

# The Role of Local Government in Promoting a Sense of Belonging as an Aspect of Social Cohesion: A Document Analysis

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## Abstract

Local government in South Africa is expected to contribute towards efforts to realise the constitutional vision of building national unity, diversity, belonging, social justice and a cohesive society. Municipalities as spheres of government closest to communities are expected to contribute towards this constitutional vision by facilitating among other things a sense of belonging as an aspect of social cohesion. However, there is insufficient evidence of what and how municipalities should facilitate a sense of belonging as an aspect of social cohesion. Accordingly, this paper explores various government documents to determine what is envisaged for municipalities to facilitate a sense of belonging as an aspect of social cohesion. The study utilised a qualitative document analysis method to explore what government highlights as the role of a municipality pursuing social cohesion through the facilitation of a sense of belonging. The analysis indicates that most government documents do not provide explicit and coherent approaches and objectives to be pursued by municipalities to facilitate social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Thus, the article found that documents make reference to social cohesion, but these references are not comprehensive enough. Likewise, documents seldom mention a sense of belonging. Accordingly, the article recommends that government documents should be more explicit in terms of the role of local government. In relation to the Cape Town case study, it also recommends that the City of Cape Town should include in its documents how it is facilitating a sense of belonging.

**Keywords:** social cohesion; local government; belonging; spatial justice, Cape Town



## Introduction

The South African government, like many other governments around the world, is confronted with the need to respond to challenges such as inequality, social fragmentation, migration, urbanisation and multiculturalism (Ritzen & Woolcock, 2000). Notably, efforts to address these challenges have thrust social cohesion at the centre of national and global discourses as well as foregrounded it in areas of governance and on policy agendas. This is evident in a recent assertion by the UNDP (2020), in its statement which emphasises the relevance of social cohesion as an imperative of the twenty-first century. According to the UNDP (2020), the twenty-first century is characterised by a widespread decline in diversity and inclusivity. In addition, there are increasing incidents of conflict, increasing identity-based tensions manifesting in race and ethnic tensions, religious intolerance and divisive nationalist and xenophobic tendencies (UNDP, 2020).

Unsurprisingly, the South African government has also embarked on initiatives to promote social cohesion. However, in South Africa, social cohesion has been constructed to respond to the unique and contextual political, social and economic factors, dynamics and complexities. In particular, social cohesion is understood to be an outcome of among other things, a sense of belonging (City of Tshwane Metro v Afriforum, 2016). Kiguwa and Langa (2015) suggest that in South Africa there is an understanding that there can be no cohesive society in an environment characterised by a pervasive spatial and social fragmentation, which contributes towards weak social relations, inequalities, conflict, mistrust, marginalisation and ultimately, to a lack of a sense of belonging. This has resulted in the conflation of debates on social cohesion with spatial justice.

These initiatives, especially regarding social cohesion, are articulated implicitly or explicitly in various government documents. These government documents emanate from different spheres of government. However, there is an absence of research which explores what these documents provide regarding the expected role of local government in facilitating a sense of belonging as an aspect of social cohesion. Accordingly, this paper explores which government documents refer to social cohesion and what they identify as the role of a municipality in promoting social cohesion. Secondly, the paper explores what government documents state regarding how municipalities in general, and the City of Cape Town in particular, actualise a sense of belonging in the city.

Cape Town was selected as a case study based on the unrelenting media reports as well as academic research highlighting the City of Cape Town's systematic discrimination against and marginalisation of black communities. This view was echoed by a recent court judgement, which rebuked the City of Cape Town for continuing to practice the shameful and divisive legacy of spatial apartheid in Cape Town (Hazell, 2021: 40). Likewise, Turok, Visagie and Scheba (2021) state that Cape Town's social composition and fractured spatial



form bear the strong imprint of its colonial and apartheid history, which still favours a privileged minority at the expense of the indigenous majority.

Although the City of Cape Town (2018: 64) concedes that it is struggling with social cohesion due to its inability to 'overcome the impact of apartheid policies on the spatial planning of the city', it pronounces in its Integrated Development Plan (IDP) that it promotes social cohesion and inclusivity (City of Cape Town, 2010). The City's 2012-2013 IDP states that the City of Cape Town (2012: 19) promotes 'an inclusive city as one where everyone has a stake in the future and enjoys a sense of belonging'.

The broader aim of this article is to gain an insight into the role of local government in contributing towards the promotion of social cohesion in South Africa. In addition, it aims to explore current approaches and practices adopted and utilised by the City of Cape Town in order to actualise a sense of belonging as an aspect of social cohesion.

## **The Concept of Social Cohesion**

Social cohesion is commonly associated with measures undertaken by governments emerging from, or experiencing or anticipating some form of conflict. The literature highlights that conflict-prone issues (such as cross-national immigration, ethnic and cultural diversity) and post-colonial independence, have instigated the need for governments to undertake some form of social cohesion initiatives (Putnam, 2007; Barolsky & Pillay, 2009; Van der Meer & Tolsma, 2014). Similarly, Chipkin and Ngqulunga (2008) indicate that many governments in post-colonial contexts undertook social cohesion projects as nation-building projects. Therefore, the significance of social cohesion is variously acknowledged as being at the heart of what humanity currently needs (Kearns & Forrest, 2000; Friedkin, 2004).

Despite its history, prominence and appeal globally, and in South Africa, the concept of social cohesion is highly contested. Various authors point to the origin of the contestation and confusion as resulting from many constructs in the social sciences (Snowball et al., 2017). Kearns and Forrest (2000) explain that the lack of consensus on the definition and measurement of social cohesion is due to the different uses of the term among disciplines and it is often considered to be vague and abstract.

The need for social cohesion is widely considered to be a strategic requirement by which to transform the South African society. Njozela, Shaw and Burns (2017: 30) highlight that there is consensus that 'social cohesion influences economic and social development and that nurturing a more cohesive society is an important policy goal in itself'. In support, Pieterse (2019) argues that social cohesion in South Africa is an indispensable tool with which to achieve transformation, policy direction, inclusive growth and representative democracy for all.



South Africa's unique political, social and economic character, requires a definition that responds to the context, challenges and dynamics in the South African situation. Consequently, the Department of Arts and Culture has developed a home-grown definition relevant to the South African context. The Department of Arts and Culture (2012: 31) defines social cohesion as:

... the degree of social interaction and inclusion in communities and society at large, and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression among individuals and communities. In terms of this definition, a community or society is cohesive to the extent that the inequalities, exclusions and disparities based on ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, age, disability or any other distinctions which engender divisions, distrust and conflict are reduced and/or eliminated in a planned and sustainable manner. This, with community members and citizens as active participants working together for the attainment of shared goals, has been designed and agreed upon to improve the living conditions for all.

The above definition is relevant to South Africa's socio-political context. The relevance thereof is reflected by its accurate understanding of the divisions, conflicts and exclusions between and within the communities in South Africa. Similarly, it is made appropriate by the need to consider and harness relationships between people, irrespective of their diversity, as well as the intention to promote interaction, to reduce conflict based on race, ethnicity and class, and to respond to the current high levels of social exclusion and polarisation. Quite clearly, the above definition does not promote coercion and conformity to the dominant group. It requires inclusivity, participation and voluntary association as opposed to forced assimilation.

Social cohesion is a relatively new concept in South Africa, as it received national prominence in 2012 at the National Social Cohesion Summit organised by the Department of Arts and Culture (2012). Subsequently, the concept of social cohesion has gained significant traction in public and academic discourse on social integration in South Africa. According to Barolsky (2016), the engagement with the concept of social cohesion in South Africa through government policy has grown substantially and social cohesion is now a major outcome in the country's medium-term strategic framework for national development.

If we consider that the concept of social cohesion is problematic, various authors provide dimensions of social cohesion in order to make up for the lack of a single definition (Kearns & Forrest, 2000; Beauvais & Jenson, 2002; Lefko-Everett et al., 2018; Ballard et. al, 2019). According to Ballard et al. (2019: 35) social cohesion has five dimensions which include, (i) 'common values and civic culture; (ii) social order and social control; (iii) social solidarity and reduced inequality; (iv) social networks and social capital; and (v) territorial belonging and identity'. Similarly, Lefko-Everett et al. (2018) list trust, identity, belonging, solidarity,



tolerance and inclusion as some of the dimensions of social cohesion. These dimensions constitute behavioural attitudes as well as institutional elements that are intrinsic for meaningful social cohesion to take place. In other words, social cohesion only becomes noticeable when these dimensions are equally present.

While all the dimensions of social cohesion are important, this paper focuses on a sense of belonging as a dimension or aspect of social cohesion. Block (2008:12) emphasises the importance of ‘the word belonging as first and foremost, to belong, to be related to and a part of something and secondly as membership; the experience of being at home in the broadest sense of the phrase’. More broadly, a sense of belonging is defined as the experience of personal involvement that leads to a person being an integral part of a society or a community (Kitchen, Williams & Gallina, 2015). Kitchen et al. (2015) also state that a sense of belonging encompasses a feeling that individuals matter to one another and to the group. It simply means being a part of the community.

Social cohesion is perceived as having potential benefits for South Africa. Palmary (2015: 63) asserts that ‘social cohesion in South Africa is uniquely understood as a project of nation building’. Consequently, social cohesion is regarded as the way to build a cohesive society anchored on inclusion, peace and solidarity. It is widely regarded as an effective way of addressing segregation and exclusion, which continue to reproduce and reinforce racial, ethnic and tribal identities of the South African society. Accordingly, the promotion of social cohesion and the facilitation of a sense of belonging on the part of municipalities must contribute to strengthen the existing processes that have not yielded positive outcomes.

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA, 2016: 13) notes that, despite challenges of spatial transformation and social cohesion, ‘there is far reaching transformative societal impact that our municipalities have pioneered and implemented over the last few years’. In the same vein, SALGA (2016: 13) admits that,

... by and large it is fair to say that we have not made the progress we have hoped on spatial transformation and that in reality our communities are still characterised by pervasive inequality and divisions between us and them.

The above suggests that unresolved spatial fragmentation contributes to among other things, social polarisation and racial cleavages. Undoubtedly, the persistent social polarisation and racial cleavages create an environment prone to conflict, mistrust, and injustice and are detrimental to social cohesion. In addition, untransformed spatial configurations continue to further strengthen peripheralisation, othering, and a destructive notion of “us and them” (Kühn, 2015; Powell & Menendian, 2018).



Social cohesion as a goal derives from deliberate and constitutive conditions. According to Koonce (2011), social cohesion is largely shaped and influenced by contextual and social factors that serve as a function of cohesiveness. Fonseca, Lukosch and Brazier (2019: 235) identify 'reciprocal loyalty and solidarity, strength of social relations and shared values, sense of belonging, trust among individuals of society (the community), and reduction of inequalities and exclusion' as aspects of social cohesion. This view concurs with Ballard's (2019: 21, 28) argument that 'social cohesion is not the natural state of any society' and therefore requires an existence of specific societal characteristics. Similarly, Koonce (2011: 146) asserts that social cohesion is a 'by-product of various activities and conditions that can be recognised ex post'. This means that social cohesion requires an appropriate supportive social infrastructure.

## **Sense of Belonging**

According to Antonsich (2010), a sense of belonging is central to social cohesion. A considerable number of authors allude to social cohesion as being intrinsically interwoven into a sense of belonging. Likewise, Boucher and Samad (2013: 1) infer that social cohesion facilitates the 'development of a harmonious society in which all groups have a sense of belonging'. Therefore, a sense of belonging must be facilitated in order to provide a building block for social cohesion.

Belonging is widely regarded as being intrinsic to human life. Authors such as Anderman (2002), Calhoun (2003), Yuval-Davis (2006), and Youkhana (2015) refer to belonging as a fundamental human need for a relationship, identity, recognition, acceptance and attachment with someone or something. Similarly, belonging is widely regarded as being central to the human psyche, and a bedrock of human meaning (Calhoun, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that Kamenov (2003) regards belonging highly, to the extent that he understands why 'Maslow postulated the need for belonging as the basic human need'. Therefore, belonging is considered as an essential human desire for social relationships that are imperative for the well-being of individuals and groups.

Arguably, a lack of belonging has harmful consequences. According to Anderman (2002), a lack of belonging has the potential to produce pathological and long-lasting negative consequences, such as emotional distress. A lack of belonging often results in isolation and exclusion. It has social, physiological and political adverse effects on individuals and groups. Cramm and Nieboer (2015: 3) state that 'a lack of sense of belonging can generate social disorder, conflict, and little interaction within and among communities'. Similarly, Powell and Menendian (2018) suggest that a sense of belonging is an effective solution to the twenty-first century problem of othering, otherness, "us and them".



There is a significantly noticeable lack of dissent in the literature regarding the significance of belonging. As early as 1995, Baumeister and Leary (1995: 497) found, through their 'extensive review of literature that there was evidence supporting the hypothesis that the need to belong is powerful and fundamental and that human beings are naturally driven toward establishing and sustaining belongingness'. Ostrove and Long (2007) concur that the importance of belonging for well-being of human beings has been adequately established.

The literature also highlights a sense of belonging as being effective in addressing incidents of othering. For example, Grant-Thomas (2018), Powell and Menendian (2018), and Uda and Singh (2019) suggest that a sense of belonging is an effective solution to the twenty-first century problem of othering, otherness, "us and them". "Othering" in particular, is commonly used to categorise and establish identities of difference through which people or groups define themselves in reference to the other (Uda & Singh, 2019). According to Uda and Singh (2019: 847), othering promotes or is promoted through identities of difference which emphasises "groups-based categories such as racial, cultural and linguistic difference". These identities of difference are commonly institutionalised through "religion, sex, race, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual orientation and skin tone". In this regard, a sense of belonging instigates and justifies opposition to the institutionalisation of othering.

However, belonging is not just a physical inclusion that produces isolation and fear. As a result, belonging should not be about being tolerated by the dominant group in the society. Grant-Thomas (2018) argues that tolerance translates into mere partial acceptance, which does not entrench meaningful and diverse inclusion and participation in social, political and economic processes and structures of the society. Riley (2019) warns that if the environment lacks genuine aspects such as inclusion, relations and acceptance, a sense of belonging can change suddenly into not belonging, with adverse outcomes for the individual and society. Therefore, belonging should not be a mere assimilation, but about being accepted and recognised.

The above exposition holds true in South Africa, considering that experiences of exclusion, segregation and polarisation have impacted negatively on a sense of belonging of black people in municipalities. In this regard, a sense of belonging is linked to how citizens, especially those in cities, feel that they are part of their municipalities. The Presidency (RSA, 2009a: 31) also underscores that, 'one of the key attributes of social cohesion is to instil a sense of belonging in individuals and communities in order for them to develop a feeling that they are recognised as members of that community'. The South African Cities Network (2016: 127) states that, 'all citizens must have a sense of belonging spatially and socio-culturally'. It continues to urge that cities in South Africa should begin to express and enhance this sense of belonging through making and managing spaces and places that people can identify strongly with and frequent freely, without fear of intimidation or being



unwelcomed (South African Cities Network, 2016: 127). This means that communities should be transformed into a geographical space that facilitates a sense of belonging.

## Persistent Spatial and Social Challenges

In South Africa, the untransformed spatial pattern has been identified as impacting negatively on the development of sense of belonging, especially, for black communities. It is widely acknowledged that South Africa's colonial and apartheid past has entrenched racial exclusion, spatial segregation and ethnic and tribal divisions. Unfortunately, spatial and social forms of separation and exclusion continue to persist in South Africa today. Accordingly, Lemanski (2006: 108) cautions that communities are currently experiencing what she describes as 'fortified enclaves' reproducing spatial and physical segregation and social exclusion.

South Africa's municipalities, especially cities, have 'remained profoundly divided, segregated and unequal' (Pieterse, 2019: 1). This view is consistent with Soja's (2009) assertion that cities in particular are confronted with challenges that produce unjust geographies and conditions, resulting in social divisions, exclusion, disconnection and marginalisation. While not exclusive to cities, segregation, divisions and exclusion are described by Mogoeng in the case of City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality *versus* Afriforum and Another (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality *versus* Afriforum, 2016: 3) as 'irrational differentiation' designed to perpetuate racial domination and intolerance. The literature is replete with views highlighting the consequences of the failure to undo the exclusionary spatial patterns inherited from the past (Pieterse, 2019; NPC, 2012; Turok, 2013). In particular, the National Planning Commission (NPC, 2012), reiterates that South African communities are among the most unequal and most visibly polarised societies in the world.

The social, political and economic consequences of urban spatial segregation have been widely documented and accordingly there is no need to extensively discuss them here. Suffice to highlight that the current urban spatial segregation continues to shape the socio-spatial structuring of society negatively. According to Kiguwa and Langa (2015), the pervasive spatial and social fragmentation contributes towards weak social relations, conflict, mistrust and marginalisation. Even though significant changes have been achieved since 1994, communities as sites of social intercourse continue to lack diversity, interaction, integration and solidarity. Thus, it is proving to be difficult to achieve a South African society that is equal, united, non-sexist and non-racial. Particularly, the lack of a social compact and cohesiveness in communities is significantly weakening the constitutional aspiration of nation building – as outlined in the Preamble of the country's Constitution (RSA, 1996). Hence, the National Strategy for Social Cohesion (RSA, 2012) infers that the promise of transformation remains elusive.





## **Government's Leadership on Social Cohesion**

In the South African context, social cohesion has become a policy objective that must be pursued as part of the broader transformation goal. Hence, the South African government has assumed the leading role and responsibility to promote and facilitate social cohesion as part of promoting a democratic, united, non-sexist and non-racial South African society. The role of the government in promoting social cohesion is demonstrated in the following statement made by the President during the State of the Nation Address in 2009:

Since 1994 we have sought to create a united cohesive society out of our fragmented past. We are called upon to continue this mission of promoting unity in diversity and to develop a shared value system, based on the spirit of community solidarity and a caring society. Our shared value system should encourage us to become active citizens in the renewal of our country (RSA, 2009b).

This narrative is also articulated in the Diagnostic Report on Social Cohesion and Nation-Building in South Africa produced by the High-Level Panel on the Assessment of Key Legislation and the Acceleration of Fundamental Change (RSA, 2015:8) when it states that:

Social cohesion has become an increasingly significant part of South African policy discourse as an imperative of building a democratic post-apartheid nation-state as well as increasing anxieties regarding current fragmentation along the lines of race, class, gender and ethnicity.

In the same vein, the National Development Plan highlights social cohesion as one of its strategic goals for government. Sayed et al. (2015) concur that social cohesion has been elevated to a national priority of the South Africa government. These directives are considered important to ensure that the government facilitates an environment within which citizens embrace and nurture a 'sense of citizenship, diversity, bonds of solidarity, greater social cohesion and new forms of identity' (South African Cities Network, 2016: 1). Thus, it is widely acknowledged that the inclusion of social cohesion in the National Development Plan bears evidence of appropriate leadership and vision for South Africa.

## **The Role of Local Government in Promoting Social Cohesion**

While it is understandable for the whole government to play a meaningful role in the promotion of social cohesion, local government constitutes a more strategic and ideal sphere of government to facilitate it in communities. It is reasonable to expect



municipalities as government structures with close proximity to communities, to inherit a burden of facilitating social cohesion between and within communities. According to Cloete and Kotze (2009), significant assumptions of the Constitution and the White Paper on Local Government are that municipalities are appropriate government structures for promoting nation building through social cohesion. Furthermore, Cloete and Kotze (2009) argue that social cohesion in South Africa should be institutionalised through local government and its processes such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP).

The role of local government in promoting social cohesion is not explicit but implied in various legislative provisions. Arguably, local government is expected to play an active role in the realisation of a united, democratic, non-racial and diverse South African society. In addition, the Constitution specifically bequeaths local government with powers to promote social and economic development – this is contained in Section 152 (c) (RSA, 1996). Equally, Section 153 of the Constitution instructs municipalities to play a development role in communities (RSA, 1996). These constitutional provisions are interpreted by the White Paper on Local Government (RSA, 1998) as directing the political leadership of the municipality to create conditions that facilitate and realise principles and values of social justice, racial equality and nation building. Thus, obligations for local government to be involved in facilitating social cohesion are mandated by the Constitution.

The notion of a developmental local government as contemplated by the White Paper on Local Government is relevant to pursue outcomes related to social cohesion. For instance, developmental local government is described by the White Paper on Local Government (RSA, 1998), as ‘local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve their quality of life’. In this regard, municipalities are expected to mobilise citizens and their respective organisations to collectively participate in efforts to find solutions to challenges experienced in their communities.

One of the vital approaches that may be used to mobilise people to participate meaningfully in the municipality’s efforts to address the developmental challenges faced by the local citizens, is the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). The IDP is mandatory and serves as a primary strategic planning process for the municipality (RSA, 2000). Thus, the IDP is a legal, democratic and administrative process to ensure a well thought out response to the challenges, needs and dynamics of communities. Its implementation accords significant value to both the process of developing the IDP as well as the outcome that facilitates the collective ownership of the plan (Cloete, 2014).

The relevance of the IDP to facilitate social cohesion has found resonance in academic discourses. Harrison (2006:177) asserts that the IDP was ‘introduced primarily to address the weaknesses of apartheid planning’. Similarly, Fuo (2013: 226) describes the IDP as a planning instrument to realise the municipality’s developmental mandate ‘relevant for



contributing towards the pursuit of social justice'. Furthermore, Fuo (2013: 245) argues that the past skewed spatial planning and injustices, including socio-economic inequalities that were exacerbated by apartheid spatial planning, could be addressed through the development of a Spatial Development Framework (SDF) that constitutes one of the core components of the IDP.

Municipal IDPs have the potential to institutionalise ways of mediating differences and conflict in the community. It emphasises the need for a political will to address actual and potential instances of social conflict in a community. Accordingly, the IDP has an immense possibility to create a democratic and meaningful municipal-driven process to enable local citizens to collectively shape their communities. The facilitative and participatory requirements for the IDP provide a democratic and meaningful process for the stakeholders and citizens in the community to engage with the challenges of the community, including the spatial transformation and restructuring aspects (Siphuma, 2009). The inclusive nature of the IDP process enables a community to reimagine the deracialised, united and cohesive communities. Ward-based planning and equitable fiscal distribution enable citizens to think beyond immediate neighbourhoods.

It can therefore be argued that a proper facilitation of the IDP has the potential to facilitate aspects of social cohesion, such as trust, a sense of belonging, inclusivity, participation and solidarity. In particular, the interrogation of spatial patterns which are inevitable in the IDP process, should create a meaningful opportunity to put in place interventions that strengthen social relationships and affirm the feeling of territorial belonging and identity. In addition, municipalities are expected to utilise their legislative authority to pass by-laws and facilitate their respective IDP processes in order to ensure that citizens, especially the vulnerable and marginalised poor, feel comfortable as citizens in a municipality (SA Cities Network, 2016).

## **Methodology**

This article utilised the qualitative document analysis methodology. Bowen (2009: 27) describes the qualitative document analysis as 'a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet transmitted) material'. Like other empirical research methods, this method requires that textual data contained in relevant documents be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge. Document analysis facilitates a rigorous and systematic analysis of themes or issues in a manner that ensures impartial and dependable analysis of written government documents (Bowen, 2009).

The documents were drawn from the national government departments, the Western Cape Provincial Government and the City of Cape Town. Documents from the national government departments and the Western Cape Provincial Government were selected and



used for the purpose of identifying national and provincial mandates and directives on social cohesion. In addition, documents for social cohesion and sense of belonging were sourced from the City of Cape Town. This approach was informed by an understanding that while national and provincial governments have a role to play in the realisation of social cohesion and a sense of belonging, it is however, the responsibility of a municipality to facilitate them through municipal governance mechanisms and processes. In particular, the political and socio-spatial dynamics that impact on a sense of (un)belonging often manifest in municipalities.

Importantly, the City of Cape Town (2016: 64) commits itself to playing a role in enabling citizens to forge strong bonds at a neighbourhood level and to feel a strong sense of connection and cohesion at a broader, city-wide level, as well as between communities. It is therefore necessary to conduct a document analysis in order to distinguish between rhetorical assertions and genuine institutional commitment to facilitate a sense of belonging. In this regard, Harris et al., (2010: 2) have cautioned that 'carefully managed statements of commitment do not necessarily tell anything about their actual commitment'. On the contrary, commitment is often demonstrated through institutionalised explicit articulations in official documents.

Thus, for this paper, approximately twenty-six documents were selected, but only eight relevant documents were analysed. The documents selected dated from 1996 to 2018. A crucial criterion for the selection of documents was that the documents should contain texts on social cohesion and sense of belonging. All documents were obtained from the websites of various government departments and the City of Cape Town. Selected documents were analysed individually to identify suggested interventions. The analysis explored the meanings of the text, rather than focusing on the presence and frequency of key words (Gouais & Wach, 2013).

#### **The following questions guided this inquiry:**

- a. What role is envisaged for municipalities to facilitate social cohesion?
- b. How is a sense of belonging conceptualised and integrated within the role of social cohesion in the City of Cape Town?

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Constitution of South Africa**

The researcher explored relevant constitutional provisions, in order to identify what the Constitution envisages as the role of local governments in the promotion of social cohesion. The result of this analysis highlighted that the concept of social cohesion is implicit and not explicit in the Constitution. Although the Constitution does not explicitly refer to social cohesion, it enjoins the government to promote a united South Africa which



respects the country's inherent diversity (RSA, 1996: Preamble). Equally, the Constitution prohibits practices that are discriminatory and exclusionary (RSA, 1996: Section 1).

The Preamble of the Constitution commits South Africa to unity, diversity and belonging. The spirit of the Constitution envisages and commits South Africa to a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or gender (Langa, 2013). Thus, the Constitution clearly and vehemently rejects a society characterised by divisions and social exclusion but commits all South Africans to a democratic and united South Africa. In this regard, the Constitution strongly repudiates coalescing around race, ethnicity, class and language.

While the Constitution is not specific in terms of providing an explicit role for local government in facilitating social cohesion, the role and involvement of local government in promoting social cohesion is implicit in a number of constitutional provisions. For instance, Section 152 (1) (c) which provides for local government to promote social development as well as Section 152 and (e) which instructs municipalities to facilitate the involvement of communities in matters of local government, could be perceived as instructing municipalities to promote some elements of social cohesion, albeit implicitly. Thus, municipalities are required to create opportunities and community spaces, services and amenities that could be utilised to promote integration and inclusion. Furthermore, municipalities can facilitate participation in a manner that affirms citizens' views. This could enhance citizens' sense of belonging.

### **National Development Plan (NDP)**

Social cohesion is mentioned nine times in the Nation Building Diagnostic document of the National Planning Commission (2011). The Nation Building Diagnostic document as a precursor of the National Development Plan 2012 refers to a series of fault lines that serve as an impediment to social cohesion and that need addressing as a matter of policy urgency. The Nation Building Diagnostic report lists the divisive effects of institutionalised racism; class divisions; social fragmentation; language; spatial exclusion; gender and sex; unemployment; crime; corruption; unequal experiences of the law; and moral decline as some of the impediments to social cohesion (NPC, 2011).

Subsequently, the National Development Plan envisions a society that is united in diversity (NPC, 2012). It calls for organs of government to play a central role in the promotion of social cohesion. The NDP advocates for government to create an enabling governance environment through which government leaders should 'promote social cohesion and working together to resolve problems'. Therefore, the NDP requires the coming together of role-players from all sectors through innovative and effective partnerships to facilitate social cohesion.



The NDP calls for a governance environment that will make it easier for South Africans to interact with each other across racial and class divides. Equally, the NDP envisions a social contract that could help propel South Africans to a higher developmental trajectory, as well as build a more cohesive and equitable society. Quite progressively, the NDP instructs government to explicitly promote spatial justice in order to reverse practices of segregation and racial divisions. Consequently, the NDP provides for government to play a strategic role in promoting social cohesion (NPC, 2011).

### **National strategy for developing an inclusive and cohesive South African society**

The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) has been tasked to promote and monitor social cohesion in South Africa. To realise the responsibility, the DAC commissioned a number of reports on social cohesion, such as the study on “Social Cohesion and Social Justice”. The DAC has also convened summits and workshops on the topic, including the Social Cohesion Summit in Kliptown, Soweto in 2012, which produced a Social Cohesion and Nation Building Strategy (DAC, 2012). This summit buttressed a commitment to utilise social cohesion as a way of ‘mobilising and unifying society to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights’ (DAC, 2012: 1).

The National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and Cohesive South African Society acknowledges that local government has the challenge of service delivery. This challenge is considered as posing a threat to the long-term stability and prospects of democracy in South Africa (DAC, 2012). This strategy calls for an ‘inclusive, cohesive, sustainable, dynamic and durable society’, which must coordinate government departments, including local government (DAC, 2012: 37). To this effect, this strategy recommends that social cohesion and nation-building be retained as medium- to long-term activity for local government priorities.

The National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and Cohesive South African Society document of the Department of Arts and Culture (2012: 65) calls for ‘social cohesion and nation-building (to) be retained as medium- to long-term national, provincial and local government priorities’. In this regard, this strategy provides an instructive role for local government in the promotion of social cohesion. Most importantly, the framing of the directive for local government to promote social cohesion acknowledges the facilitation of social cohesion as a part of the role and responsibilities of local government. It further recommends that the integration of social cohesion in municipal IDPs is consistent with the governance as well as the institutional mechanisms applicable to municipalities (DAC, 2012).



## **South African Local Government Association (SALGA) – Strategic Framework 2017–2022**

SALGA, which is the representative body promoting the interests of local governments in South Africa, developed a strategy titled “Strategic Framework 2017–2022”. This strategy highlights the need to address the complex challenge of spatial transformation and social cohesion. As indicated already, in South Africa there is a link between social cohesion and spatial justice. To this effect, the SALGA Strategy 2017–2022 suggests that social cohesion as envisioned in the NDP as requiring municipalities to address the quality of life and human dignity, spatial justice and an inclusive economic reality for communities (SALGA, 2016). In addition, the strategy also commits to supporting regional economic strategies and effective land use management approaches in order to drive spatial transformation for social cohesion (SALGA, 2016). Most importantly, the strategy intends to guide municipalities in facilitating social cohesion through the IDP process and spatial budgeting. However, the SALGA strategy is underpinned by a governance arrangement in which municipalities are not forced to implement the SALGA strategy. Consequently, SALGA has no authoritative power to compel municipalities to implement its strategic goals. In this regard, despite the well-crafted strategic goals, the governance arrangement leaves doubt whether it will be institutionalised in municipalities.

### **Presidential Twenty-Year Review**

The researcher conducted document analysis of the Presidential Twenty-Year Review, facilitated by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME, 2014), to explore the role envisioned for municipalities to promote social cohesion. The result of this analysis identified that municipalities are required to put in place mechanisms to make urban spaces liveable to promote social cohesion. This highlights the need for municipalities to address the spatial patterns that continue to exacerbate division, which hinders social cohesion. The Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (2014) also highlights that municipalities as the custodians of the aspirations and needs of the communities have a role to facilitate a sense of belonging. Equally, the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (2014), through the Twenty-Year Review, acknowledges that spatial patterns have not been resolved.

### **The Western Cape Provincial Strategic Plan**

The Western Cape Provincial Strategic Plan – driven by the Premier’s Office – highlights the need to develop integrated and sustainable human settlements as fundamental to the promotion of social cohesion (Western Cape Government, 2015). The review notes that the Western Cape Government continues to face serious inefficiencies in the functioning of its human settlements, especially the lingering spatial inequalities that persist as a legacy of apartheid planning and development, as well as the rate of urbanisation and in-migration into the province during the past 15 years. It states that inequality and



unsustainable settlement patterns continue to hinder the process of citizens feeling at home.

### **State of Cape Town Report 2010**

In this report, the City undertakes to advance social cohesion among different communities within the city (City of Cape Town, 2010). The report further states that the 'city can contribute to all stakeholders buying into a shared vision and how to approach city-wide challenges such as persistent poverty and inequality, high unemployment, social marginalisation, high crime activity and so forth' (City of Cape Town, 2010: 46). Importantly, the report proposes that the City of Cape Town must foster the formation of communities and social interaction to advance social cohesion and increase the liveability of more compact environments.

The report acknowledges that the City of Cape Town is still very much characterised by a persistent environment where different socio-economic groups are settling in spaces that are still largely racially identified and that limit social interactions between the various groups (City of Cape Town, 2010: 46). According to the report, the 'predominantly black urban communities remain settled along the spatial delineations of the apartheid era on the urban fringes' (City of Cape Town, 2010: 46). A startling admission from the report is that 'socio-economic groups such as Khayelitsha, Nyanga, Langa, Gugulethu, Mitchells Plain, and Elsies River are the poorest communities with regards to provision of infrastructure and health care, and contain some of the highest population densities as well as considerable social infrastructure backlogs' (City of Cape Town, 2010: 46). The report concludes that the 'poor social cohesion, mainly racially based, may also render Cape Town a less open and less inviting social environment for black Africans' (City of Cape Town, 2010: 56).

### **City of Cape Town's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) – 2017–2019**

The City of Cape Town's IDP makes explicit mention of social cohesion (City of Cape Town, 2017). Notably, the City of Cape Town's IDP acknowledges apartheid spatial planning, which intentionally created a fragmented city where people were forced to live far from economic opportunities, without any investment to bring economic activity into those areas. The IDP states that apartheid spatial planning still influences where communities live and work, and the quality of their neighbourhoods.

In addition, the document highlights that building integrated communities means proactively and directly working to reverse the impact and practices of apartheid to improve quality of life. One of the ways in which this can be achieved is by facilitating spatial transformation of the city. Furthermore, the City of Cape Town has identified programmes and projects in areas of concern. These programmes and projects aim to address a range of issues, from homelessness to anti-racism awareness projects.





These create and contribute to the culture of caring and inclusivity that the City of Cape Town wants to achieve.

Furthermore, the City of Cape Town also claims to promote a sense of belonging. It acknowledges that past South African society has been divided along artificial lines (City of Cape Town, 2017). Notwithstanding an inclusive city, it is also strongly reliant on the proper functioning of the programmes in the other focus areas in order to give meaning to this concept.

The City of Cape Town asserts that it intends to build a more inclusive, integrated and vibrant city that addresses the legacies of apartheid (City of Cape Town, 2017:106), stating that,

Commitments are to address existing imbalances in the distribution of different types of residential development, and avoid the creation of new structural imbalances in the delivery of services. The desired outcomes are a greater mix of income groups, land uses, population density and the adequate and equitable provision of social facilities, recreational spaces and public institutions.

The above analysis highlights that the City of Cape Town is committed to promoting a sense of belonging. Notably, the IDP provides a strategic platform for the City of Cape Town to plan and implement its social cohesion interventions. However, it should be noted that reference to the social cohesion in the IDP does not necessarily confirm its implementation in communities. While inclusiveness is one of the elements of social cohesion, it is however, not clear what specific programmes act as vehicles for the strategic goals of an inclusive city.

## **Recommendations**

This study offers the following recommendations, based on the outcomes of the document analysis:

The Constitution provides an unequivocal aspiration regarding the nature of a society it envisages. In addition, it explicitly enunciates a commitment for unity, diversity, belonging and social justice. The challenge is that the constitutional provisions are not directives, but often require complementary legislation to prescribe specificities regarding the role of local government in promoting social cohesion. It is therefore recommended that national guidelines be developed to guide local government's conceptualisation of its role within the broader constitutional mandate. The guidelines must not be overly prescriptive but should enable a municipality to define its social cohesion activities according to its social, political and economic context, challenges and resources.



Although the guidelines must provide the overall objectives to be pursued, they however, need to allow municipalities to facilitate a bottom-up process that takes into account the views of citizens and communities. This will create an empowering, collective and inclusive process for local stakeholders to be responsive in addressing the challenges that inhibit the promotion of social cohesion in their municipality. This process itself will promote social cohesion.

Other analysed documents demonstrate a visible link to the constitutional aspirations, an example of which is the National Development Plan (NDP). Although the NDP clearly outlines the implications of a lack of a cohesive society, it binds local government to promote social cohesion. In this regard, a municipality cannot be held accountable and be sanctioned for not promoting social cohesion. This study recommends that social cohesion should be made binding and clear performance outputs should be part of a municipality's planning processes.

Of the eight documents analysed, six make reference to the need for spatial transformation. Although the identified need for spatial transformation is a step in the right direction, it is, however, inconclusive for a sense of belonging. Reference to spatial transformation in the analysed documents does not mention how the current divisions, segregation, exclusions and marginalisation of black communities are going to be addressed. It is important to note that the current high levels of division, segregation, exclusion and marginalisation of black communities militate against a sense of belonging as one of the key aspects of social cohesion. Therefore, a mere mentioning of spatial transformation does not provide clarity regarding whether this transformation will facilitate the removal of practices that produce unjust spatial conditions and thereby encourage a sense of belonging.

As indicated, a sense of belonging is essential to social cohesion and it is doubtful that in South African municipalities, a sense belonging will miraculously be realised if citizens and communities do not feel the attachment, belonging, acceptance, and recognition of others in the municipalities. This study recommends that government documents need to elevate the levels of seriousness and be explicit on the sense of belonging to give traction and prominence to the envisaged spatial transformation.

The City of Cape Town makes uncommitted reference to a sense of belonging in its IDP. However, the facilitation of a sense of belonging requires more than rhetorical assertions. What is absent from the City of Cape Town's documents is the *how*. Therefore, as a recommendation, the City of Cape Town must be explicit in detailing the institutional mechanisms and processes utilised to facilitate a sense of belonging. These details will enable meaningfulness, regularity, predictability and inclusion in the City of Cape Town's strategies and plans.



The City of Cape approaches the issue of a sense of belonging as part of its inclusive city pillar of the IDP. This approach emphasises the economic rationale more than the political and social realities. Understandably, the issues of a sense of belonging are complex, involving a variety of dynamics and underlying intricacies. Furthermore, the City of Cape Town needs to approach issues regarding a sense of belonging as part of the initiatives or programmes to address spatial injustice. In this regard, the study recommends that the City of Cape Town approaches the issues of a sense of belonging from a socio-political context as well. This will necessitate its facilitation of the social interactions among the citizens of the City of Cape Town. Among other things, the City of Cape Town should review and devise ways of addressing issues pertaining to offensive statues, street names, housing in the inner city and service delivery in poor communities.

## Conclusion

It was the objective of this article to review government documents in order to gain an insight into the role of local government in contributing towards the realisation of social cohesion in South Africa. In addition, as part of its case study, the article explored approaches and practices adopted and utilised by the City of Cape Town in order to actualise a sense of belonging as an aspect of social cohesion. The study found that although documents refer to social cohesion and superficially address a sense of belonging, there is a problem that documents do not clearly articulate how both social cohesion and a sense of belonging are actualised at local government level.

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