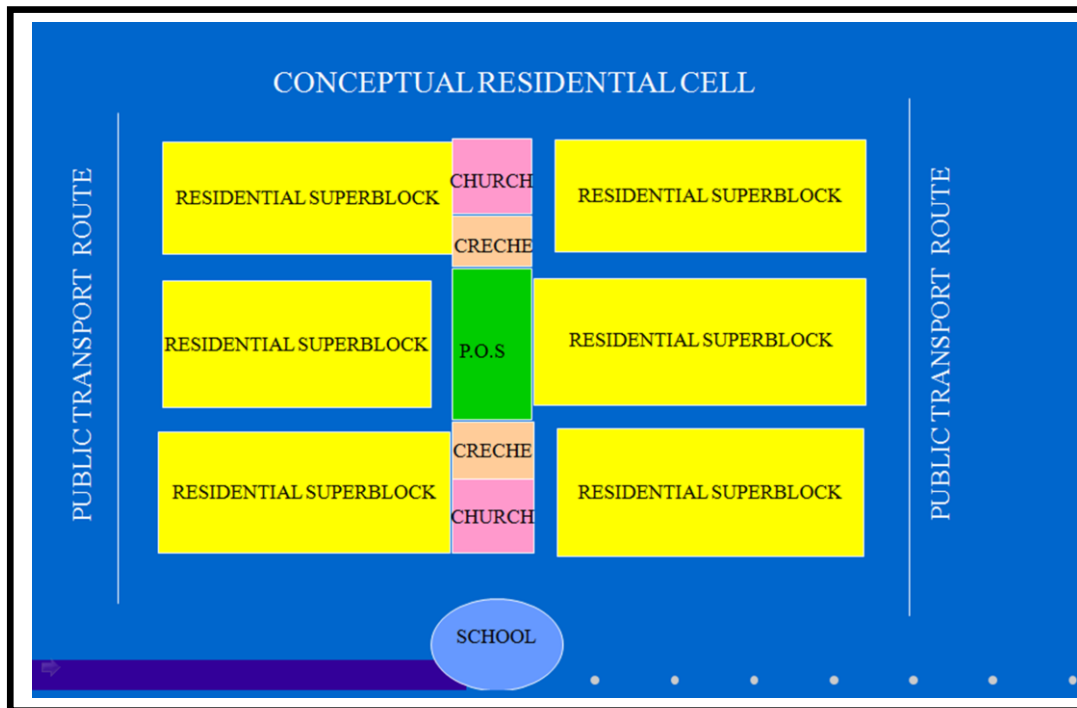


Figure 28: Concept for residential cell with institutional linkages

Source: NuPlan Africa (2011)

Figure 28 illustrates the conceptual design for a model utilising a joined network of institutional and public spaces to create mutually beneficial uses and movement corridors for pedestrians. The model focuses on the importance of educational land uses and the role of schools in developing communities.

The concept shown in Figure 29 ties in with the concepts of both Clarence Perry's Neighbourhood Unit Plan (See Chapter 3, p 33) with the focus on public facilities such as schools as central hubs, and also with Clarence Stein's Radburn Plan (See Chapter 3, p 38) by emphasising the importance of pedestrian movement. According to Larsen (2011) this concept points to a new way of thinking when designing low-cost residential developments. Larsen refers to a focus on the community and enhancing community life and interpersonal relationships rather than the delivery of basic, bare neighbourhoods which deliver an anonymous collection of dispersed uses and residential stands.

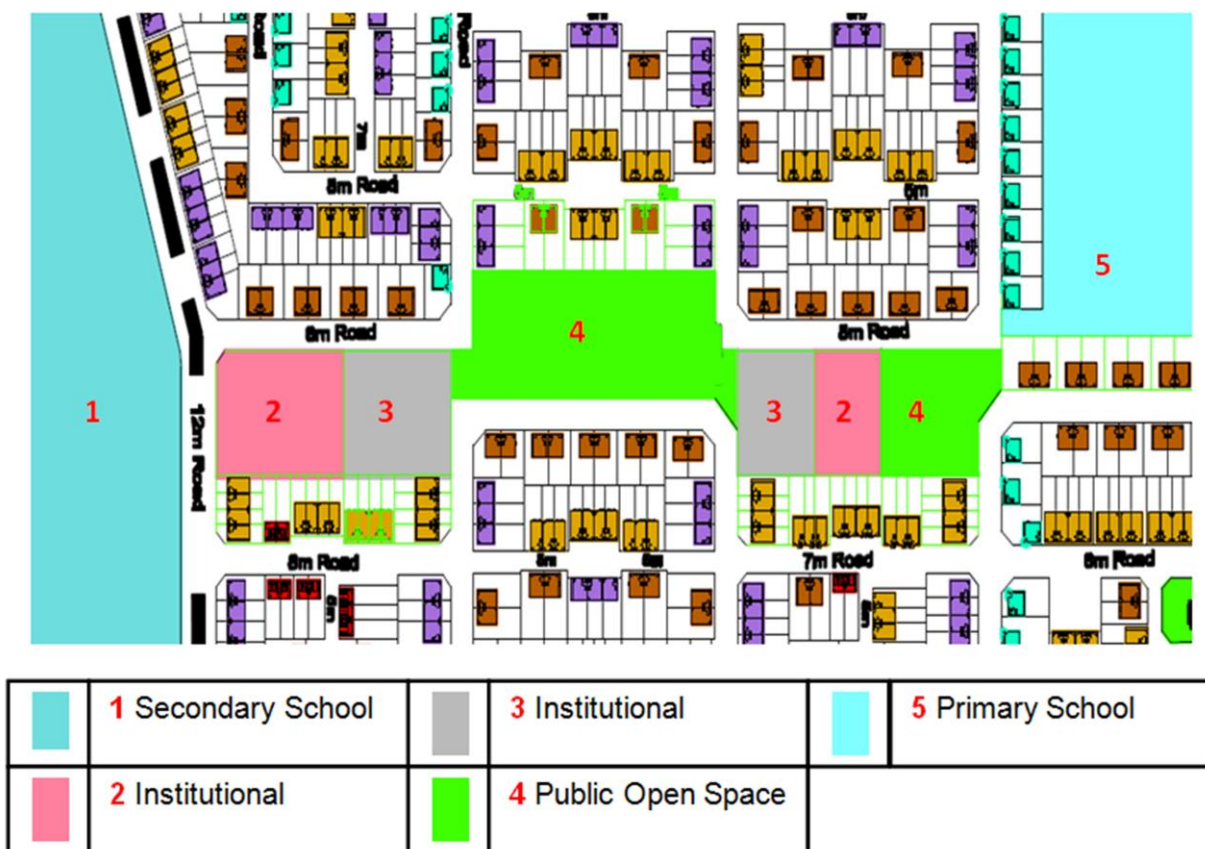


Figure 29: Concept for pedestrian friendly layout

Source: Adapted from NuPlan (2011)

Figure 29 shows how public open spaces can be effectively linked to institutional uses such as crèches and churches, enforcing a sense of community interaction and pedestrian movement. This system could be used to further link primary and secondary schools and to provide these educational institutions with additional open spaces which can be utilised safely by learners for sporting activities and play.

This approach contributes to pedestrian safety by creating an entire movement corridor from one school to the other, through different institutional uses, with minimal contact between pedestrians and vehicles. The model will however need to be adjusted according to the size and needs of specific communities and also according to existing facilities in the area. It is emphasised, yet again, that one uniform blueprint approach, no matter how theoretically successful, should never be introduced unadjusted in any and every development.

A linear system as seen in Figure 29 can serve as a buffer between areas of different economic and social ranks, representing a space of convergence and interaction as a measure to secure socio-economic integration. In this manner the value and desirability of bonded units can be maintained whilst providing subsidised units in close proximity. Alternatively this buffer can divide areas consisting of different housing typologies, such as single detaches units on one side and semi-detached units on the other.

In addition to the establishment of an institutional and open space linkage system, consideration should be given to the provision of economic land uses as part of the connecting spine. By providing space for small and medium enterprises and informal trading, an enhanced degree of interaction is made possible. Links now become sources of recreational and economic activity and thus enhance the benefits to pedestrians who would otherwise need to walk long distances to shops and markets. In this regard the importance of low-cost housing as a supportive element of local economic development (See Chapter 5, p 59) is emphasised and facilitated.

Figure 30 represents a simplified model of the concept to link institutional uses, economic and open spaces to educational facilities. This model also indicates pedestrian movement through the safe pedestrian friendly area provided by the link. The NuPlan Africa concept is further extended through the introduction of pedestrian bridges at strategic locations to extend the benefits of the model's focus on pedestrian movement.

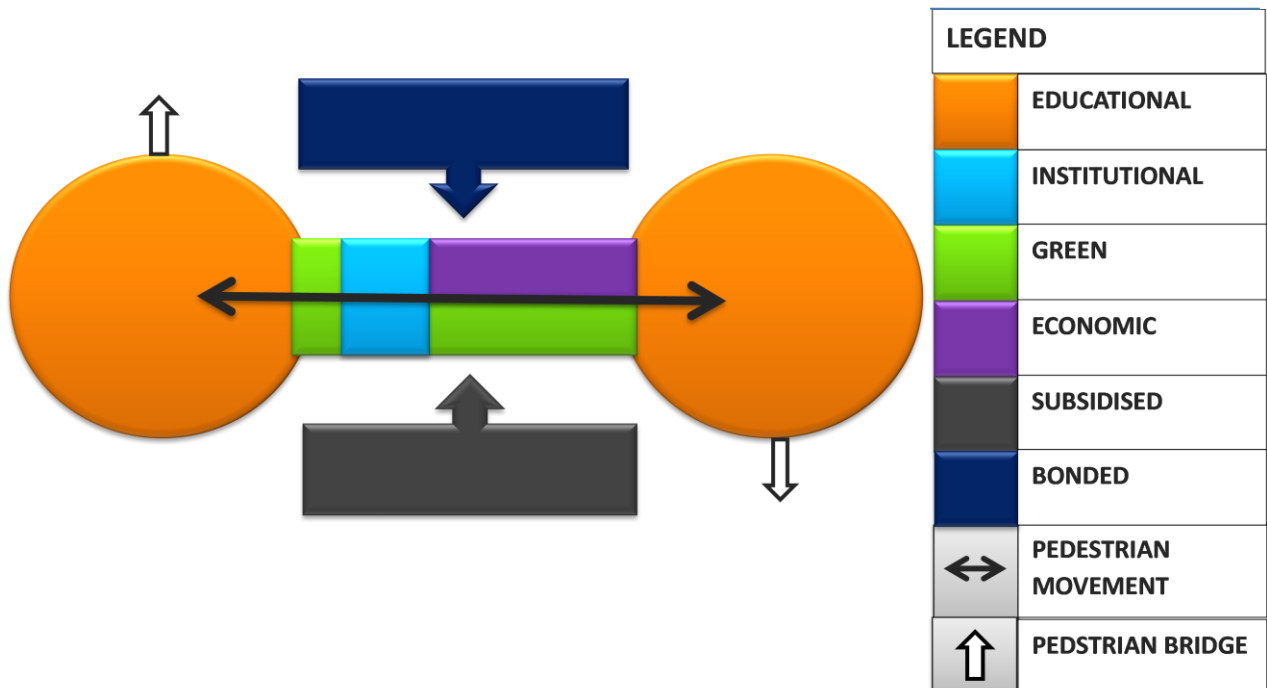


Figure 30: A simplified and adjusted model of the NuPlan Africa concept

Source: Own construction (2012)

The model (see Figure 30) illustrates how this concept can be further utilised to create an effective buffer between subsidised and bonded units whilst promoting integration and interaction through communal areas.

According to Ryan Thomas aesthetic urban design principles are often the starting point for NuPlan Africa's design approaches in low-cost housing projects (Thomas, 2011). The aesthetic and supportive qualities of institutional and public open spaces are of vital importance in creating a development which would uplift quality of life and satisfaction with the environment. Concepts frequently centre on the provision of well-designed and equipped public spaces situated in connected networks known as community spines. When comes down to implementation however, funds are repeatedly more limited than initially expected, leading to the delivery of unattractive and underutilised open spaces along important main roads, thus creating more problems than solutions. This relates to Dewar and Uytendogaardt's view on the common South African problem of promised facilities which are never delivered. The problem with most existing low-cost projects according to Dewar and Uytendogaardt (1995:3) is that the public facilities planned, never become a reality and that a collective public environment which promotes a sense of pride in ownership, is neglected.

Aesthetic urban design Initiatives can also aid in employment creation where funds are available. This falls in line with the objectives set in The Breaking New Ground Initiative, which sets employment creation in housing as a main objective. (Refer to Table 2 of Chapter 2). An example of labour intensive projects to be introduced, include paving, landscaping and painting which may all entail labourer intensive activities. However the question arises whether or not this principle can be sustainably introduced in a housing environment where funds are barely available to meet basic housing needs. In reality putting roofs over the heads of the homeless majority, needs to be more important than supplying the already serviced minority with landscaped gardens and attractive features. The solution thus lies in delivering housing which is aesthetically pleasing at the same cost as the traditional RDP units we have come to know. Basic solutions like variations in paint colour, varied building facades, building placement, programmes encouraging privately cultivated gardens and more intensive public sector involvement in terms of funding and sponsorship could aid in this effort.

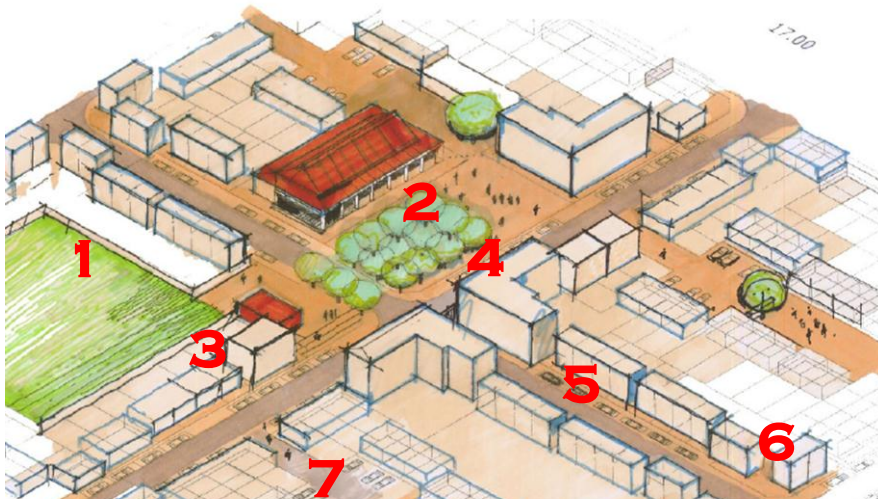


Figure 31: Artist's impression of community spine

Source: NuPlan Africa (2011)

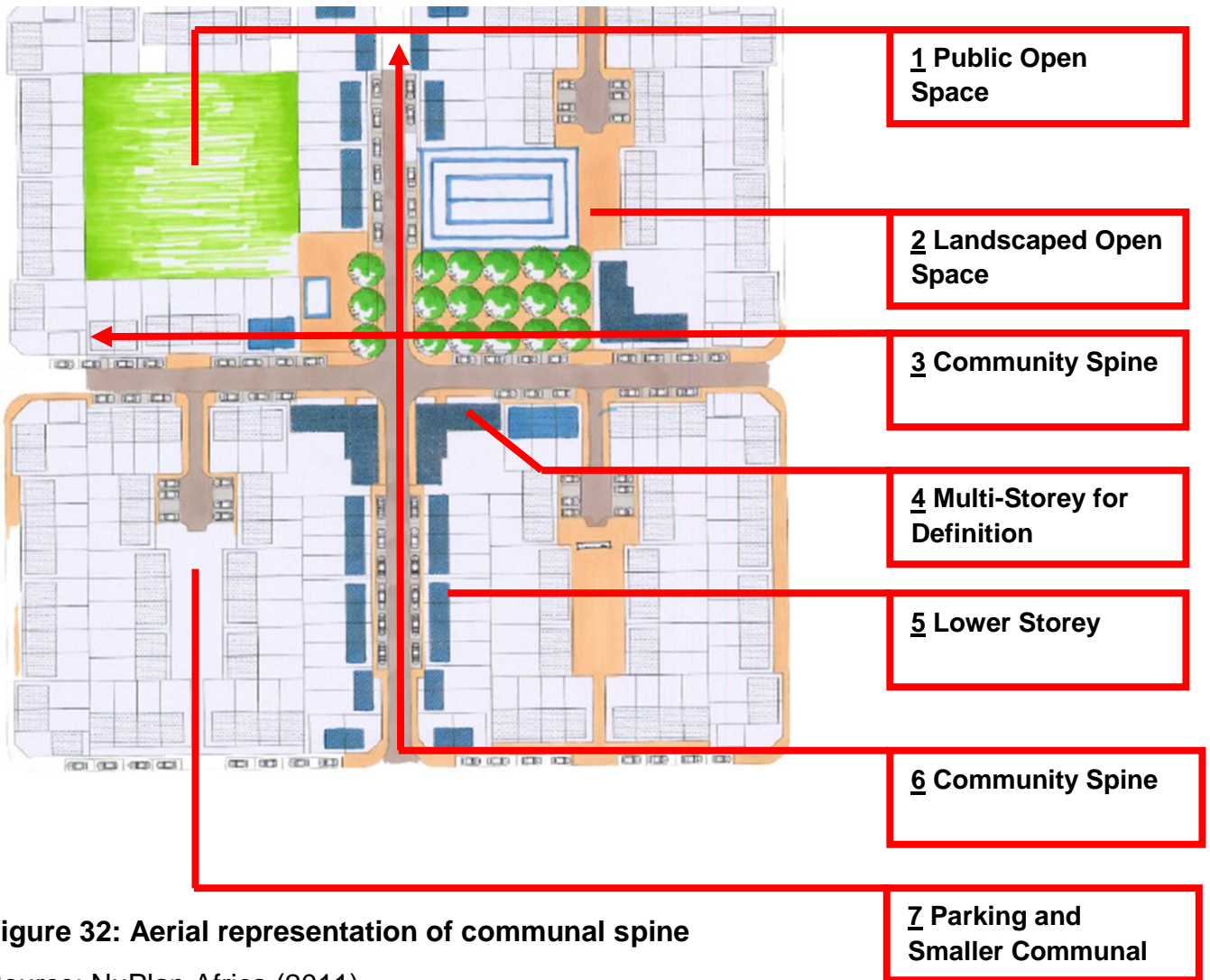


Figure 32: Aerial representation of communal spine

Source: NuPlan Africa (2011)

Figure 32 illustrates NuPlan Africa's approach which utilises community spines as networks containing various institutional uses and buildings of varying heights to create visual interest. This concept was ultimately inspired by urban design principles and in this regard the entire layouts may be guided by the urban designer's vision. Once affordable and realistically implementable urban design principles become a preliminary step in creating the parameters and concepts for a project, can it be expected that the ultimate product will be of a better quality. Only when the basic outline and format of a low-cost residential development's layout promotes the establishment of integrated open spaces and the opportunity to create visual interest and focuses, can these concepts be successfully implemented. According to Larsen (2011) a focus on good urban design was traditionally seen as a concept meant for higher income areas such as estates, gated communities and urban centres. Larsen (2011) says that a good quality environment is in reality even more important in low-cost areas where residents have little means to improve the visual appeal of their neighbourhoods. Larsen (2011) states: 'Where communities are unable to better their environments, we as planners and authorities, must do what we can to improve satisfaction with the quality of the environment we provide for them. Urban design has become a cornerstone of the approach we follow in designing low-cost housing developments'. Where consultants commit to the implementation of urban design Initiatives, authorities need to lend their support.

Often restricted financial resources and continuously decreasing budgets leave the concepts illustrated in Figures 31 and 32 sparsely implemented, resulting in environments of a lower quality. According to Larsen (2011) this has been a problem in various low-cost housing developments where planners and professionals delivered on the initial briefs received from government, only to see their plans set aside or altered due to financial restrictions. It thus becomes apparent that development strategies should be put in place which is not as dependant on generous funding.

According to Thomas (2011) good and cost effective design in terms of simple adjustments can make a significant difference in the quality of life experienced by low-income inhabitants. An example is the placement of building structures as close to street boundaries as possible to discourage the occurrence of unwanted structures like shacks and clothing lines facing the street. This creates a more ordered and aesthetically pleasing environment, whilst encouraging a safer street environment through the so called 'eyes on the street' approach, which promotes involvement in street life and street safety. Building placement can also remedy problems related to sandy environments as often experienced in certain areas of the City of Cape Town, as illustrated by Figures 33 and 34.



Figure 33: Problems with sand in Cape Town

Source: NuPlan (2011)



Figure 34: Sandy areas remedied by building placement

Source: NuPlan Africa (2011)

10.1.1 Conclusion to the NuPlan Africa interviews

In conclusion the NuPlan Africa interviews reveal the commitment present in the private sector to improve the housing products and neighbourhoods delivered. This chapter emphasises the need for an equal commitment from both government and the private sector in order to improve living conditions, as alternatives will never be implemented without support from both spheres. The main findings derived from the Nulan Africa interviews, are summarised by Table 13.

Table 13: Main findings derived from the NuPlan Africa interviews

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Widely recognised that change is needed. -Political will exists to research and implement changes. -Private consultants are eager to improve layouts with innovative and demand responsive approaches. -The importance of aesthetic urban design is increasingly recognised. -Cost-effective and simple design adjustments, such as revising building placement on stand can provide significant benefits.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of capacity to manage the implementation of new concepts by government. -Lack of effective policy to conceptualise, implement and manage more responsive development approaches. -Maladministration of funds and timelines is common. -Development agencies such as ASLA complicate the enactment of more alternative strategies.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Harnessing SA's creative and professional expertise in the private sector. -Innovative infill development strategies may be followed to rectify past mistakes. -Interventions in the approaches followed by development agencies such as ASLA and Power Construction may develop new industries and new housing products. -Community spine concepts show promise for more extensive implementation.
Gaps between practice and theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Policies and government authorities recognise the need for alternative approaches, but a realistic implementation and management strategy is presently absent. -Policies recognise the need for change, but officials are unable to deliver on alternatives.

Source: Own construction (2012)

The following section will discuss an interview held with Mrs Ilette Swanevelder of the ProPlanning Academy in Potchefstroom.

10.2 Ilette Swanevelder, Proplanning Academy, Potchefstroom, 20 September 2011

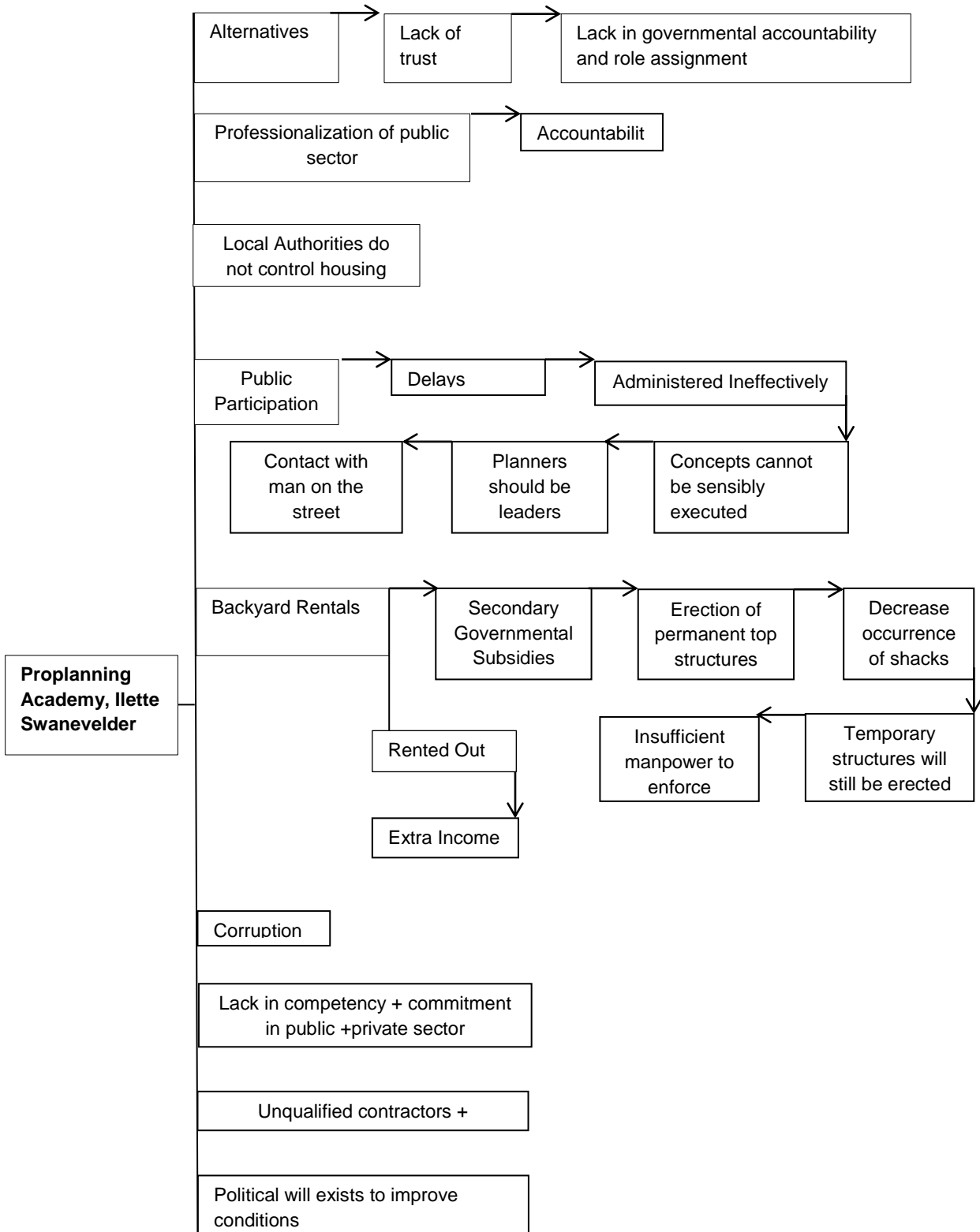


Figure 35: Summary of Chapter Ten (10.2): Proplanning Academy, Ilette Swanevelder Interview

Source: Own construction (2012)

Ilette Swanevelder is a planning professional practising in Potchefstroom. She provided great insight and perspective into the low-cost housing planning context in the North-West province and the rest of South Africa. The following chapter refers to an interview held with Mss Swanevelder on 20 September 2011.

According to Swanevelder (2011), the most prominent setback in the South African low-cost housing environment lies in a lack of competency and commitment in both the public and private sector. Prominent problems include corruption in government and the tender procurement process, which often leads to unqualified and inexperienced contractors and consultants being appointed. This influences the development process from planning to construction phases and ultimately leaves the low-income beneficiary with a substandard house in an unsustainable neighbourhood setting. According to Swanevelder (2011) a better screening process, focussing on candidates with good references and a track record in reaching targets in past projects, needs to be followed, instead of an approach where candidates receive contracts on the basis of their political connections. Appointment by merit will source only the best professionals and tradesmen in order to streamline the delivery process and enhance the ultimate homes provided.

Swanevelder (2011) states that the political will exists to better the lives of South Africa's poor by providing low-cost housing developments in a theoretically sustainable manner, creating liveable and integrated communities. Political will is undoubtedly the first necessary step in a long process which sets creating sustainable settlements as ultimate goal. The problem lies in converting the political will of South Africa's leaders into implementable and practical solutions at a grass roots level. Government spends a large amount of money on research and studies on the subject of low-cost housing development, but the data collected and policies constructed from these studies, prove worthless when they cannot be sensibly executed. According to Swanevelder (2011) the hope for change which is initiated at national level, is slowly diminished along the process of delivery due to a lack of accountability and expertise to execute the plans made.

A further setback is found in a lack of role assignment in government, with local authorities often not being in control of low-cost housing delivery in their municipal area. This leads to massive confusion and delays in the process, due to a fragmented, duplicated and disorganised governmental structure. In turn leading to situations where local authorities are credited with housing departments which do not have the authority to make decisions regarding low-cost housing development in their actual areas of jurisdiction.

A lack of funding is often blamed for slow delivery and low quality units. Swanevelder (2011) states that a lack of funding to provide low-cost housing is not the problem. The problem lies in the incompetence of the authority and professional consultants in the private sector to administer these funds wisely. When funding is sourced and secured responsible and accountable financial management should see to the delivery of the maximum number of units and a housing product of satisfactory quality. In reality maladministration and corruption at every level of government results in less units being delivered within the allotted budget.

According to Swanevelder (2011) new policies and legislation relating to the importance of utilising and employing true professionals in local authorities to better plan and administer activities is a step in the right direction. This concept focuses on the professionalization of the public sector by only employing qualified and registered professionals as heads of planning-, human resources-, finance- and engineering departments and importantly as municipal managers. In reference to urban planning only registered professionals should be appointed to combat the current state of affairs where unqualified technicians and drafters are employed as planners in local authorities, leading to unsustainable housing developments of a poor quality and a waste of valuable government resources. Once registered professionals are employed, these professionals can be held accountable for their actions by their governing bodies and committees. Swanevelder (2011) says: 'accountability leads to commitment, even when that commitment is forced'.

According to Swanevelder (2011) public participation is for the most part administered ineffectively in South Africa. Too often situations occur where the frequently uninformed community prescribes what action is to be taken. Community participation can only be successful where the planner utilises his/her professional expertise to lead the public in making informed decisions. Swanevelder (2011) says that the management of the public's perception as to what is being planned and what is realistically applicable in a specific situation, are the planner's best tools to guide and utilise the public participation process. Swaying perceptions furthermore depends heavily on an understanding of a specific community's dynamics, sentiments and needs. Planners should not attempt to estimate the true needs and desires of a community according to western and generalised norms. An isolated community in KwaZulu Natal may for example think of electricity as a convenience, but not as a primary need. It is the task of the planner to utilise public participation in a way which best provides him/her with a clear understanding of what is truly needed and not what is perceived to be needed. It is important to grasp the level of education of a community and its understanding of what is being planned, to be able to effectively communicate new ideas to them. Here the use of graphic representations such as maps, artist's impressions and photos can prove vital in communicating ideas and concepts.

Swanevelder (2011) states that true public participation is not accomplished by the distribution of questionnaires, but through contact with the man on the street. Through personal interaction and an understanding of the socio-economic, cultural and demographic complexities of specific communities can one grasp the best course of action to be taken. Unfortunately this approach to public participation is extremely lengthy and delays the delivery process tremendously. We are thus left with a state of affairs where a trade-off between lengthy but effective participation and timely delivery needs to be negotiated. Here the need for planners to possess effective project management and communication skills becomes evident.

According to Swanevelder (2011) South African authorities are very sceptical regarding alternative building materials. Perceptions and a lack of trust in the sustainability and effectiveness of alternatives, often leads to the rejection of proposals suggesting alternative building materials.

Another problem relates to which department is to be held accountable for the consideration and implementation of alternatives in low-cost residential developments. This problem extends to the fact that different departments can be responsible for approving and implementing alternatives, leading to internal conflict due to a lack of coordination. According to Swanevelder (2011) alternatives would stand a better chance at success once engineers are on board, as engineers could implement alternative concepts in their tender documents, which would add a higher level of status to these plans in terms of commitment and accountability.

On the matter of the South African backyard rental sector, Swanevelder (2011) states that much needs to be done to address the issue of illegal and unsafe living conditions brought about by backyard living. In response to the backyard issue Swanevelder (2011) mentions policies have been drafted which provide basic secondary governmental subsidies to inhabitants of single-low cost units to provide them with the opportunity to erect safe and permanent top structures which can be rented out. This concept aims to decrease the occurrence of shacks and unsafe and unsightly structures attached to homes, which are rented as a form of extra income. Swanevelder has however not seen these policies applied in practice and therefore cannot comment on their merits. The question however arises of what is to stop the recipients of these subsidies from still erecting shacks and other structures alongside the subsidised rented structures? This concept seems noble and theoretically sound, but South Africa lacks the manpower in the form of building inspectors etc. to monitor and prevent the erection of illegal structures throughout low-cost housing developments. This field will need more research and study before alternative solutions can be effectively implemented.

10.2.1 Conclusions with regard to the ProPlanning Academy (Ilette Swanevelder) interview

Ilette Swanevelder provided valuable insight into the planning profession in practice and her comments on the current issues in low-cost residential development in South Africa illuminated various problems. Matters such as the professionalization of the planning field and the importance of competent and accountable management and delivery reaffirm the need for better training and an alternative delivery model in low-cost housing development.

Table 14 is provided as a summary of the Main findings derived from Ilette Swanevelder interview.

Table 14: Main findings derived from the Ilette Swanevelder interview

Strengths	Political will exists to improve living conditions. Alternatives are widely researched.
Weaknesses	Lack of competency and commitment in both public and private spheres. Corruption in government. Lack of role assignment within government. Local authorities often influence housing delivery to a limited extent. Procuring funding is not the main issue, the management of said funds is. Public participation is administered ineffectively and can prolong the development process. An almost complete lack of backyard rental management policies in SA.
Opportunities	Mandatory registration of all professionals is possible. Planners can guide participatory planning processes effectively once professional discretion is used.
Gaps between practice and theory	Housing policies cannot be sensibly implemented given current structures and capacity restrictions. The authority given to province as main housing developer undermines the value of the local municipality. Public participation is a main focus in policy, but effective implementation strategies remain absent. Policies do not adequately address the backyard rental sector.

Source: Own construction (2012)

Chapter 11 will capture South African case studies which may provide valuable insight into the realities delivered by the low-cost housing mechanisms put in place.