

TO FIGHT AGAINST THE WATER CRISIS, BUILD BETTER CITIES

By Gerrit Jordaan, Director at NEW URBAN Architects and Urban Designers



Königstraße, Aachen, Germany (Photograph by B.D.Serfontein, 2018)

April 2018

How does city design influence water usage?

Before Modernist and Apartheid planning, cities were more compact, travel distances were shorter, and services did not have to span extensive distances: Cities were functioning more effectively than they are today. In addition to this, South African cities' infrastructure didn't keep up with the rapid pace of urbanisation and resources were not planned and distributed sustainably. Consequently, we are facing a water crisis.

South Africa, as a country that has not reached its full development potential yet, can learn from the successes and failures of nations whose development potential is satiated. It is not the first time that a country goes through an urbanization process. There lies an opportunity in making use of the precedents available to result in better cities and more efficient services. South Africa has an abundance of land which is being wasted by developing in low

densities which spreads infrastructure far and wide. Agriculture soil is not being optimized and the cities, as they are currently designed, are expensive to maintain, because development was reactive and not pro-actively planned.

City-planning ought to employ New Urbanist planning principles. This movement has eight fundamental rules which are: to achieve a walkable city, to densify the urban core, to design mixed-use buildings as well as mixed-income housing developments, to build streets that are safe, green and attractive, to design sustainable developments from the start, and essentially to build neighbourhoods and not villages.

These are the first steps to building more sustainable cities. Unfortunately, there is no short-term solution. To ensure better cities for the future, there needs to be a forward-looking approach that requires considerable implementation and not just grand overall policies and plans.

Author Biography:
Gerrit Jordaan



Gerrit Jordaan was instrumental in building the interdisciplinary environmental consultancy, NewUrban, specialising in sustainable architecture, urban design, resource planning and restoration.

He is a member of the Institute of South African Architects and was admitted as a member of the International Institute for Urban Design in 1994. He has served as the Head of UDISA, Urban Design Institute of South Africa.

CATEGORY:
Sustainable Design