




Competitive Cities

An Exploration of Location and Human Capital in South African Cities

Mpho Mashego 

*Department of Urban and Regional Planning
University of Johannesburg 
Johannesburg, South Africa*

Vuyiswa Letsoko 

*Department of Urban and Regional Planning
University of Johannesburg 
Johannesburg, South Africa*

Abstract

Cities drive the economic growth of any country. In a fast globalising and urbanising world, cities compete not only to attract investment and skilled labour but also to provide solutions to urban and social challenges and to create spaces that are liveable for their citizens. The Global South has experienced an exponential increase in the number of people living in cities, which makes it the fastest urbanising region in the world. This presents both challenges and opportunities for these cities. South African cities are not exempt from the current realities of urbanisation and globalisation; they must position themselves as global players while simultaneously addressing past spatial injustices. Cities are compelled to enhance and maintain their unique advantages to compete in the global arena. This paper investigates the factors that contribute to city competitiveness in Gqeberha, with the aim of positioning the city for global competitiveness. It examines geographical location, human capital, and urban planning as key contributors to this competitiveness to provide insight into the



city's strengths and challenges. A comprehensive competitive cities framework for developmental states was developed through this research, which Gqeberha and other developing cities can use to position their cities for global competition. The qualitative research approach was employed in this study, where primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with seven key informants who are professionals in land use management, spatial planning, and economic development. Furthermore, the study collected secondary data from sources such as documents, maps, and literature. A combination of qualitative data-analysis tools, including thematic analysis, exploratory spatial data analysis, document analysis, and triangulation analysis, was utilised to analyse the collected data. The key findings indicate that Gqeberha possesses strategic assets, such as two seaports and Special Economic Zones (SEZs); however, their influence is hampered by underutilisation and a disconnected location. The city also faces a human capital shortage, which results from a mismatch between industrial demands and educational attainment.

Deficits in urban planning, such as an outdated Municipal Spatial Development Framework and issues with internal collaboration, further hinder development. To address these challenges, this paper proposes a framework for enhancing competitiveness in Gqeberha and other developing cities. The framework emphasises that priority must be placed on infrastructure development, effective urban governance, strategic spatial planning, and human capital development. The implication of this study is that by implementing these recommendations, Gqeberha can position itself to be globally competitive. Additionally, future research should investigate examples of successful urban planning in other developing cities, assess how SEZs affect social and spatial inclusion, identify skills gaps that exist between industry demands and education, and explore best practices for port management in developing nations.

Keywords: City competitiveness, human capital, location, urban planning, urbanisation, globalisation.

Introduction

In the rapidly changing landscape of the 21st century, cities have emerged as pivotal drivers of the global economy. Economically agile and entrepreneurial individuals are drawn to the promises and opportunities that cities offer. Against this backdrop, many cities are experiencing rapid urbanisation and globalisation (South African Cities Network [SACN], 2016). It is estimated that the annual urbanisation rate in Africa, the fastest urbanising region, is 3.6%, with some cities growing at an average rate of 5% per annum, which is faster than in other global regions. This phenomenon has led to a substantial increase in demand for housing, infrastructure, and basic services (Korah et al., 2019). Due to rapid globalisation and urbanisation, cities face the challenge of competing for investment and attracting talent while addressing urban and social issues (Ghahremani et al., 2021). South African cities, including Gqeberha, are not immune to these trends; they must contend with the lingering effects of apartheid planning while also grappling with current realities brought about by urbanisation and globalisation.

The State of South African Cities Report highlights the following issues currently faced by South African cities and towns: demographic changes, the relative strength of metro economies, basic service provision, increasing inequality and exclusivity of cities, and understanding of and support for local government (SACN, 2016). In order for cities such as Gqeberha to navigate their way out of these challenges, the only solution is to shift their focus to competitiveness, wherein the city should exploit or create a competitive advantage that results in sustainable urban environments and economic growth relative to its competitors (Van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018; Porter, 2015). The European Commission defines competitiveness as the “ability of a region to offer an attractive and sustainable environment for firms and residents to live and work” (cited in Rand, 2017). Factors that influence competition in cities are multifaceted and context-specific, which indicates that it is not a one-size-fits-all approach. This paper investigates the factors that contribute to city competitiveness in Gqeberha and explores geographical location, urban planning, and human capital.

These factors have yet to be fully explored in previous studies in Gqeberha to position the city for global competitiveness. The aim is to develop a framework to help Gqeberha and other developing cities, particularly in the Global South, enhance their global competitiveness.

Literature Review

Understanding City Competitiveness

Over the past three decades, cities and urban centres have increasingly focused on the competitiveness of their economies, firms, and labour. This shift has been driven by globalisation, which has integrated world economies and created mutual dependence (Jovović, 2017). For cities to be active participants in the global economy, they must adapt to technological advancements that enable interconnectivity and communication among all actors (Porter, 2000). Furthermore, cities need to reshape their urban spaces to accommodate a new labour force that is characterised by specialised skills, mobility needs, and demands for lifestyle and social amenities (Guaralda et al., 2020). The World Economic Forum's (2016) Global Competitiveness Report defines the competitiveness of cities as "the set of factors – policies, institutions, strategies, and processes – that determines the level of a city's sustainable productivity". Sustainability refers to a balance of economic, social, and environmental issues, while productivity involves utilising resources effectively to fuel economic development. According to Villamejor-Mendoza (2020), almost everything matters for competitiveness: schools, roads, financial markets, and citizens.

Furthermore, for all these factors to enhance competitiveness, there must be a change in mindset among people and in the culture, although improving competitiveness takes time. While competition is context-specific to a country or city, general factors influence competition across the spectrum (Momaya, 2016). According to Ferreira and Ratten (2017), the resource endowments of a city also influence

competitiveness. These resource endowments are both tangible and intangible, including proximity to major economic points such as transportation routes, human capital, and knowledge in a region. The argument is that even if a city is geographically disconnected from other major cities, it can still be attractive and competitive based on its intangible assets, such as sound urban planning strategies and policies, as well as skills and knowledge. Baker et al. (2017) state that some of these factors that influence city competitiveness are beyond the control of the city government and, by nature, fall under the mandate of the national government. However, a city's ability to be competitive may be hindered by urban policies that fail to address land management issues, a poor business environment, weak infrastructure, low labour skills, and inadequate governance.

Urban Planning as a Determinant of City Competitiveness

Urban planning and related spatial policies have become indispensable tools for cities to thrive in an increasingly competitive global landscape. The dynamic and transformative demands of the globalised economy have compelled cities to adopt strategic approaches to bolster their competitive edge. Consequently, urban planning and development have emerged as prominent frameworks for enhancing city competitiveness (Yigitcanlar & Bulu, 2015). Urban planning encompasses the strategic arrangement of land use, transport, infrastructure, and public spaces to achieve sustainable and equitable development in urban areas (Bibri et al., 2020). When coupled with spatial policies that guide the distribution of resources, investments, and economic activities across a region or city, urban planning can shape a city's physical and economic landscape, which will influence its competitiveness and liveability (Todes & Turok, 2018).

Effective urban planning can enhance a city's competitiveness by creating efficient and attractive urban environments. This includes fostering compact, mixed-use development that minimises commuting distances and promotes walkability, cycling, and public transport. By prioritising pedestrian-friendly streets, well-connected public spaces, and

diverse mixed-use neighbourhoods, cities can attract more residents, businesses, and visitors (Buck et al., 2017).

Infrastructure development plays a vital role in enhancing city competitiveness. Investing in modern transport networks, reliable energy systems, and robust telecommunications infrastructure can connect businesses, facilitate movement, and support digital connectivity. Additionally, cities can enhance their attractiveness by investing in quality public amenities such as parks, cultural facilities, and educational institutions (Arimah, 2017). Moreover, in an ever-changing urban development landscape, cities ought to employ spatial policy approaches that aim to improve conditions by strengthening the city's unique assets, knowledge, and human capital (Todes & Turok, 2018). However, for urban planning and spatial policies to be effective in enhancing competitiveness, they need to be supported by good urban governance. Good urban governance means "the sum of the many ways [that] individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated, and cooperative action can be taken" (Nissen, 2021). The convergence of all these urban governance actors can positively influence competitiveness (Parilla & Trujillo, 2018).

Location as a City Competitiveness Determinant

According to Ferreira and Ratten (2017), location is defined as a place or city with a distinct geographic space. However, the argument is that location determinants are not only geographic but are also related to infrastructure provision and service delivery. For example, in South Africa, Clover, one of the largest dairy product producers, had to close its biggest cheese factory in Lichtenburg, North West province. The reason for the closure was the municipality's failure to provide basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and water for the firm's production processes. The company stated in a media release that it incurred substantial financial losses due to constant disruptions in water and electricity supply, as well as poor road conditions, and would relocate to Durban, resulting in 300 job losses

(Ginindza, 2017). The competitiveness of a location is also influenced by its autonomy or independence (Ferreira & Ratten, 2017). Mbaye and Gueye (2018) support this by suggesting that cities must have diverse resources and competencies to provide enterprises with a competitive advantage.

However, the competitive advantage of cities and locations presents a paradox. One would expect that location would be less critical in an increasingly globalised world with open international markets and the exchange of ideas and knowledge. Therefore, when economic activity occurs in a specific location, it is for a good reason (Snowdon & Stonehouse, 2006). Some of these reasons may include soft location factors that a city has to offer, such as attractive landscapes, recreational and shopping facilities, universities, and libraries. Location factors are essential for firms and individuals who wish to move to and remain in a city (Gremm et al., 2018). Gugler (2019), referring to Porter's four interrelated components of competitiveness, states that location comprises both inherited and created factors. Inherited factors include natural resources specific to a place, while created factors encompass efficient infrastructure, such as communication, transport, and energy systems. Bam et al. (2020) note that location-related considerations also include natural advantages that involve geography and climate, as well as the cost of capital, which comprises physical capital, financial capital, and land costs.

Furthermore, the quality and reliability of infrastructure influence location decisions. Infrastructure affects competitiveness in two ways. Firstly, businesses rely on global access points such as airports, ports, and digital infrastructure to sell their goods and services in both domestic and international markets. Secondly, a city's competitiveness also depends on its capacity to efficiently connect its people and physical assets to their optimal use (Parilla & Trujillo, 2018). This means that industries conform to pre-existing patterns of people and resources in their area.

For cities to attract firms, they need a development and beneficiation policy framework that accurately evaluates and

addresses the location determinants that affect firms' location decisions (Bam et al., 2020). Moreover, a city or municipality can utilise its resources to improve its standard of living and boost local competitiveness (Villamejor-Mendoza, 2020).

Human Capital and City Competitiveness

High levels of human capital give cities a competitive advantage. Education levels include primary, secondary, college, and higher education. Universities and colleges are the quintessential reservoirs of human capital (Debrah et al., 2018). Human capital is based on the endogenous growth theory that Paul Romer first advocated in the 1980s; it is defined as human skill sets and abilities. The term can be expanded to include labour, skills, talents, and knowledge as forms of productive wealth. This expertise is partially acquired through formal and informal education (Osiobe, 2019). According to Antonenko (2021, p. 526), London, New York, Singapore, and San Francisco, which are the world's most competitive cities, achieved their success through clear municipal policies that emphasise human capital, strategic investments, and technological development. This focus has made them global economic, social, and cultural centres that attract residents and businesses.

In order to attract investments and provide a safe environment for all, cities seeking expansion should prioritise human capital. According to Albach et al. (2018), for a city to enhance its performance, it must be willing to change, improve, and utilise new technologies. Moreover, the accumulation of knowledge drives sustainable long-term growth in cities (Jones, 2019). This explains why cities in developed countries grow faster than their poorer counterparts; cities are typically the custodians of innovation and technology (Chirwa & Odhiambo, 2018).

Cities are transitioning from dependence on natural resources to a knowledge-based economy. To meet current and future industry demands and achieve competitiveness and socio-economic development, cities need to align education and skills and establish frameworks and resources to facilitate

knowledge creation (Gremm et al., 2018). The World Bank Institute's knowledge economy framework provides essential pillars for knowledge creation, including education and skills, an economic and institutional regime, information and communication technology infrastructure, and an innovation system. Essentially, there must be long-term investment in education, the modernisation of information infrastructure, a favourable economic climate that supports market transactions, and the growth of innovative capacity (Mohamed et al., 2022; Phale et al., 2021).

In addition to a city developing its human capital, it can also export skills from outside; this is achieved when a city offers a good quality of life and diversity to attract and retain the brightest individuals to work and live there (Tejedo, 2008). This notion is supported by Royuela (2014, p. 927), who underlines that a city's amenities and lifestyle options influence the location decisions of the highly skilled labour force.

Other scholars believe that for cities to harness human capital through innovation and knowledge, they must encourage cluster development. Clusters are vibrant ecosystems of interconnected businesses, universities, research institutions, and skilled individuals that act as engines for driving economic growth and societal progress. Nurturing and promoting these clusters are no longer optional; it has become a strategic imperative for cities seeking to thrive in today's dynamic and disruptive landscape (Florida et al., 2018). To promote cluster development, cities must ensure that their educational systems meet industry demands. This arrangement facilitates a labour force with the critical knowledge and abilities required for these industries to thrive (Porter, 1998). Cities can improve labour force readiness and foster innovation by enabling partnerships between industry and educational institutions (Bathelt & Henn, 2014). According to Katz and Wagner (2014), curriculum modifications that consider industry demands also attract talent and investments, which boost city competitiveness and growth.

Case Study: Gqeberha

Gqeberha is a port city located in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality. Previously known as Port Elizabeth, the city has an estimated population of 1.26 million and covers a land area of 1 959 km². It is the largest metropolitan municipality in the Eastern Cape province (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs [CoGTA], 2020). Gqeberha has two ports that play a major economic role in the province: the Port of Gqeberha and the Port of Ngura (Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, 2022). The city is currently South Africa's automobile manufacturing hub (SACN, 2021).

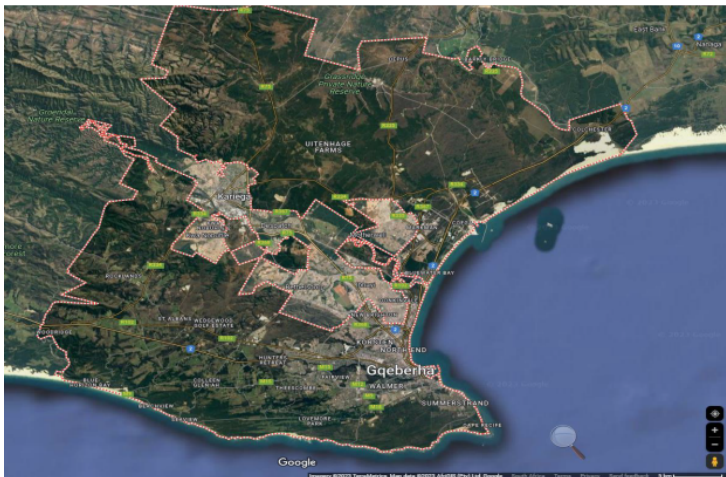


Figure 1: Gqeberha Locality Map. Source: Google Maps (2023)

The city is home to Volkswagen, Isuzu, FAW, and BAIC Automobile, which contribute significantly to its economic growth. Additionally, the city has identified the Coega Special Economic Zone (SEZ) as an area zoned for industrial development. Besides the two ports located in the SEZ, it houses a cluster of heavy, medium, and light industries (CoGTA, 2020; Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, 2021a). The city therefore has a strong industrial cluster situated along the coast and major trade routes (see Figure 2). Furthermore,

the Automotive Industry Development Centre provides skills development and training programmes, as well as incubation programmes for the automotive industries. In 2018, Gqeberha contributed 2.63% to South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) and was the largest contributor to the GDP of the Eastern Cape province, accounting for 34.07% of the province's GDP in the same year (CoGTA, 2020). The city's economy is dominated by four main economic drivers: manufacturing, community services, agriculture, and finance. The manufacturing industry primarily consists of automobile manufacturing, clothing and textiles, renewable energy, and chemicals (Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, 2021a). Most of the city's population is employed in this sector.

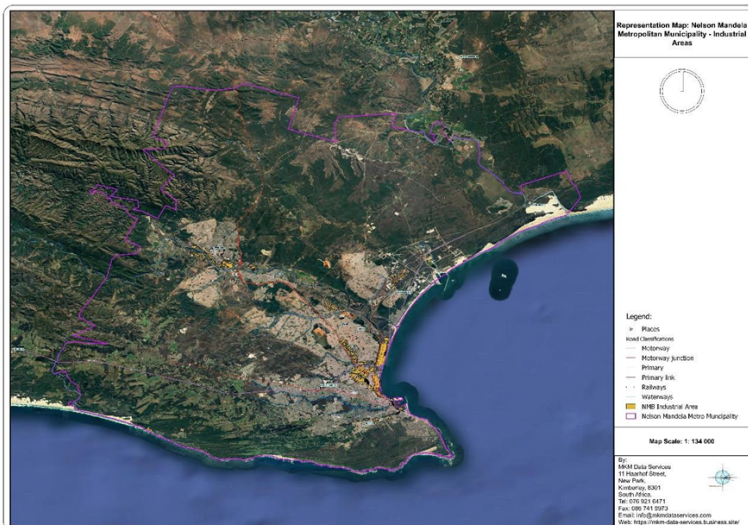


Figure 2: Gqeberha Industry Cluster. Source: Compiled by the authors in collaboration with MKM Data Services

Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study to investigate the factors that contribute to city competitiveness in Gqeberha and to provide a framework that will help to achieve this competitiveness. Both primary and secondary data were

utilised as data sources. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with nine key informants, including professionals in land use management, spatial planning, and economic development. These interviews provided valuable insight into the city's strengths, challenges, and opportunities. The secondary data were collected from relevant documents, maps, and literature. Qualitative data-analysis tools were employed to analyse the data, including thematic analysis, document analysis, exploratory spatial data analysis, and triangulation. The purpose of using this range of analytical tools was to obtain credible and valid results.

Research Findings and Discussion

Gqeberha Urban Competitiveness Factors

This paper aimed to examine and explore the elements that affect competitiveness in Gqeberha. It found that numerous factors play a role in competitiveness, and that the unique circumstances of each city shape its offerings. However, despite this diversity, common elements emerged that are evident in many cities around the globe. One such element is the strategic clustering of large enterprises and institutions in a designated geographic area, along with the concentration of economic activities, land utilisation, and population densities. This clustering promotes innovation, research and development, productivity, and economic advancement.

The research indicated that Gqeberha has a substantial development of clusters in the form of SEZs, which attract multinational corporations and foreign direct investment. These clusters are primarily manufacturing-oriented, and the city has yet to fully explore innovation-based clusters. Despite these investments, the socio-economic conditions of residents in Gqeberha remain poor, which highlights a gap between the advantages gained by companies and the welfare of the city's citizens.

The geographical separation of SEZs from the rest of the metropolitan area, combined with insufficient integration of

municipal services, job opportunities, and transport, intensifies this inequality. While corporations enjoy tax benefits and low labour costs, these advantages do not reach ordinary citizens, who remain trapped in poverty. Economic and social benefits are concentrated in the city centre, which leaves the surrounding areas underdeveloped and marginalised. This assessment underscores the need for increased efforts to transform Gqeberha into a more inclusive city. A city may have resources, but if those resources only serve a privileged few rather than the broader population, it cannot be considered genuinely prosperous. Gqeberha still faces significant challenges in reshaping its urban environment.

To tackle these challenges and encourage inclusive prosperity, Gqeberha requires urban transformation. This means that the city should become a central hub for addressing current urban issues. Initiatives must focus on incorporating the urban poor into the economic and social framework of the city to ensure that all residents benefit from its prosperity.

It was discovered that Gqeberha offers attractive tax incentives to lure investors, particularly in the SEZs. The city also has an efficient one-stop shop where investors can engage with various departments. However, Gqeberha is sluggish in granting land use applications, with the exception of building plans, which only take seven days. This suggests that Gqeberha should explore ways to accelerate the approval of land use applications to avoid losing potential investors and to accelerate development.

Strategic Location and Underutilisation of Assets

In assessing a city's economic vitality, connectivity, and liveability, geographic and locational factors are essential. Leveraging unique geographic characteristics is vital for sustainable success and inclusive growth as cities compete for global recognition. Interviews and theoretical studies highlight that one of Gqeberha's standout features is its status as the only metropolitan area in South Africa with two seaports: the Port of Gqeberha and the Port of Ngqura. These ports

significantly enhance trade between South Africa and the rest of the world; however, they fail to reach their full potential due to infrastructure, operational, and management deficiencies. This poor utilisation of resources hampers the city's urban development, which raises concerns given Gqeberha's advantageous location and natural resources. In terms of international connectivity, the city is served by an airport. While this airport provides crucial links, substantial upgrades are necessary to align with international standards, which are essential for competitiveness.

Gqeberha offers various social amenities that enhance its competitive advantage, such as schools, recreational activities, shopping centres, and tourist sites. Nevertheless, ongoing challenges such as high crime rates and insufficient urban space diminish the city's liveability. Economically disadvantaged individuals remain confined to informal settlements on the outskirts of the city. Addressing these issues, including housing backlogs and informal settlements, is vital for fostering inclusive and sustainable urban growth.

As the largest city in the Eastern Cape, Gqeberha experiences the impacts of rapid urban growth, which strains its physical infrastructure. The participants pointed out the urgent need to enhance the city's outdated infrastructure, including power supply, water, roads, and sanitation systems. Furthermore, political instability has obstructed decision-making processes, which undermines the city's sustainability and urban development initiatives. Achieving a stable environment would enable the city to operate at its best and enhance its overall potential. Although the city has inherent strengths, it is crucial to tackle challenges such as underutilised port facilities, insufficient infrastructure, and political instability to realise its full potential. By introducing targeted strategies and promoting political stability, Gqeberha can establish itself as a competitive and sustainable city on the global stage.

Human Capital Deficiencies

The main goal of this study was to explore the essential components of human capital that are vital for Gqeberha's development as a competitive city. The research highlighted the crucial importance of investing in individuals for a city's success. It specifically pointed out the link between education and urban advancement, suggesting that cities that emphasise education are better prepared to deal with the challenges of intense global competition. The findings revealed the significance of both tangible and intangible resources in boosting Gqeberha's competitiveness. It was discovered that the proportion of individuals with higher education in the city is quite low, at only 8%. Meanwhile, 69% of the population has completed only some primary education, while 25% have finished secondary education (see Figure 3) (SACN, 2021). The city includes one public university alongside several further education and training colleges and private educational institutions (CoGTA, 2020). To address the skills gap, the city launched several workforce development initiatives, including internships, job shadowing, apprenticeships, graduate programmes, and community training initiatives (Mativenga et al., 2021).

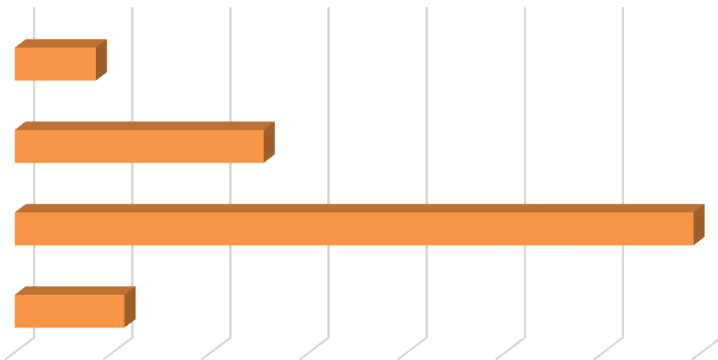


Figure 3: Education Levels. Source: CoGTA (2020)

Furthermore, it has been discovered that Gqeberha, although it has a rich heritage exemplified by figures such as Nelson Mandela and a favourable quality of life relative to other urban

areas, encounters difficulties in effective marketing. While it possesses noteworthy characteristics, including its connection to Mandela and a relatively high standard of living, the city faces challenges such as insufficient branding and global visibility. As a result, there is an urgent need for Gqeberha to strengthen its marketing strategies and enhance its visibility on the global stage.

The study also highlighted the cooperative relationship between the city and its university, where the institution engages in research to tackle urban issues and participates in discussions alongside private partners to address skill development requirements. Despite this partnership, the level of the university's impact on city research remains unclear. Nonetheless, the interdependent relationship between Gqeberha and the university is commendable, as universities play a crucial role in boosting urban competitiveness through the sharing and acquisition of knowledge.

However, despite collaborative efforts involving the university, Gqeberha falls short in developing a knowledge-driven economy. This gap is particularly concerning given the city's designation as Africa's automotive hub, which hosts international car manufacturers. Research indicates a lack of education programmes tailored to specific industries and a dependency on importing skills, and highlights a low-skilled workforce due to poor education levels in the city. This discrepancy underscores the importance of higher education institutions aligning their programmes with industry needs to promote local skill advancement.

Additionally, the research revealed a deficiency in vocational and practical training programmes, as illustrated by a boat manufacturing company that had to rely on importing skills from Cape Town during busy production periods. This situation underscores a missed opportunity for Gqeberha to develop its workforce and facilitate knowledge sharing from prominent local enterprises. Clearly, the city's initiatives to enhance the skills of its population are inadequate, which

indicates the need for a reassessment of training strategies and closer collaboration with industry partners.

Investments in human capital are essential for a city such as Gqeberha to remain competitive. In addition to physical assets, intangible elements such as education, partnerships, and vocational training are crucial for influencing urban development paths. By addressing shortcomings in education, skill enhancement, and knowledge exchange, Gqeberha can strengthen its resilience against global competition and create a foundation for sustainable growth and success.

Urban Planning Challenges

Urban planning, which lays out guidelines for the development of cities and business operations, plays a crucial role in shaping urban environments. This research highlights urban planning as a comprehensive process that integrates governance, social well-being, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. A significant discovery is the lack of internal collaboration in Gqeberha's urban governance framework. This indicates a failure to cohesively institutionalise development initiatives in the municipal administration. As a result, different departments do not share common goals and visions for their collaborative efforts on joint projects.

Considering these findings, it is apparent that successful urban planning extends beyond creating regulations; it involves promoting synergy among various administrative entities to achieve shared objectives. In Gqeberha's situation, the lack of such collaboration limits the city's capacity to enhance its competitive advantages and comprehensively tackle urgent urban issues. There is a distinct need for united efforts to improve collaboration and coordination in Gqeberha's urban governance system. By nurturing a culture of cooperation and aligning objectives, the city can leverage its potential for sustainable development and competitiveness.

The research also uncovered an increasing demand for densification in Gqeberha, as evidenced by the high volume of rezoning applications the city receives. This reflects a trend

towards transforming urban areas and intensifying land use. Nevertheless, the city struggles to address the challenges associated with densification due to insufficient physical infrastructure. Additionally, it was noted that Gqeberha relies on an outdated Municipal Spatial Development Framework (MSDF) that contains obsolete strategies.

These findings raise concerns since the MSDF is a critical instrument for guiding the city's developmental direction and determining priority investment areas. It is essential for the city to update its MSDF to reflect current and future demands and aspirations. The findings indicate rising momentum towards densification in Gqeberha, yet several obstacles impede its effective realisation. By enhancing its physical infrastructure and revising its MSDF, the city can more effectively meet the demands for densification and guide its development in a sustainable and inclusive manner. This requires proactive initiatives to adapt to evolving urban dynamics and ensure that Gqeberha becomes a thriving and resilient urban hub.

The findings present both opportunities and challenges for Gqeberha's growth and underscore the necessity for upgraded infrastructure and strategic planning. It is evident that proactive approaches are vital for navigating urban complexities and promoting sustainable development. By confronting these challenges directly and fostering a cooperative environment, Gqeberha can forge a path towards enhanced competitiveness.

A Framework for Enhancing Competitiveness

Based on the findings, this study proposes a comprehensive framework for enhancing the competitiveness of Gqeberha and other developing cities. The framework focuses on seven key areas: improving hard infrastructure, establishing consistent planning policies and strategic spatial planning, enhancing human capital and the knowledge-based economy, identifying suitable locations for SEZ development, adopting an entrepreneurial city approach to urban governance, ensuring safe environments, and maintaining political stability.

Competitive Cities



Figure 4: Competitive Cities Framework for Developmental Cities

Hard Infrastructure Improvement

According to Eide's (2014) report for the World Economic Forum on the Competitiveness of Cities, urban planning is essential for providing hard infrastructure. Planners must be mindful of how they design cities, avoiding both overplanning and underplanning, which can lead to unpredictable, uneven growth. Balance between planning and organic growth is necessary. Additionally, cities should increase their spending on infrastructure to accommodate the demands of urbanisation. Without this, cities may face obstacles to sustainable growth, which can result in sprawl, congestion, pollution, and inadequate public services. However, cities must take a demand-driven approach to infrastructure projects that respond to the needs of their local economies, rather than a supply-side approach that overlooks demand. The successful implementation of these projects requires careful planning, budgeting, and financial support (Choe & Roberts, 2011).

Consistent Planning Policies and Strategic Spatial Planning

To thrive competitively, emerging cities must adopt a cohesive approach to development that shapes both public and private investment choices. Consistent planning policies are crucial for enhancing city competitiveness for several interconnected reasons. Firstly, such policies establish a stable framework for long-term investment and development, which fosters confidence among businesses and investors. When regulations and zoning laws remain consistent over time, companies can confidently make decisions about where to locate and how to expand, without fear of encountering sudden regulatory obstacles or changes in land use. This stability not only supports local entrepreneurship but also attracts external investment, which will ultimately drive economic growth and job creation (Kamana et al., 2023).

In addition, a transition needs to be made from conservative spatial planning, which is concerned with preserving order, to strategic spatial planning, which focuses more on addressing challenges and transformation. Furthermore, this approach marks a departure from conservative spatial planning that is project-oriented rather than goal-oriented. In essence, emerging cities need to adopt a strategy that effects change and sets meaningful strategic goals, rather than relying on the implementation of spatial projects that may be effective today but ineffective tomorrow (Albrechts, 2015).

Key to strategic spatial planning is the establishment of objectives and the formulation and implementation of strategies to meet those objectives. Cities should have a vision for the future, assuming that current trends will continue (Salet & Faludi, 2000). Public and private sector coordination, along with public participation, is fundamental to the successful implementation of a strategic spatial plan (Oliveira & Hersperger, 2018). Moreover, strategic spatial planning acknowledges that the challenges faced by cities cannot be tackled solely by local authorities, as some fall outside the scope of local government; intergovernmental coordination is therefore necessary (Royal Town Planning Institute, 2015).

Enhancing Human Capital and the Knowledge-Based Economy

Cities must acknowledge the growing influence of technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and robotics. Thompson and Curella (2021) emphasise the importance of adapting to these emerging trends. For developing cities, aligning processes with factors outlined in the knowledge economy concept, such as skills development, global competitiveness, and entrepreneurship, is essential (Amo et al., 2017). The initial step for these cities is to formulate appropriate policies and strategies. Although specifics may vary, the World Bank's Knowledge Economy Index suggests focusing on themes such as education, economic incentives, institutional frameworks, and information and communications technology infrastructure. Additionally, cities should consider factors such as research and development, vocational training, government accountability, quality education, and investment in innovation and technology as enhancing measures towards their goals (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020).

The next crucial stage in improving their knowledge economy involves developing partnerships among various stakeholders. These stakeholders include the city government, businesses, research institutions, emerging entrepreneurs, creative individuals, innovators, and residents. Such partnerships serve as platforms for mutual learning and knowledge exchange, and facilitating the pooling of resources for collective advancement (Praharaj et al., 2018).

Suitable Locations for Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Development

The geographical positioning of SEZs plays a crucial role in ensuring broader inclusivity and maximising their positive impact on local economies and communities. A comprehensive approach to SEZ development must therefore incorporate considerations of both regulatory frameworks and spatial planning to foster holistic socio-economic growth that gives a city a competitive edge (Ahmed et al., 2020; Frick et al., 2019). The locations of SEZs in emerging cities should therefore

be orchestrated to serve the collective interests of various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, investors, local enterprises, residents, and workers. The primary objective should be to address pressing socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and poverty. By situating SEZs strategically, cities can harness their potential to stimulate job creation, enhance economic opportunities, and alleviate poverty (Ali, 2020).

Cities and national governments need to undertake comprehensive feasibility studies in areas where SEZs are to be located in order to determine the most suitable sites that are connected optimally and have the potential to transform a specific area from rural to urban. Furthermore, the choice of location for an SEZ should consider the potential for developing other land uses around it, such as commercial or residential (Janjua et al., 2017).

An Entrepreneurial City Approach to Urban Governance

Both theory and practice demonstrate that, for a city to be competitive and attract investment, an entrepreneurial approach to city governance is essential. This approach advocates treating city governance like a business, with the government acting as an entrepreneur to market the city and foster its growth. This involves ensuring fiscal stability and access to financial markets to attract investment and boost investor confidence (Lauer mann, 2018).

At the core of this governance approach lies the establishment of public-private partnerships for local governments to secure external funding, create employment opportunities, and attract new direct investment (Delmon, 2017). Olson et al. (2020) refer to these local government initiatives as “entrepreneurial governance”, wherein opportunities are identified and assessed, resources are gathered and utilised, and opportunities are exploited.

Furthermore, this city governance model emphasises the creation of institutions or municipal entities that are tasked with revenue collection and public service delivery on behalf

of the municipality. These entities operate independently from the municipality and mitigate the bureaucratic constraints faced by public entities by adopting private sector delivery models. Although these entities maintain public accountability and transparency, they do not represent full-scale privatisation. In addition to revenue collection, these entities are responsible for generating job opportunities across various skill levels (Mabalane, 2019).

Safe Environments

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2005) highlights various factors that contribute to urban crime. Key among these are unregulated urban growth, large income disparities, and inadequate governance. To tackle these issues, cities, particularly those in developing nations that are undergoing rapid urbanisation, need to establish robust regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms. It is essential that these efforts involve active engagement with local communities. Additionally, prioritising socio-economic inclusion is crucial. This means integrating crime prevention strategies into a range of social and economic policies and programmes, including those that address employment, education, healthcare, housing, and urban planning. By doing so, cities can work towards creating safer and more inclusive urban environments.

Urban planning approaches in developing cities must be re-evaluated to ensure the establishment of safe urban spaces. For example, mixed land uses should be encouraged in city development, as well as strengthened pedestrian traffic movement. This strategy not only increases the vibrancy of urban areas but also reduces the need for long commutes, which can contribute to safety by decreasing congestion and potential areas for criminal activity. Street layout design should deter criminals, which involves careful consideration of factors such as visibility, access points, and lighting to minimise opportunities for crime, while ensuring that housing density standards provide adequate space for community facilities, natural light, ventilation, and open spaces for residents (Al-Ghiyadh & Al-Khafaji, 2021).

Political Stability

Grøn and Salomonsen (2019) contend that a city's reputation can be adversely affected by political instability. Consequently, it is crucial to proactively address potential conflicts between administrative and political entities. Public managers should also be mindful of their organisations' historical reputation, as this could impede their ability to coordinate an effective and unified response when faced with threats to the organisations' image. Furthermore, effectively managing the discord between politics and administration in Gqeberha is essential to uphold a positive public image and foster collaboration among all stakeholders.

Implications of the Study

The study's findings have important implications for the future of Gqeberha. By adopting the suggested framework, the city can position itself to compete globally while addressing the urgent issues of urbanisation and spatial injustice. The framework focuses on key elements related to location, human capital, and urban planning, which are essential for creating a sustainable and competitive city.

Furthermore, the study emphasises the potential for Gqeberha to become a model for other developing cities facing similar challenges. By sharing best practices and lessons learned, Gqeberha can contribute to a wider discussion on urban competitiveness in the Global South. The framework outlined in this study provides a flexible blueprint that can be customised to address the distinct challenges faced by different cities.

Future Research Directions

Expanding on the findings from Gqeberha, future studies on city competitiveness in developing nations can explore the following areas:

- Assessing the effects of SEZs: Investigate whether the current SEZ model promotes economic inclusion or perpetuates existing disparities.

- Enhancing port operations: Study effective port management strategies from prosperous developing countries to identify adaptable solutions for Gqeberha.
- Aligning education curricula with industry needs: Conduct a skills gap analysis to identify specific mismatches between current educational offerings and industry requirements in Gqeberha.
- International promotion: Investigate the impact of global promotion on driving economic growth and competitiveness for Gqeberha.
- Urban governance collaboration and spatial planning: Identify successful instances of collaborative urban planning from other developing cities and evaluate their applicability to Gqeberha.
- Contextualising the competitiveness framework: Refine the proposed competitiveness framework by incorporating specific data and best practices relevant to the South African context.

Conclusion

The dynamics of competitive cities are shaped by various factors that influence the economic, social, and environmental landscapes. Cities that emphasise knowledge and innovation, allocate resources towards infrastructure, and utilise effective urban planning strategies are more likely to thrive in the global arena. As urban areas face changes in demographics and rapid technological progress, embracing sustainable practices will be crucial for long-term viability. Cities must evolve, experiment, and engage in collaboration to create vibrant and competitive environments that satisfy the needs of their inhabitants.

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