

Shifting focus from the centre

The heart of Durban lies in its outer areas where there has been a striking rise in population density in recent years, a development which is ripe with opportunity for new leaders coming into office after Wednesday's polls, write **Ivan Turok** and **Gerbrand Mans**

A NOVEL new three-dimensional map (see graphic) of eThekweni turns the conventional image of the city inside out. Focusing on where people live shifts the centre of gravity and produces a striking new perspective. Established districts to the north and south of Durban lose their significance compared with outlying areas such as Umlazi, KwaMashu and Inanda.

The map was prepared for the 2011 State of the Cities Report. The height of each column represents the population density of that district or neighbourhood – the taller the column, the higher the density. The footprint of each column is the geographical extent of the area – the bigger the footprint, the larger the area. So the volume of each column reflects the total number of people living in that area.

The map provides a powerful representation of how the population of eThekweni is distributed across the metro. This is vital for strategic planning and resource allocation by public bodies. It is also crucial for property developers and other private-sector investors influenced by the location of consumers and workers.

The overwhelming concentration of people in townships and informal settlements in the outer north-west and south-west of the city is remarkable. Residential densities tend to rise from the inner suburbs towards the outer areas. Growing shack settlements function as gateways to the city for migrant groups. Homes are crammed together because of pressure on the supply of land and municipal restrictions on settlement expansion.

Meanwhile, the middle- and high-income suburbs have low densities and small populations. A single house with a garden on each erf is the norm, often with a pool. There is little awareness here that each of the major townships has more people than all the city's suburbs put together.

Township densities are typically more than 10 times higher than in the suburbs, and often well more than 100 or even 200 people per hectare. These densities stem from small overcrowded dwellings at ground level, rather than the tall buildings typical of dense Asian or Latin American cities.

The housing backlog means backyard shacks drive densities higher still. This limits the open space available for recreation and adds to the strains on families and

facilities. Township residents have less personal space than the domestic animals kept in some affluent suburbs.

The fragmented urban form of eThekweni is also peculiar by international norms. Most big cities have their highest densities in and around the central area. This is where competition for space is most intense and land values peak, because this maximises access to opportunities. High-rise apartment blocks dominate inner-city living.

People normally trade off the amount of living space they want against proximity to workplaces and social amenities. Population densities and building heights usually fall with distance from the city centre, creating a cone-shaped urban structure. This compact arrangement is highly functional. Average travel-to-work distances are modest and a comprehensive public transport system is viable.

In eThekweni, most high-density areas are in the outer city. Residents fortunate to have jobs have to commute long distances. This imposes big costs on themselves and their families, as well as on businesses and the environment.

The quality of life is worsened by the extreme densities and lack of space for expansion. Existing public infrastructure is often overloaded, and schools and health centres are overcrowded. Intense competition for housing, land and other scarce resources exacerbates social tensions and crime. High densities expose people to heightened risks of fire damage and flooding.

It is also inefficient for workers to be concentrated in peripheral areas because of the effects of long-distance commuting on punctuality, productivity and wage demands. Travel-to-work distances match Los Angeles, despite eThekweni being a low-income region.

Transport subsidies and other state resources should be invested in making the spatial form more coherent through carefully targeted housing development, infilling and densification of the inner suburbs. Linkages between the townships and established urban areas should also be strengthened through mixed-use property development in

intermediate locations, supply chains and better transport connections. Durban's settlement structure can't be reshaped overnight, of course. Efforts to restructure cities are a bit like turning around a supertanker, except it is much slower and more difficult. Without stronger interventions by local and provincial planners and infrastructure providers, present patterns will continue to be entrenched well into the future, threatening the city's long-term viability.

Wider awareness of the present growth path is a precondition for progress. Most citizens in the suburbs don't have a clue how people are distributed across the city, and what conditions are like in low income areas. It would be easier to mobilise a concerted effort by all spheres of government to create a more functional city if they did.

The growing concentration of people in outlying areas is significant for four other reasons:

- These are areas of rising consumer spending power that service-sector businesses and house-builders could benefit from taking more seriously.

- They are sizeable sources of labour supply that major employers ought to consider.

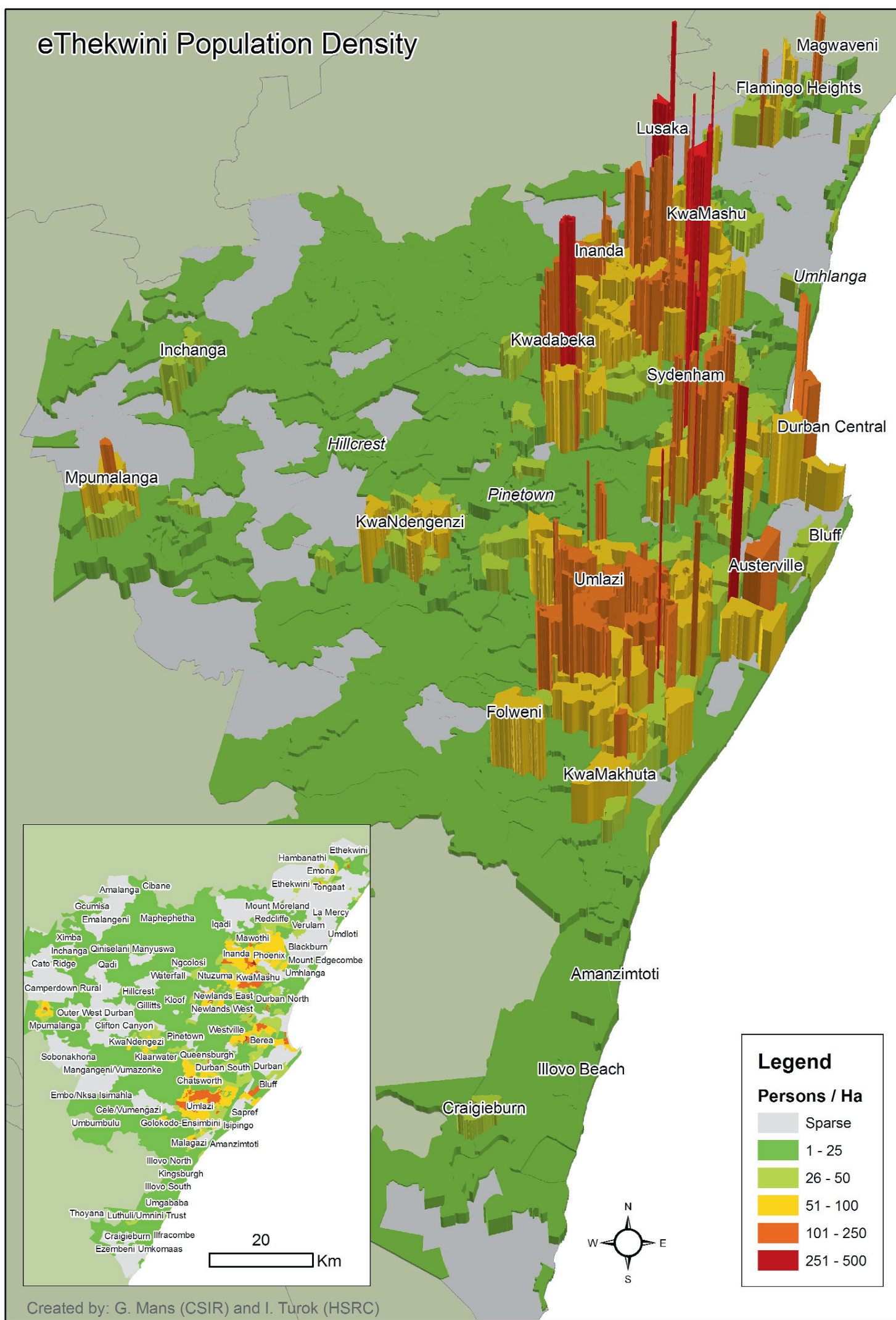
- Housing policy urgently needs to support in situ upgrading and densification.

- These are also areas with rising capacity to pay municipal taxes. Although residents cannot pay as much as in more affluent areas, in aggregate they can pay enough to sustain better services.

Durban's major townships are at the heart of the "people's city". Many are experiencing greater economic vitality, and should not be seen as bottomless pits into which state subsidies need to be poured. Recognising them as areas of potential has potent implications for strategic decisions about the location of major public and private investment. It is vital that civic leaders, urban planners, managers, investors and other decision-makers recognise this reality.

● **Ivan Turok is an economist/planner and deputy executive director at the HSRC. Gerbrand Mans is an urban geographer and GIS specialist at the CSIR.**

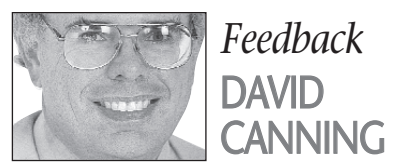
“Township densities are typically more than 10 times higher than in the suburbs”



The road to self-sufficiency starts with good education

THE ELECTION excitement being over, national attention should now turn to the results of two surveys published over the past week.

First, the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report found that South Africa's global ranking in terms of competitiveness had dropped dramatically – from 44th to 52nd among emerging and industrialised countries. Second, the State of the World's Cities Report found South African cities were the most unequal in the world in terms of income distribution, even worse off than Zimbabwe. It explained that "such extreme values often result from



Feedback
DAVID CANNING

dysfunctional labour markets, sluggish economic growth, structural problems of wealth distribution and institutional failure that reflect long-standing patterns of inequality".

"All the countries in this group are in southern Africa, with urban areas in the Republic of South Africa featuring the highest degree of income inequality in the world."

Put into layman's language, this means that we are not only failing to create wealth at lower levels of society but (in business terms) we are also losing our competitive edge to other countries.

Today's competition between nations revolves more than ever around innovation and skills development. Yet South Africa ironically suffers from both a skills shortage and an unemployment nightmare. This is not surprising when we consider the dysfunctional nature of education in many schools and the knock-on effects. Our universities are producing many graduates unfit for the modern world. Some of

the most important Setas (sector training authorities) are mired in inefficient bureaucracy and are not serving industry. Like so many other institutions, their top levels have become comfortable areas for the deployment of political cadres.

Education, which has long been a victim of false ideologies, needs to be refocused on the real needs of business, which is the engine of wealth and job creation. In this the profit motive needs to be celebrated so that innovators come forward and start new businesses.

These two reports put into abstract academic terms the real-life experiences of people working on

the ground. I have a friend, a foreign social worker, who visits this country once a year. Every time she arrives with great hopes of seeing an improvement in our social fabric, particularly in the educational and living standards of families in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal. Unfortunately, she is often disappointed.

Thousands of bright young girls with academic potential drop out of school because they get pregnant. The "fathers" are nowhere to be found. They and thousands of young boys become adults without skills, adding to the growing number of mouths to feed. Many people

in these rural family groups (if they are lucky) depend on social grants or on one or two members sending home money from city relatives.

Another friend works in an NGO teaching good practices to schools with young children. She despairs at the number of schools that slide back once the direct help is removed and focused on other schools.

"Where will it all lead?" my foreign friend asked. "Where will South Africa be in 10 to 15 years? Will a thin layer of five million taxpayers be able to carry on its shoulders an ever-growing army of peo-

ple in desperate need of hand-outs – social welfare pay-outs, housing, schooling, water and electricity subsidies, and so on?"

The answer is a clear no. There has to be a swing in the national mindset, away from one of dependency and entitlement towards self-sufficiency and accomplishment.

It happened in what are now called the Asian Tigers and it is already happening in parts of South Africa. The place to focus on is education – we need to recognise and celebrate those schools, universities, municipalities and businesses producing excellence – and do all in our power to replicate them.

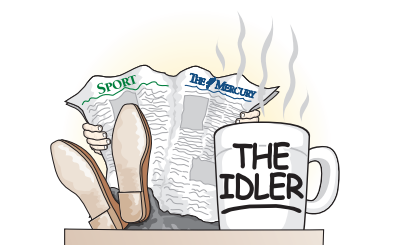
Apocalypse not quite yet

THIS really is too much. Californian preacher Harold Camping has let us down. Here am I slaving at the keyboard again, even though Pastor Camping told us the world was definitely going to end on Saturday, May 21, 2011. Deadlines, deadlines... nothing has changed.

Okay, he got it wrong before, in 1994, but all the same there was quite a vibe this time, especially in Russia where posters all over the place predicted the Apocalypse.

I suppose most of us are rather pleased the pastor got it wrong again, in spite of the unpleasantness and wickedness of so much of the world these days – noisome politicians, nauseating celebrities and the wretched performance of our rugby team. We would rather soldier on in spite of it all. On the whole, I would rather be slaving at the keyboard.

But what if I had taken Camping



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seriously? What if I had, in the run-up to the supposed Apocalypse, bought a Rolls-Royce on tick, run up a huge bar bill at the Oyster Box and proposed marriage to a girl, believing I would never be held to account for my responsibilities?

I say Camping is guilty of gross irresponsibility. Give me any day the ecclesiastics of the 17th century, such as James Ussher, Anglican Archbishop of Armagh, and Dr John Lightfoot, vice-chancellor of

Cambridge University. These worked with clarity, precision and a sense of responsibility. Ussher calculating that the earth was created at nightfall on October 23, 4004 BC and Lightfoot adding that man was created at nine o'clock in the morning next day.

This was sensible and responsible research. Nobody was induced to buy a Rolls on tick, run up a bar bill or propose marriage.

This modern world... where does it end?

All bases covered

MEANWHILE, the Corner Cafe was covering all eventualities. A blog to customers last Friday read:

"Dear loyal customers who are about to die, the opening times are very simple. If the world ends tomorrow as predicted then we will be closed for the day.

"The good news is... I'll open



A Filipino girl takes a breather as others continue to dance as part of celebrations of the feast day of Saint Rita de Cascia in Paranaque, Philippines, yesterday. PICTURE: AP

another coffee shop in the next life. That's right, we will call it 'Apocalyptic Cafe' and I won't make the same mistakes as this time round. We will not stock decaf, it will be a kid-free zone, non-smoking, – and I'll hire only ex-Hooters girls.

"We are expecting a last-minute

rush today just before we close, so get here early."

The blog attracted a couple of interesting comments:

- "Why don't you stay open and be the restaurant at the end of the universe?"
- "So can I bring 10 friends in later and pay you on Monday? I am

short of cash as I'm going to hire a Ferrari and crash it into a tree."

I presume this is the Corner Cafe in Glenwood – but I suppose it could be a Corner Cafe anywhere in the world, such is the all-encompassing nature of the blogosphere.

Follow instructions

READER Gray Braatvedt says he's still recovering from the stiffness occasioned by last week's municipal election.

"When I got to the ballot box I read a sign saying: 'Fold in Four'. It was awful, I'm so unfit I can hardly touch my toes!"

Changes

VOICEMAIL message: "I'm not available right now, but thank you for caring enough to call. I'm making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you're one of the changes."

Tailpiece

A MIDDLE-AGED woman is in a pet shop, looking for something to keep her company. She recoils in horror from the ugliest frog she has ever seen. But then the frog winks at her.

What the heck! She buys it and puts it on the passenger seat of her car to drive home.

As they go along, the frog croaks at her: "Kiss me and I'll turn into a handsome prince."

What the heck! She kisses him. And, sure enough, the frog turns into an absolutely gorgeous, sexy, handsome young prince.

Then he kisses her. And suddenly the middle-aged woman feels herself transforming.

What does she turn into? A Holiday Inn, what else?

Last word

SOME are born great, some achieve greatness, and some hire public relations officers. – **Daniel J Boorstin**

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