



Exploring the social value of integrated development planning through SME inclusion in South Africa

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Abstract

This article conceptually explores the role of Integrated Development Planning (IDP) in promoting social value through the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South African municipalities. IDPs are strategic instruments required by law to guide municipal planning and service delivery in a manner that fosters inclusivity and sustainable development. The study explores four categories of SME activities, retail and service-oriented, creative and cultural, urban agriculture and light industrial, and technology and knowledge-based enterprises, highlighting their contributions to social cohesion, employment, innovation, and local economic growth. Using examples from national policy frameworks and international planning practices, the paper illustrates how SMEs can be integrated into municipal planning to drive urban regeneration and address inequality. It further identifies enabling policies such as equality of access, skills development, local sourcing, financing mechanisms, and public-private partnerships as essential to the success of SME-driven development. The article concludes that when IDPs are people-centred and inclusive, they can empower communities to shape their socio-economic futures. Recommendations are made for municipalities to adopt responsive, community-driven approaches to urban development that align with principles of smart, sustainable cities. This paper does not present empirical findings but synthesises conceptual and policy insights to inform a more inclusive, SME-integrated approach to urban development planning in South African municipalities.

Keywords: Integrated Development Planning; Local Governance; Small Enterprises; Social Value; Urban Regeneration

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1. Introduction

An Integrated Development Plan (IDP) is a strategic plan that serves to reflect a particular community's needs and clarifies service delivery deficits to be addressed by a municipality. Recent policy revisions highlight the increasing importance of IDPs in enabling structured, people-centred governance at the local level (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2024). An IDP is a document which is the result of a mandatory and comprehensive integrated development planning process that occurs in South African municipalities. The concept of Integrated Development Planning (also known as the IDP-process) in South Africa, and how it promotes value – social and economic – should be understood in terms of Chapter 7, section 152 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. This section deals with the purpose and functions of local government, which include providing 'democratic and accountable government for local communities', ensuring 'the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner', promoting 'social and economic development', promoting 'a safe and healthy environment', and encouraging 'the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government'.

The IDP process helps to clarify priority issues and objectives to provide solutions to the challenges faced by a municipality. An IDP is a requirement for municipalities as stipulated in the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 (Act 32 of 2000). Therefore, an IDP is viewed as an essential instrument for strategic planning and development-related matters in the South African local government sphere. As such, all strategic planning by a municipality must be in congruence with its IDP framework. This includes the rendering of services in a sustainable manner to communities served by a municipality, and the need to foster inclusive, vibrant, resilient urban developments and environments that create social value.

Within any IDP, provision should be made for strategic urban design that can benefit communities through a variety of Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) activities that are complementary to the social values of the communities within which they occur. Too often, enterprises seemingly abetted by local governments are at odds with the communities in which they operate, and instead of injecting value, they foster division and social decay. Koroneos and Rokos (2012:141) write:

"A Worth-living Integrated Development may be achieved only when human societies decide to create necessary presuppositions – at the educational, research, economic, social, political, technical/technological and environmental levels – for a better world, based on the human values of peace, justice, solidarity, political, economic and social democracy and ethics, respect for nature and for the variety of cultures of all human beings."

This article emphasises the positive contribution of four types of SME activities and focuses on how SMEs contribute to social value by promoting local economies, generating employment, and forming the foundation for healthy community networks. The selected activities are: (i) Retail and service-oriented SMEs; (ii) Creative and cultural SMEs; (iii) Urban agriculture and manufacturing and light industrial SMEs; and (iv) Technology and knowledge-based SMEs.

2. Methodology and scope

This paper adopts a conceptual and narrative review approach to explore how IDP can enhance the social value of urban spaces through the integration of SMEs. The discussion is grounded in South African policy frameworks and supported by relevant academic literature, practitioner reports, and municipal planning

documents. Key sources were identified through targeted searches in scholarly databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar, as well as institutional repositories and official government websites.

The selection of SME categories retail and service-oriented, creative and cultural, urban agriculture and light industrial, and technology and knowledge-based enterprises was informed by their documented relevance to urban socio-economic development, particularly within emerging economies. These categories were also chosen for their varying spatial, economic, and social demands, which align with IDP priorities around inclusive growth and local resilience.

International examples, particularly from Melbourne and Portland, were included to illustrate how integrated planning practices in diverse contexts have addressed urban health, equity, and enterprise development. These cases were selected based on their prominence in the urban planning literature and their relevance to South Africa's ongoing debates on participatory governance and spatial justice.

This methodology does not involve empirical fieldwork but instead aims to synthesise theory, policy, and practice to offer a structured discussion on how SMEs can contribute to IDP objectives in South African municipalities.

3. Understanding the social value of Integrated Development Planning

In our understanding of integrated development planning (the process), we note that various elements contribute to comprising an IDP. According to the Saldanha Bay Local Municipality's IDP (2022–2027), integrated development planning ‘...is a process through which municipalities prepare a strategic development plan which extends over a 5-year period’. In terms of the Municipal Systems Act, 32 (Act 32 of 2000), “all municipalities have to undertake an IDP (*read integrated development planning*) process to produce IDPs” (Saldanha Bay Municipality, 2024). As per some definitions, it is a super plan, and a framework in which development can take place (Education and Training Unit for Democracy and Development, 2024; North-West University, 2024). An IDP can also be regarded as a plan that is focused on a five-year term, and provides ‘guiding principles, strategic focus areas and development priorities’ (North-West University, 2024). In addition, it is “a strategic business plan for a municipality which involves the municipality itself and its residents” (Western Cape Government, 2013).

A general description of an IDP reads:

“A municipal integrated development plan (IDP) is a five-year strategic narrative (plan) of the guiding principles, strategic focus areas and development priorities of a municipality as a government institution and as a spatially demarcated area. The IDP assists a municipality to coordinate its work with the other spheres of government with the overall aim of improving the quality of life of local communities in South Africa. For it to serve its purpose well, an IDP must be aligned with the municipality's service delivery and budget implementation plan. Sector-specific legislation may require additional municipal plans that should be incorporated with the IDP” (North-West University, 2024).

An integrated development planning process embraces a holistic perspective of a community to ensure it addresses its broader concerns and that it encompasses economic strata, from the very wealthy to homeless

and indigent members. It must harmonise activities and cooperation between its various entities, *viz.* public, private and community. It must ensure enhanced accessibility to especially public services to promote equitability. Integrated development planning also has a procreant goal, namely, the revitalisation of, and multiplication of, accessible public areas and services; for instance, public parks and open spaces that should be accessible to everyone. This is aligned with recent frameworks that emphasise equitable design and accessibility of public space as a cornerstone of inclusive urban development (South African Cities Network, 2023). By involving the community in deciding on the shaping of public spaces and services, a sense of involvement is created together with a feeling of social cohesion.

On a broader front, well-known IDP researchers, Lowe et al. (2015) cite how the city of Melbourne, in Australia, garnered information and case examples from the city of Portland, Oregon, USA, about integrated development planning in terms of providing access to healthy communities by creating optimal transport connectivity that includes walking, cycling and public transport facilities and infrastructure. Melbourne extrapolated the lessons from Portland and designed their own town and regional planning model.

Lowe et al. (2015) also reflect on the necessity for land use planning as well as the installation of appropriate infrastructure to ensure emotional health benefits for the community in a town and regional planning context. For the aforementioned to occur, critical components should be integrated. These include policy content, policy context, policy actors and policy processes (Lowe et al., 2015). As an example, regarding policy content, Melbourne had health and wellbeing promotion as a primary focus in a social context. This accords with Portland's land use planning policy, which encourages those aspects of land use that ensure healthy communities. A noteworthy observation is that in contrast to Melbourne, Portland focuses on social equity.

As for policy context, the two cities have contrasting environments from a political perspective. In Melbourne, election cycles are disruptive, as a previous administration's policies may be discarded. Portland, on the other hand, has a proactive approach to finding widespread political support across party lines, promoting a seamless continuance of active development initiatives and processes in the event of a political transition amid an integrated development cycle. A close link exists with policy actors and leadership. In both Melbourne and Portland, leadership is viewed as the essence of an IDP-process. Lowe et al. (2015) emphasise that in Portland, '...consistent strategy over the long term has been their hallmark planning approach, made possible through political leadership, bipartisanship and consensus-building'. From the Melbourne and Portland examples, it can be inferred that SMEs play a fundamental role in IDPs, as they contribute to social value by creating jobs, lessening poverty, providing skills and vocational training, applying Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to foster innovation, and supporting public and community networks.

4. SME contributions to social value in urban development

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are central to fostering local economic resilience, innovation, and inclusive development. Within the context of Integrated Development Planning (IDP), SMEs represent more than just economic actors, they are instruments of social cohesion, community identity, and urban renewal. They help bridge service and infrastructure gaps where public institutions fall short and often reflect the entrepreneurial capacity of local communities. This section explores four categories of SMEs and their differentiated contributions to social value in municipalities.

4.1. Retail and service-oriented SME's

Retail and service-oriented SMEs offer accessible employment and stimulate micro-economies within urban neighbourhoods. They account for a significant share of informal and formal economic activity in developing contexts (Marcos, 2024; Masakale, 2024; Myslimi and Kaçani, 2016). These enterprises, which include local shops, barbers, tailors, and mobile food vendors, contribute to the daily functioning of urban life. Their close proximity to residential zones allows for localised exchange, reduces commuting burdens, and builds social relationships between producers and consumers. Despite pressure from large-scale retailers, these SMEs remain critical for economic participation and community resilience. They also serve as entry points for youth and women into the economy, helping address unemployment and inequality in township and informal settings.

4.2. Creative and cultural SME's

Creative and cultural enterprises contribute uniquely to community identity, tourism, and urban vibrancy. When included in IDP frameworks, such SMEs can activate public spaces, generate emotional connection to place, and foster cultural diversity (Grodach et al., 2014; Richards, 2011; Borowiecki and Dahl, 2021). Arts-based SMEs, including local galleries, craft cooperatives, and performance groups, enrich community cohesion and are often a first step toward gentrification-resistant urban revitalisation. However, urban planners must proactively mitigate the risk of gentrification (Moskowitz, 2017; Grodach et al., 2014), while also recognising their economic impact on tourism and identity (Pablo-Romero and Molina, 2013; Brida et al., 2020). The importance of creative environments as living ecosystems was underscored by Hospers and Van Dalm (2005), who liken city streets to “vital organs” of social and economic creativity. Cultural SMEs can also preserve heritage and create intergenerational dialogue, vital for healing in post-apartheid South African cities.

4.3. Urban agriculture and light industrial SME's

Urban agriculture and light manufacturing offer practical models for circular, self-reliant urban economies. These enterprises support food security, reduce supply chain dependencies, and generate multi-stage employment opportunities—from production to distribution and recycling. In cities facing land constraints, techniques such as vertical farming and rooftop gardens offer innovative solutions for food systems (SME South Africa, 2024). Light industrial SMEs such as carpentry, textiles, and mechanical workshops, when integrated into IDP zoning strategies, contribute to skills development, income diversification, and localisation of supply chains. IDP processes that enable mixed-use zoning and flexible land use policies can harness these benefits while maintaining public health and safety standards (World Bank, 2022). Their presence is particularly significant in secondary cities and peri-urban zones, where large industry is often absent.

4.4. Technology and knowledge-based SME's

Digital and knowledge-based SMEs exemplify how urban economies can modernise without heavy physical infrastructure. With appropriate digital connectivity and co-working infrastructure, municipalities can attract tech entrepreneurs and remote professionals, stimulating knowledge transfer and innovation ecosystems (Mancinelli, 2020; Nash et al., 2020). Digital nomads and remote professionals offer new urban possibilities

(Zhou et al., 2024), and historical examples suggest that supportive local environments can incubate future global enterprises (Kumar, 2020). Importantly, these SMEs also enable new forms of participation in the urban economy, especially for persons with disabilities or those based in rural areas who can now engage through virtual platforms. Smart cities that are inclusive must consider these SMEs not only as economic assets but as vehicles for broader digital inclusion.

5. Policy enablers for inclusive SME development

The role of SMEs in IDP can only be fully realised through deliberate policy support. Municipalities must remove structural barriers and create enabling environments through the following interlinked strategies:

5.1. Equitable access to urban resources

Inclusive IDPs must ensure that all entrepreneurs, including informal traders and marginalised groups, have fair access to trading spaces, infrastructure, and services. Urban design should accommodate diverse business models, particularly in under-served areas (Lemaire and Kerr, 2017). Planning authorities should consider flexible licensing, street trading zones, and mixed-use public infrastructure that supports informal retail and services without criminalising informal economic activity.

5.2. Skills development and entrepreneurial training

Municipal support for SME participation must include capacity-building initiatives that go beyond sector-specific training. Generic business skills, digital literacy, and innovation capacity are foundational for sustained SME growth. Skills programmes like the Seriti Entrepreneurship Programme and the now-discontinued Eskom Contractors Academy have demonstrated how targeted entrepreneurial education builds business capacity (Masakale, 2024; Trialogue, 2019). Municipalities should also establish incubation centres and provide mentorship through partnerships with local universities and industry bodies.

5.3. Local sourcing and access to finance

Public procurement policies should incentivise local sourcing and prioritise emerging enterprises. Municipalities can partner with financial institutions or create local funding instruments to unlock working capital for SMEs (World Bank, 2011). Furthermore, procurement regulations should include preferential clauses for women-owned, youth-led, and township-based enterprises. Financial support could be coupled with technical assistance and monitoring to ensure successful implementation.

5.4. Collaborative governance and networks

Cross-sector partnerships between government, private actors, and community networks are critical for scaling SME impact. IDP frameworks must institutionalise mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, resource sharing, and continuous learning (State of South African Cities, 2021). Local business forums, participatory budgeting, and regular SME dialogues can increase transparency, build trust, and align SME needs with urban

development agendas. Interdepartmental collaboration across municipal departments, planning, finance, economic development is essential to break silos and sustain long-term SME inclusion strategies.

6. Challenges and future directions

The 21st century is characterised by a resistance to societal heterogeneity, as there is an economic cost associated with the integration of marginalised individuals into established urban environments. The evolution of the so-called smart city is an apparent attempt at mitigating obstacles to integration for the marginalised as suggested by Yin et al (2015) in their literature study on smart cities from which they extrapolated the characteristics of smart cities as follows:

- Instrumented, interconnected and intelligent;
- Using ICT to make a city (administration, education, transportation, etc.) more intelligent and efficient; and
- The economy, governance, environment, people, mobility and living should be considered.

According to Yin et al. (2015:4), a smart city is “...an intelligent city where application is focused on practical use and user experience”. It is evident from this that an evolutionary approach to integrated development planning is required. With the advent of a digitally expert workforce, it is necessary to create a more efficient, responsive, and sustainable urban environment. Contemporary urban populations increasingly require innovative, responsive solutions tailored to digital and inclusive urban futures. Regarding smart cities, they clearly need the following: integrated and presumably artificial intelligence driven transportation networks, sustainable energy provision, environmentally sound buildings, i.e., heating and cooling considerations, water reticulation and waste management.

It may be concluded that integrated development planning might be the current best practice, but such planning can no longer be left to a handful of town planning mandarins. Instead, the participation of a city's citizens cannot be avoided if provision needs to be made for the development of smart cities, the cities of tomorrow.

7. Recommendations

The value of Integrated Development Planning (IDP) lies in its ability to align municipal strategies with the lived realities of communities. Based on the arguments presented in this paper, the following recommendations are made to strengthen the contribution of SMEs within the IDP process:

- *Integrate SME Development into the IDP Framework*
Municipalities should ensure that SME development is explicitly referenced and prioritised within IDP objectives and programmes. This includes recognising the social value that different types of SMEs bring to communities, beyond purely economic contributions.
- *Facilitate Inclusive Engagement in IDP Processes*
IDP consultations must actively involve informal traders, micro-enterprises, youth-led businesses, and other marginalised groups. Their participation ensures that development priorities are informed by those who are often most affected by planning decisions.

- *Support Local Sourcing and Enterprise Participation in Service Delivery*
Municipalities should review procurement practices to create space for local SMEs to participate in public service delivery. This can be achieved through simplified bidding processes, supplier development programmes, and partnerships with cooperatives and community businesses.
- *Plan for Infrastructure that Enables SME Activity*
The spatial and infrastructural dimensions of IDPs should accommodate the operating needs of SMEs. This includes zoning for mixed-use spaces, maintaining accessible public markets, and ensuring digital connectivity in both urban and peri-urban areas.
- *Encourage Interdepartmental Coordination and Learning*
Local governments must break down silos between departments involved in economic development, infrastructure, and community services. Coordinated efforts, informed by ongoing learning from other municipalities and international practice, can improve the coherence and impact of SME-related initiatives.

8. Conclusion

Integrated Development Planning (IDP) remains a powerful tool for aligning municipal strategies with the lived realities of communities. When SMEs are thoughtfully included in IDP frameworks, they can contribute meaningfully to local economic development, social inclusion, and urban regeneration. This paper has highlighted the diverse roles that SMEs play from retail to technology-based enterprises and highlighted the enabling conditions required to support them, including access to finance, skills development, and equitable urban infrastructure.

The integration of SMEs into IDPs should not be treated as a peripheral concern but as a strategic approach to building resilient and community-driven urban economies. Moving forward, municipalities in South Africa should consider more explicit, structured engagement with SMEs in their planning cycles, ensure that local development policies reflect the diversity of community needs, and promote collaborative governance models that bridge public, private, and civic sectors. Through such integrative approaches, IDPs can become more than planning tools, they can become instruments of genuine social transformation.

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