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Urban Regeneration: Identifying Causes and Impacts of Urban Decay within the Pietermaritzburg Central Business District: South Africa

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1 ABSTRACT

Urban decay affects cities worldwide, and South African cities have not been immune to this quagmire. It is regarded as a development that negatively contributes to physical degeneration and high spatial inequality. Most integrated development plans highlight the challenges of South African cities facing environmental decay and inadequate infrastructure maintenance. Consequently, greater regeneration plans for inner cities have been the strategic focus of urban planning. The study aims to investigate the main factors influencing urban decay within the Pietermaritzburg Central Business District (CBD). It is known that urban decay in Pietermaritzburg CBD is associated with economic decline and negatively impacts the city. However, it is unknown what specific strategies or plans the Municipality of Msunduzi is pursuing to combat urban decay, the level of funding available for urban regeneration initiatives, and the role of the private sector in urban regeneration efforts. The work adopted a case study research design and applied a qualitative approach to understanding factors contributing to urban decay in the Pietermaritzburg CBD. An in-depth examination and comparison of the causes and effects of urban decay using interviews with residents and relevant stakeholders, as well as observations of buildings conducted between 1 October 2022 and 30 October 2022, mention that the causes of urban decay in Msunduzi include Urban Planning and Governance: lack of measures to encourage city growth and inconsistent service delivery. The closure of public facilities, inadequate services, and the neglect of properties by absentee landlords worsen urban decay. The research findings emphasise the significance of private investments and changing residents' negative perceptions in achieving successful urban regeneration. A comprehensive approach to urban regeneration should encompass psychological, economic, social, physical, and civic aspects, thereby fostering economic development through collaboration between the public and private sectors. Most Pietermaritzburg participants attribute urban decay to socioeconomic shifts, such as the departure of middle-class residents, the presence of absentee landlords, and the absence of necessary amenities. Proposed solutions to combat urban decay involve implementing a regeneration programs program that prioritises city cleanliness, holds landlords accountable, enforces eviction measures, and offers incentives for businesses to relocate. Effectively implementing these measures necessitates collaboration among the municipality, private sector, community, organisations, and residents to stimulate economic growth, enhance infrastructure, and promote urban regeneration. The paper's overall contribution lies in developing an urban renewal strategy that addresses the factors leading to urban decay and supports efforts toward urban regeneration.

Keywords: Urban Planning, Spatial Inequality, Urban Regeneration, Urban Decay, Governance

2 INTRODUCTION

The built environment is always changing, both physically and functionally. Urban decay is examined from the viewpoints of physical, social, and economic origins, which have detrimental effects on urban planning. Urban decay presents itself in various ways, specifically in the physical deterioration of buildings and declining quality of the environment (Lea, 1972:43). Urban decay happens everywhere in the world in particular places or geographical areas in cities. However, the UN-Habitat (2017) notes that most of the world's population is relocating to cities and is predicted to increase in the next decade. However, urban decay mostly affects cities in developing countries. Urban decay is a global issue affecting developed and developing countries, resulting in the most aggravated effects if not addressed promptly. The cause of urban decay differs in each city. However, the impacts are slightly similar (Smith, 2018). According to Amirtahmasebi, Orloff, Wahba, & Altman (2016), every city either has an underutilised, overused, or distraught parcel of land, which gradually degenerates the city's appearance, liability and production and negatively affects the overall development and economy of the city. According to Andersen (2003:23), urban

decay is the most significant process which negatively contributes to generating high spatial inequality. It should be noted that urban decay is regarded as a global phenomenon affecting both developed and developing countries. Hence, the ARCA conference (2016:382) mentions that the impact of urban decay has stimulated global cities to formulate and implement urban regeneration strategies to address this issue. This research aims to investigate the main contributing factors influencing urban decay within the Pietermaritzburg Central Business District (CBD) and develop an urban renewal plan that addresses the threats contributing to urban decline while promoting urban regeneration. By analysing international case studies, the research will examine the reasons and factors behind the decline of the Msunduzi CBD, evaluate the socioeconomic and physical effects of urban decay in the area, and assess past, current, and future interventions aimed at combating urban decay. Through this comprehensive analysis, the research aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations for sustainable urban development and revitalisation in the Msunduzi CBD.

3   SIGNPOSTING

This paper explores various case studies that offer valuable insights into urban renewal and revitalisation efforts. Specifically, examining the cases of Santiago, Chile; Washington DC; Seoul; Singapore; and Johannesburg, providing a comprehensive understanding of their respective approaches. These case studies demonstrate the importance of comprehensive planning, public-private partnerships, restoring natural and cultural assets, addressing socio-spatial segregation, and having a long-term vision adaptable to changing circumstances. The significance of effective policy frameworks and governance structures in driving successful urban renewal initiatives is also highlighted. Moving on to the study area of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, the paper delves into the perceptions of urban decay and its impacts through interviews with municipal officials and business owners. They shed light on the causes of urban decay, including middle-class residents leaving the city, absentee landlords neglecting properties, and a lack of services. Furthermore, the paper examined the resulting impacts, such as abandoned buildings, rising criminal activity, and declining property prices. Despite these challenges, there is a sense of optimism regarding the municipality's ability to regenerate the city. Participants propose potential solutions, including implementing a rehabilitation program, holding landlords accountable, conducting eviction processes for overcrowded properties, and providing business incentives. The findings emphasise the significance of private investment, transforming negative perceptions, preserving historical and cultural heritage, creating green spaces, improving transportation infrastructure, and investing in affordable housing and job opportunities as crucial factors for effective urban renewal.

4   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach is in line with the study's goals and objectives. Since the study's main goal is to understand other people's opinions and behaviours surrounding urban decay in the Msunduzi CBD, the interpretative paradigm is used (Rahi, 2017). Qualitative research allows for the deep observation, examination, and disclosure of human experiences and behaviour (Alzheimer Europe, 2009). An in-depth examination and comparison of the causes and effects of urban decay are provided using a case study approach, the research design employed in this work. This aligns with thoroughly comprehending how urban decay affects the Msunduzi CBD. The sampling design chosen for the study is convenience sampling, which McCombes (2019) believes involves selecting individuals who are easily accessible and located near the study area. The target population for the study includes business owners located along Upper Boom, Pietermaritz and Church Street and government officials. Data collection instruments include primary data such as interviews with residents and relevant stakeholders and observations of buildings. Interviews took place between 1 October 2022 and 30 October 2022, where participants were asked to demonstrate their understanding of contributing factors and people responsible for urban decay within Msunduzi Municipality. Participants were also encouraged to provide personal views regarding how urban decay has affected them as individuals in their daily personal experiences and provided suggestions for an effective regeneration plan. This aligns to assess the scale of impacts regarding established interventions in Msunduzi CBD. Additionally, as Kabir (2016) indicated, secondary data collection methods are used to gather existing data from peer-reviewed journals and government publications.

5 CASE STUDIES

In the case study of Santiago, Chile, Santiago followed the laws of the Indies for planning but faced socio-spatial segregation and obsolescence in buildings and public spaces. The city lost half its population in the 1940s and implemented the Repopulation Program in 1990 to attract residents and promote urban renewal. The measures included attracting private investors, rehabilitating the physical environment, and changing negative perceptions of the city (Greene et al., 2011; World Bank, 2015). The Washington, DC, case study highlighted the city's strong model of urban revitalisation through the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI). The initiative aimed to bridge the psychological, economic, social, physical, and civic divide by restoring the river, improving transportation infrastructure, creating public open spaces, and developing cultural attractions and residential areas (Amirtahmasebi et al., 2016; Government of the District of Columbia, 2003). Seoul's case study focused on restoring the Cheonggyecheon stream in the downtown area, which sparked the regeneration of the city's inner districts. Revitalisation involved tearing down an elevated expressway, restoring the stream, and collaborating with the private sector for further development (Amirtahmasebi et al., 2016; World Bank, 2015). Singapore, a highly populated metropolis, faced physical decline and overcrowding in its core section. The city implemented urban rejuvenation strategies through legislative and development action plans, including the Master Plan of 1958. Projects such as the restoration of the Singapore River and the development of the Marina Bay waterfront played a significant role in the urban renewal process (Amirtahmasebi et al., 2016; World Bank, 2015; Guo, 2016). In Johannesburg, the decline of the inner city was influenced by apartheid policies and subsequent political transitions. Urban regeneration initiatives were implemented through area-based initiatives, improved public spaces, and urban development zones, focusing on rehabilitating neighbourhoods and revitalising the inner city (Amirtahmasebi et al., 2016; Nzimande & Fabula, 2020).

6 LESSONS LEARNT

The case studies of Santiago, Washington DC, Seoul, Singapore, and Johannesburg provide valuable lessons for urban renewal and revitalisation efforts. Here are the key lessons learned from these cases:

Comprehensive planning: Effective urban renewal requires a comprehensive planning approach considering various factors such as physical infrastructure, social dynamics, economic considerations, and environmental sustainability. By addressing multiple aspects of urban development, cities can create a holistic and integrated strategy for revitalisation. Public-private partnerships: Collaborating with the private sector is crucial in urban renewal initiatives. Engaging private investors, developers, and businesses can bring expertise, funding, and innovation to support the revitalisation process expertise, funding, and innovation. Public-private partnerships can help leverage resources and ensure the sustainability of urban renewal projects. Restoring natural and cultural assets: Rehabilitating natural and cultural assets within cities, such as rivers, streams, historic sites, and public spaces, can catalyse urban renewal. These assets can attract residents, tourists, and businesses, contributing to the economic and social vitality of the city. Addressing socio-spatial segregation: Urban renewal efforts should address socio-spatial segregation and inequality within cities. Cities can promote inclusivity and social cohesion by providing equal access to quality housing, transportation, public amenities, and economic opportunities. Long-term vision and adaptability: Successful urban renewal requires a long-term vision and adaptability to changing circumstances. Cities should develop flexible plans to evolve and accommodate new challenges and opportunities. Policy and governance: Effective policy frameworks and governance structures are essential for driving urban renewal initiatives. Cities need supportive legislation, regulations, and institutional mechanisms that enable coordinated planning, implementation, and monitoring of urban renewal projects.

7 STUDY AREA

The study area is in South Africa, within the second largest city of the KwaZulu-Natal province, known as the Pietermaritzburg city. The Pietermaritzburg city was originally established in 1838 after the defeat of Dingane at the Battle of Blood River. It was named after the two Voortrekker leaders, Piet Retief and Gert (Gerrit) Maritz. Pietermaritzburg is also known as uMgungundlovu and the capital city of KwaZulu-Natal, as it falls within the uMgungundlovu district and is governed by the Msunduzi Local Municipality (see figure 1). The current Pietermaritzburg population is estimated to be over 600,000 residents (including neighbouring townships). It is deemed to have one of the largest Indian South Africans in this country

(Siyabona Africa (Pty) Ltd, 2021). Pietermaritzburg is popularly known for its history and heritage essence, as it has numerous museums, art galleries and monument sites, historical buildings, and a railway station (Siyabona Africa (Pty) Ltd, 2021). The study area covers the Pietermaritzburg Central Business District, particularly the upper Pieter Maritz Street and upper Church Street (see figures 2 and 3).
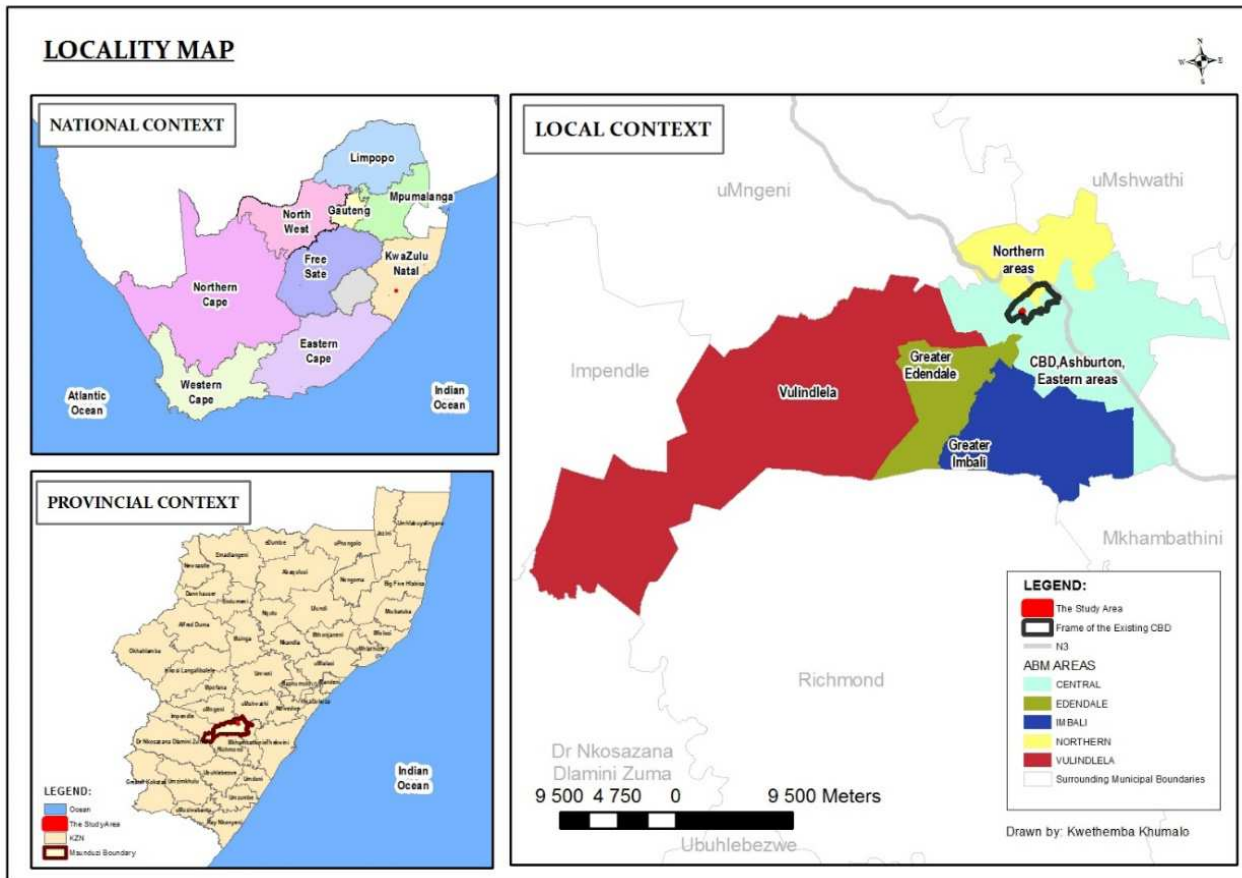

Figure 1: Locality Map. Source: Authors (2023).

Figure 2: Study Area. Source: Authors (2023)

8 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results and discussions of the study emanate from the perceptions of municipal officials and business owners situated along Upper Boom, Pietermaritz and Church Street. The results and discussions are categorised into themes as per interview questions.

8.1 Conceptualising urban decay

Factors	Percentage
Despair	13.33%
Decline of Economy	40.00%
Decline of Status	20.00%
Unhygienic Habits	13.33%
Social Ills	13.33%

Table 1 Defining Urban Decay

Inquiring about the definition of urban decay allowed researchers to assess how well participants understood it and how it related to their own experiences. Because there are many different ways to define this term depending on the environment, it was suggested that participants think about what they observe in the city of Msunduzi. According to the diagram, most PMB participants associate urban decay with economic decline. According to the participants, urban degradation is the process by which a community gradually deteriorates through time as a result of a change in the socioeconomic circumstances of a community. Cuthbert (2017) states that the cause of urban decay varies, even though the underlying philosophy is comparable and is gradually and permanently deteriorating the city's cities-built form feature. Urban decay is a global issue that mostly affects an area's overall built environment; as such, most root causes require joint intervention from different spheres of government. Urban decay has many undesirable impacts, including a decline in a city's market economy, intensified crime and employment rates, and health effects. According to Shin and Shaban-Nejad (2018:9), various aspects of urban decay have the possibility of causing permanent health issues, especially respiratory-associated illnesses.
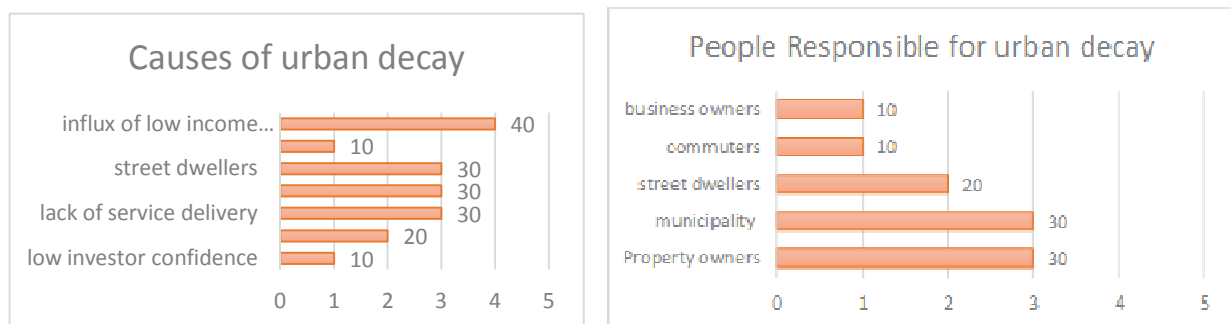

Figure 3: Causes of Urban Decay.

The participants contend that the primary causes of Pietermaritzburg's urban decline are middle-class citizens leaving the city for the suburbs, resulting in a commensurate inflow of lower-class or temporary residents. This is made worse by absentee landlords who do not check on the number of occupants or the condition of their buildings and are unable or unwilling to maintain their properties. The most underrated factor is a lack of services, namely the closure of public facilities, which forces commuters and homeless people to use open spaces like streets as restrooms when public restrooms are unavailable.

The participants continue to argue that the Municipality and property owners bear the primary blame for accelerating urban decline. The lack of consistent service delivery throughout the city with areas not being prioritised, the municipality's non-implementation of measures to encourage growth in the city and developing a favourable environment for economic and social sustainability. Most property owners neglect their homes and are not penalised, which causes the city's attractiveness to deteriorate.

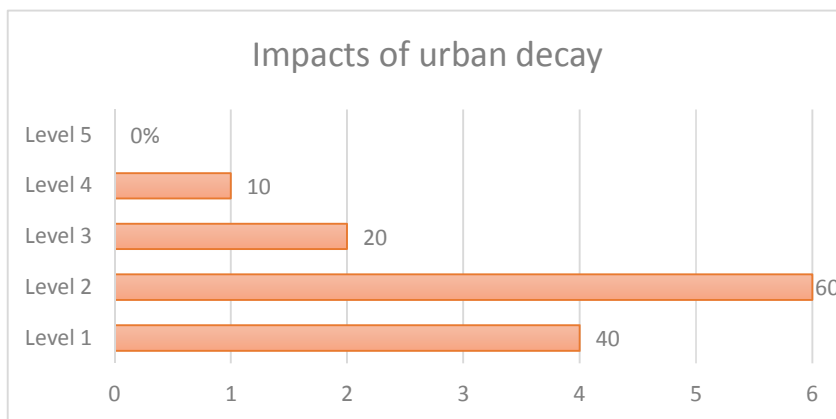## 8.2 Impacts of the Urban Decay in PMB

Figure 4: Impacts of urban decay.

Participants' opinions and observations on the effects of urban decline in the Msunduzi Municipality were requested. They were asked to rank the impact level from 1 to 5 as another criterion. The objective of this study on urban decline was to determine the most urgent issue and encourage community involvement in the process. Participants said Msunduzi Municipality is in the middle of levels 1 and 2. Urban decay's Level 2 impacts, which are more obvious, include unoccupied or abandoned buildings, shattered windows, and a rise in criminal activity. These problems have decreased property prices, deterring regional growth and investment. Level 1 refers to minor issues such as peeling paint on buildings and occasional vandalism.
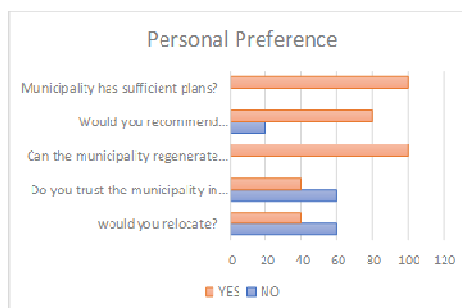

Figure 5: Personal preference.

Participants were questioned about whether they needed to leave the study's area, whether they trusted the municipality's approach to effective urban regeneration, and whether they would suggest investors in the study area based on the consequences. The findings suggest that there may be a lack of confidence in the municipality's leadership and capacity to take decisive action because 60% of participants do not believe the municipality would work relentlessly to fix the problem. However, the data also reveals that some inhabitants are hopeful and upbeat. There is a view that the problem of urban decline can be solved, as evidenced by all respondents to the question "Can the municipality regenerate the city?" agreed that the municipality can do so. Furthermore, 100% of participants who responded positively to the question "Does the municipality have sufficient plans?" agree that the municipality has adequate plans in place to address the problem of urban decay and that 80% of participants would advise the city to invest both show that residents are willing to support efforts to make the city better.

8.3 Possible solutions to urban decay in PMB

The participants engaged in discussions to suggest potential solutions for addressing urban decay in PMB. Among the participants, 40% advocated for a comprehensive rehabilitation program that adopts a multifaceted approach. This program encompasses various strategies, including initiating a cleanup campaign to reclaim public spaces from vagrants and criminal elements. Holding landlords accountable for their properties emerged as a critical step, emphasising the need for property owners to undertake reasonable maintenance. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of enforcing eviction processes in cases of overcrowded dwellings. The municipality's role was acknowledged, with suggestions that it should play a part by condemning and demolishing abandoned structures. A proactive approach to law enforcement was

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emphasised to curb criminal activities, and the revival of incentives for businesses was deemed essential to rejuvenate the city's economic landscape. In response to the reviewer's comments, a comprehensive examination of these proposed measures reveals the following recommendations:
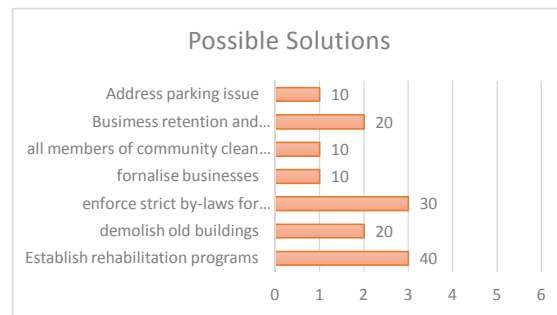

Figure 6: Possible solutions.

(1) Establish Rehabilitation Programmes: Develop and implement structured rehabilitation programs that restore deteriorating areas. These programs should involve community engagement, partnerships with local organisations, and targeted interventions to address specific challenges within each locality.

(2) Demolish Old Buildings: Identify derelict and dilapidated structures that contribute to urban decay and pose safety risks. Develop a systematic plan for demolishing and removing these buildings, ensuring proper waste disposal and adhering to environmental regulations. Old buildings listed under AMAFA (Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali) should be comprehensively preserved. This involves detailed documentation, a conservation plan that respects historical value, and adherence to heritage regulations. Stakeholder engagement and sensitivity to original design during restoration are crucial. Periodic maintenance, public access, and heritage tourism can further promote their significance.

(3) Enforce Strict By-Laws for Residents and Property Owners: Strengthen and enforce municipal by-laws that require property owners to maintain their premises in a reasonable condition. Introduce penalties for non-compliance to encourage property owners to invest in upkeep.

(4) Formalize Businesses: Facilitate formalising informal businesses operating in the affected areas. Provide support and resources to help these businesses become legal entities, contributing to the formal economy while promoting safety and regulatory compliance.

(5) Community Clean-Up Initiatives: Mobilize community members to participate in regular clean-up campaigns. Encourage ownership and responsibility for the local environment, fostering community pride and cleanliness.

(6) Business Retention and Incentives Strategy: Develop a comprehensive strategy to attract businesses back to the area and retain existing ones. This could involve offering tax incentives, streamlined licensing procedures, and support for business development.

(7) Address Parking Issues: Implement effective parking management strategies to alleviate congestion and ensure orderly parking. Consider introducing parking regulations, designated zones, and alternative transportation options.

The research focuses on an area outside the city's CBD regeneration strategy, posing challenges in sourcing funds for regenerative efforts in this location. A potential solution involves advocating for policy amendments to encompass these overlooked streets within the regeneration initiatives. A closer examination reveals that the chosen study area is primarily occupied by homeless individuals, leading to investor reluctance due to heightened nocturnal criminal activities. Addressing their inclusion in policy-making requires innovative strategies. To address this, the City of Msunduzi could develop a comprehensive mandate as part of its regeneration policy, collaborating with rehabilitation centres to relocate and support homeless individuals. This collaboration would offer them essential activities, skill development programs, and drug rehabilitation services. The study area also comprises tenants from various African countries

renting properties owned by South African landlords who don't reside there. The city could consider purchasing these properties, enhancing them through rehabilitation, and reselling them under stricter maintenance regulations. Alternatively, exploring expropriation is an option, subject to conditions that allow property owners to provide tenants with sufficient time to relocate, with the city's assistance if needed. Collaboration is key, such as utilising already-built housing programs to benefit these residents, ensuring a joint effort to prevent potential gentrification. Furthermore, part of the regeneration process should involve integrating informal street traders. This could entail reserving ground-level spaces within buildings for economic activities and providing stalls and furniture to support a regenerative economy.

9   CONCLUSION

According to the interviews, it can be inferred that most PMB participants saw urban decay as a process where an area deteriorates because of a shift in socioeconomic conditions. They also think that the outflow of middle-class residents from urban areas, absentee landlords, and a lack of amenities are major factors in urban decline. Urban deterioration is rated as having a level 1 to level 2 impact by participants in PMB, with more obvious problems such as broken windows, abandoned buildings, and increasing criminal activity. Participants don't have complete faith in the municipality to successfully combat urban deterioration, but they think it can revitalise the city. Participants suggest possible solutions, including creating a rehabilitation program that cleans up the city, holding landlords responsible for their homes, evicting extra people, and offering incentives for companies to relocate back to the city. Overall, the findings indicate that urban decline is a serious problem in PMB, but citizens are hopeful and eager to fix it. We can infer from the case study that the key components of effective urban regeneration initiatives include luring private investment and altering negative perceptions of the city, collaboration between the public and private sectors, giving top priority to historical and cultural significance, creating green spaces, putting transportation planning into practice, regenerating natural resources like rivers, and investing in affordable housing and job opportunities.

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