

Skeptic City:

Do large proprietary communities have a contribution to make to the inclusive South African city?

Submitted in conjunction with the group report Century City: Poised for Permeability?



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Introduction

As a functionally-mixed private property development within Cape Town, Century City is unique only in scale and ambition. At the time of writing, its developers, Rabie Group, were in the first phases of an expansion of the scheme that would bring its total value to R21bn (“Ratanga Junction to make way for property developments”, 2014), nearly four times the City of Cape Town’s annual capital expenditure budget (City of Cape Town [CoCT] 2012a), and equal to two Victoria and Alfred Waterfronts (“R4.3bn Commercial transformation to Century City on track”, 2014). However, these two statistics tell their own story: it is possible to argue that Century City has achieved by private investment what would have been impossible through state expenditure alone, without fundamentally altering the existing hierarchy of nodes in Cape Town - complementing nodes like the CBD and the Waterfront, where growth remains buoyant, rather than cannibalising them.

Despite its concentration of a financially comfortable class within a mixture of overt and covert security cordons, Century City does succeed in offering starter homes to buy or let that are affordable by the standards of central Cape Town. For example, Century City’s 2012 adjusted Rands/square metre rate¹ of R12 779 was lower than every suburb in the City Bowl and Atlantic Seaboard, except Bo-Kaap, Devil’s Peak and District Six (See Appendix 3) (Understanding Cape Town Property Prices, n.d.). It has also caused property values in neighbouring precincts, such as Royal Ascot, to rise (Sales at Century City, 2011), reinforcing the argument that proximity to Century City, as full-service node, has transformed the relative position of neighbouring suburbs. Its commercial properties further allow corporate tenants to design their own brownfield buildings according to internal criteria, such as Green Star SA ratings – something few other nodes in Cape Town can offer at present.

In evaluating Century City’s conformity with tenets of socio-spatial justice and environmental sustainability in urban environments, in measuring its outcomes against the presumed priorities of private-sector property developers (hereafter Developers) and the City of Cape Town (hereafter the CoCT), and in speculating on how different sets of incentives and disincentives might have altered the present outcome, this report will make certain assumptions.

1 Adjusted R/m² is calculated by discounting the price of gardens against home prices at the prevailing area rate for vacant land. This ensures an accurate comparison of dwellings with and without gardens.

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Firstly, that Cape Town competes for investment not only with other South African cities and destinations abroad but with forms of investment other than property, including investment foregone (and saved); meaning that a given amount of investment in the city cannot therefore be assumed, and hypothetically channelled according to the objectives of urbanists. Secondly, the report will assume that consumer demand for gated communities reflects a complex set of attitudes towards safety and security on the part of home buyers and lessees, and that challenging these attitudes through alternatives to gated communities represents considerable risk to Developers. Thirdly, it will be assumed that the shopping mall, as retail typology, faces certain structural risks to its financial sustainability within the medium and long term, and that, unlike self-renewing contiguous city fabric, Century City's current success must be measured against the possible future expense of retrofitting the Canal Walk Mall to other uses when consumption patterns change.

Evaluating Century City against such contested criteria as socio-spatial justice and environmental sustainability involves subjective decision-making, since the CoCT lacks a rigorous rubric by which the performance of urban environments may be so measured. However, the CoCT's Spatial Development Framework Statutory Report (City of Cape Town [CoCT] 2012b:38-80) outlines several Key Strategies which are intended to shape future land use planning [Appendix 1]. Although these far post-date the 1997 establishment of Century City, they reflect the City's current priorities and represent a more demanding standard against which current and future growth and planning at Century City will be measured.

Key Strategy 1 concerns employment and access to economic opportunities, and discusses inclusive, shared growth; the promotion of small businesses; the establishment of an integrated, citywide public transport system; the integration of different types of planning, and the role of economic gateways such as ports and airports. In this area, Century City's performance is mixed. On the one hand, no other mixed-use retail development of this scale can lay claim to integrated rail, BRT and minibus taxi connections.

The possibility of intermodal travel combined with the largest retail range in the Western Cape comes closer to fulfilling Strategic Objective P11, "Ensure that new urban development is supported by appropriate public transport infrastructure and services" (Appendix 1, CoCT 2012b:44) than any comparable regional shopping mall in the Western Cape. On the other hand, Century City is a tightly-policed

enclave in which overt and covert forms of security and surveillance are ever-present. Its streets, accessed through three highly-controlled entry routes, play host to a sanitised and abbreviated subset of the cast of residents who walk the streets outside.

Its 250 hectares (Century City Property Owners' Association [CCPOA] 2013) constitute a huge range of economic activity that is removed from the informal and survivalist economy, including tens of thousands of consumers and hundreds of workers and their spending power. In terms of the informal and survivalist economy of Cape Town, therefore, Century City presents a roughly 2x2km barrier to opportunity. Informal trade, begging and busking cannot take place there; animal-drawn transport and trolleys filled with recuperated building materials cannot cross it. This is clearly out of step with the City's Key Strategy 3, "Build an inclusive, integrated vibrant city" (Appendix 1, CoCT 2012b:69) as it precludes meaningful integration of the most vulnerable economic actors in society. Century City also excludes the next few Living Standards Measure (LSM) categories in its housing mix, which is priced far below the R1.428m average in the CBD in 2014 ('

Century City must therefore be seen as a development that is very much of its political moment, manifesting deep-seated middle-class paranoia and a resulting desire for spatial segregation (Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009:354) as well as every symptom of neoliberalism in South African public space after the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy (Maharaj and Narsiah 2002:91), which was announced barely a year before ground was broken at Century City.

In the World-Bank inspired logic of GEAR, Century City's potential for job creation and the securing of massive investment with little cost (the developers, Monex, were to meet the capital cost of all necessary infrastructure and services) outweighed the loss to the city of continuous streetscape and a contiguous public realm. More than a decade and a half later, the CoCT's Spatial Development Framework implies seems to rule out any future developments of this type and scale, at least in the letter of the guidelines. However, evaluating Century City's qualities as

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an urban environment must go further than measuring its integration into the wider city. Two key questions remain.

Firstly, would an equivalent amount of investment have been realised elsewhere (for example, along corridors or at nodes identified for strategic renewal by the CoCT) had Century City not been approved as a single, massive precinct adjacent to a freeway, with all the insulation from surrounding area risks that that implies? As discussed by Adams, Croudace and Tiesdell (2011:2578), planners sometimes conceive of the 'notional property developer' as "a malleable and potentially compliant partner with shared objectives to the State", a stance which masks crucial differences of outlook and incentives between planners and developers, as well as amongst developers. It is thus by no means clear that the alternative to Century City as it is today might have been the same R21bn, but spent in a way that supported the informal and survivalist sectors, was fully integrated into Cape Town's public streetscape, that supported a mix of income groups in housing and that contributed some beneficial public infrastructure or asset to its immediate surrounds.

Secondly, what was - or, what might have been - the bargaining position of the CoCT at the time of the initial planning for Century City? Was the City in a position to demand adherence to social sustainability outcomes - such as a mix of tenure types and unit sizes and provision for access to state social infrastructure such as crèches, primary schools and clinics? It could be argued that the City of Cape Town was, in 1997, in a position substantially less secure than what it enjoys today, having experienced wholesale administrative overhaul and division into six municipalities the preceding year.

With all of the above taken into account, it can be argued that Century City represents a relatively 'open' example of an anti-urban typology, that of the gated large community (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002:195), rather than a relatively 'closed' example of a pro-urban typology, that of the New Urbanist community which Century City's marketers explicitly cite as its guiding vision (Executive Summary, n.d.). This assessment, which most images of Century City seem to belie, depends on a critical evaluation of what Century City's infrastructure, both social

and environmental, actually achieves in real life. On paper, Century City seems to espouse the New Urbanism in its creation of a varied, interesting and safe pedestrian movement system, its achievement of relatively high building densities along legible boulevards, its making of small public places, its efforts at landscaping and tree-planting to render the outdoor environment pleasant and cool, etc. Its Developers can also point to a rehabilitated wetland at its centre, Intaka Island, and the many species of bird life now found there, as well as a cluster of corporate head offices with high Green Star SA ratings. In short, at a middle distance, Century City resembles a walkable, mixed-use, 24-hour New Urbanist community. However, a detailed look at any of these aspects reveals that they have failed to work - and, crucially - that it bothers no one with any real say in the matter.

For example, the pedestrian boulevards do not offer any means of entry into the buildings that flank them - all of these merely look out onto the boulevards, while interfacing operationally only with their own car parks, at the rear. Bicycle lanes disappear and reappear; pedestrian paths are used as a storage area for landscaping equipment. Trees are planted along the medians of very wide boulevards, leaving pavements unshaded, noisy and hostile. The width of streets and the design of intersections make walking-as-transport difficult and stressful, with no protection from the elements, while long blocks and opaque, unbroken glass façades reinforce the South African norm by which no one walks anywhere unless they must.

Most tellingly of all, Century City is free of economic want, since those without labour to sell or wealth to spend are simply absent from its progression of pastiche simulacra. The 'mixed use' component is most telling of all: most of Century City's residential units are clustered inside themed and aesthetically contiguous gated sections, which all but domestic staff enter and exit by car. Century City renders walking *possible* but not *preferable*, and cannot therefore be said to represent the New Urbanist ideal.

As for Century City's environmental performance, its isolated achievements in creating a valuable new natural system at Intaka and setting up an internal shuttle are essentially cosmetic when set against the lack of integrated green building principles in the nearly 1 million square metres of existing development, which utilises entirely conventional means of heating, cooling, lighting, energy and drinking water supply. In contrast, its wastewater and bio-filtration systems are well developed as a source of irrigation water, and the precinct does

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possess an integrated waste management system. However, these are operational measures which, at best, merely mitigate the high resource demands locked in by conventional building practices.

As has been shown above, Century City generates considerable private benefit (well-located premium residential and commercial space anchored by a major retail centre) alongside modest public benefit (rising land values in neighbouring suburbs, an injection of job opportunities) in exchange for public subsidy (of facilities like the Century City train station and the MyCiti, Golden Arrow and minibus taxi infrastructure) and public benefits foregone (the unrealised potential of the Century City land parcel to achieve social goals, such as inclusive housing).

In the final analysis, and in view of the factors outlined above, it is unlikely that Century City would be approved today in the form it took in 1997. It clashes with all three Key Strategies of the CoCT's Spatial Development Framework to varying degrees, offending by its disruption of the street grid, the deliberate class-homogeneity of its residential units, its lack of real walkability and the approaching obsolescence of the shopping mall typology (Jordan 2012, Merrick, 2014), especially at sub-strategy level.

Had Monex approached the CoCT at a more consolidated point in the city's administrative history, a variety of tax incentives might have been offered to developers for the construction of a regional mall alone. Around this, the CoCT might have created a Density Priority Zone (DPZ) in terms of its 2002 MSDF Densification Guidelines Manual and its 2012 Densification Policy. This Zone could have been linked to the existing activity routes envisaged by the City's present Spatial Development Framework in a continuous, granular way, establishing a gride that could be extended seamlessly into the vacant military land parcel adjacent to Century City to create, eventually, a mature, contiguous neighbourhood. The City could have sold off the land concentric to the mall with varying baskets of rights, at a scale attractive to large developers in some parts, and to smaller developers elsewhere.

In short, it is easy to imagine that the City could have leveraged the last large parcel of buildable vacant land close to the CBD of Cape Town for greater social impact, now that a strong City government presides over an attractive and reinvigorated CBD, having crafted progressive urban and spatial policies while also enjoying the political heft to defend and enforce these (to a substantially greater degree than most South African municipalities). The investment thus

realised may have fallen far shore of the R21bn spent to date, but it would conceivably have accomplished more for those immediately neighbouring Century City and the city as a whole.

In allowing Century City to develop as a sanitised and prosperous enclave that welcomes thousands of lower-income consumers and workers by day, but cannot accommodate them at night, the City of Cape Town lost a great opportunity to advance its transformative and oft-professed spatial agenda; what it has gained is a subtle incarnation of the gated community and the suburban office park, updated to meet the upwardly mobile Capetonian's limited appetite for cosmopolitan atmosphere and urban scale. Century City, as a sort of internal sprawl - a suburb come to rest near the heart of the city - once made sense as a new seat of city identity, when it seemed that the CBD of Cape Town would crater into lawlessness and abandonment in the 1990s. Now, it presents a sort of internal Singapore, benefitting from internal autonomy and the absence of social friction while attached to a much larger economy neighbouring urban economy, on which it depends but which it does little to support.

Appendix 1

Key Strategies 1-3, Cape Town Spatial Development Framework (CoCT 2012b:38-80)

5.1 Key strategy 1: Plan for employment, and improve access to economic opportunities	39	5.1.3 Establish an integrated, citywide public transport system that supports the accessibility grid	44
5.1.1 Promote inclusive, shared economic growth and development	40	P10 Create a hierarchy of integrated public transport services related to the accessibility grid	
P1 Maintain and enhance the features of Cape Town that attract investors, visitors and skilled labour		P11 Ensure that new urban development is supported by appropriate public transport infrastructure and services	
P2 Support investors through improved information, cross-sectoral planning and removal of red tape		P12 Lobby for the introduction and/or expansion of passenger rail services	
P3 Introduce land use policies and mechanisms that will support the development of small business (both informal and formal)		P13 Include walking and cycling as essential components of land use planning	
P4 Encourage area specialisation and the development of a diverse, mutually supportive system of economic areas		P14 Introduce parking policies to encourage use of the most context-specific and appropriate modal travel choice	
P5 Encourage the use of available economic incentives		5.1.4 Integrate land use, economic and transport planning	49
P6 Promote regional economic planning		P15 Reinforce and enhance metropolitan development corridors	
5.1.2 Address spatial economic imbalances	42	P16 Encourage medium to higher-density forms of urban development to locate on or adjacent to activity routes, development routes and activity streets	
P7 Unlock employment-generating opportunities within the Metro Southeast and Atlantis		5.1.5 Support the rationalisation, upgrade and/or development of economic gateways, and manage land uses around them appropriately	50
P8 Support private-sector development initiatives in locations that are easily accessible from the Metro Southeast		P17 Support the development of an integrated system of airports and appropriate surrounding land uses	
P9 Improve public transport links between the Metro Southeast and the main economic nodes of the city		P18 Create and manage a functional interface between ports/harbours and their surrounding areas	

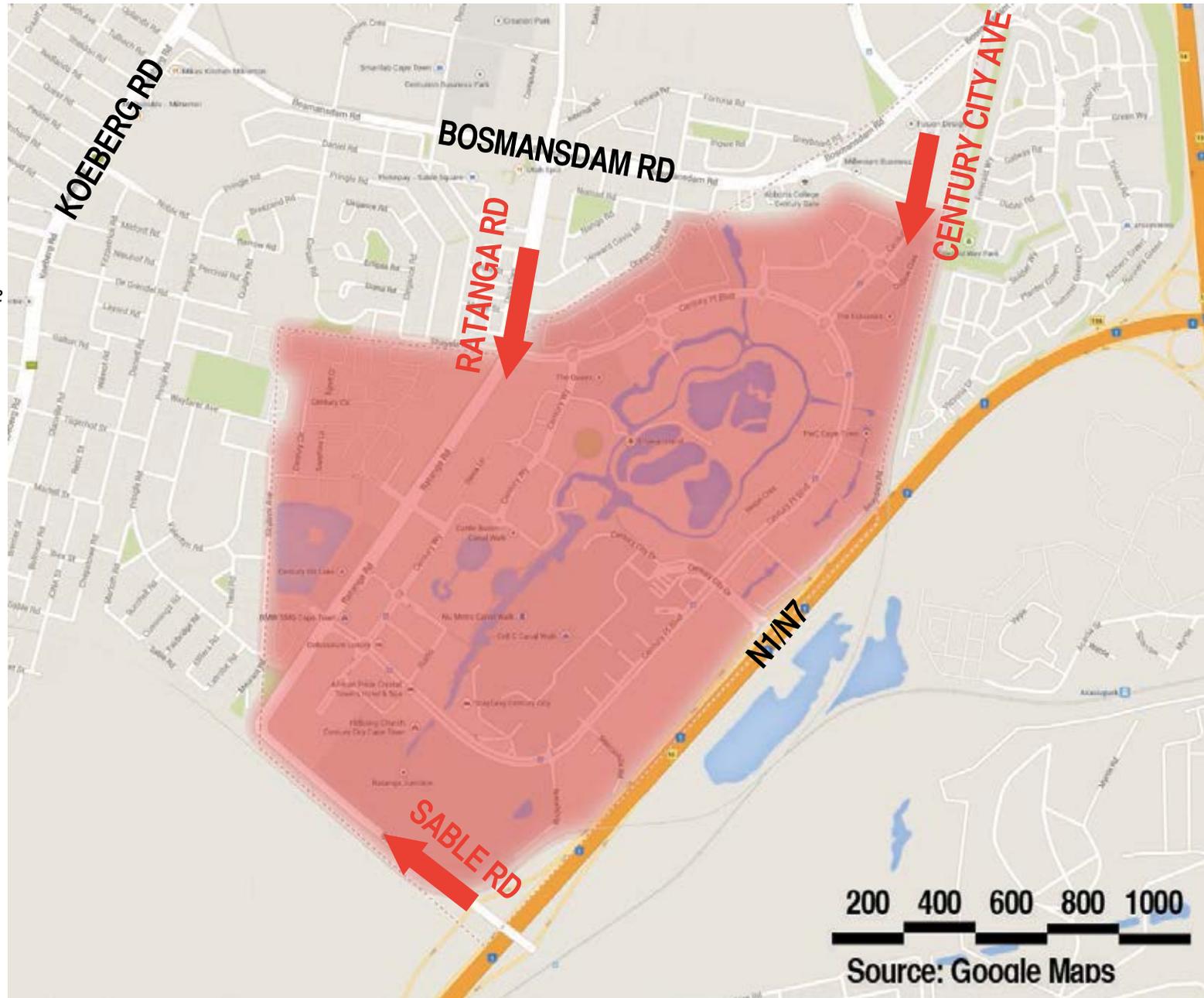
5.2 Key strategy 2: Manage urban growth, and create a balance between urban development and environmental protection	52	5.2.5 Appropriately manage urban development impacts on natural resources and critical biodiversity networks	61
5.2.1 Facilitate urban development	53	P25 Increase efforts to protect and enhance biodiversity networks at all levels of government	
P19 Support property developers by identifying the locations potentially suited to urban development		P26 Reduce the impact of urban development on river systems, wetlands, aquifers, aquifer recharge areas and discharge areas	
P20 Facilitate urban development and direct the phasing of urban growth through the deliberate and integrated use of planning, infrastructure provision, and the regulatory and fiscal authority of all spheres of government		P27 Manage urban development along the coast in a sustainable and precautionary manner	
5.2.2 Support incremental development processes	55	P28 Protect valuable agricultural areas, existing farmed areas and horticultural areas from urban encroachment and support urban agriculture	
P21 Put in place a LUMS that supports a stepped approach to housing and tenure, and the development of a single property market		P29 Adopt a proactive planning approach to mining resource management	
5.2.3 Encourage a more compact form of development	56	5.2.6 Make efficient use of non-renewable resources	67
P22 Promote appropriate land use intensification		P30 Promote a culture of sustainable development and living	
P23 Contain the development footprint of the city and protect natural, rural, urban and heritage assets with development edges: Urban and Coastal Edge		5.2.7 Protect and enhance the city's rural environment	67
5.2.4 Appropriately protect the citizens of Cape Town from hazardous areas/activities	59	P31 Prevent urban development from intruding into the rural environment	
P24 Direct urban growth away from hazardous areas/activities		P32 Support appropriate development and activities in rural areas, and in and around unique and culturally significant rural settlements	
		P33 Rationalise and proactively manage smallholdings	
		P34 Develop and manage rural gateways	

5.3 Key strategy 3:			
Build an inclusive, integrated vibrant city		69	
5.3.1 Transform the apartheid city		70	
P35	Redress existing imbalances in the distribution of different types of residential development, and avoid creating new imbalances		
P36	Transform townships and informal settlements into economically and socially integrated neighbourhoods		
P37	Encourage public/private partnerships to develop integrated human settlements and diversify housing delivery		
5.3.2 Proactively support publicly led land reform and new housing delivery		71	
P38	Identify land for land reform and publicly led housing delivery programmes		
5.3.3 Encourage integrated settlement patterns		73	
P39	Generally support development, rezoning, subdivision and similar applications that promote a greater mix of land uses, people and/or densities		
P40	Ensure that land uses and built form within predominantly residential areas support the daily functioning of those areas, and contribute to their overall character and well-being		
P41	Ensure that development proposals provide an adequate and equitable distribution of social facilities, recreational space and public institutions		
5.3.4 Enhance the unique sense of space and the quality of the built form of Cape Town			76
P42	Promote good contextual urban design fit, and ordering of the relationship between people, urban space and the environment (built and natural)		
5.3.5 Enhance the value of heritage resources and scenic routes			76
P43	Identify, conserve and manage heritage resources, including cultural landscapes		
P44	Ensure access to, and provide information about, public heritage resources		
P45	Create an enabling environment for urban regeneration that allows buildings and sites of historical and architectural significance to make a positive contribution to the economy and quality of urban life		
P46	Celebrate and reinforce Cape Town's diverse historical legacies through urban form, architectural design, signage and where appropriate, artwork.		
P47	Provide positive spaces for cultural and social ceremonies and life-related events		
P48	Carefully manage land uses and interventions along identified scenic routes, and in places of scenic and visual quality		
P49	Identify additional scenic routes		
5.3.6 Promote accessible citywide destination places			80
P50	Develop high-quality, accessible destinations & public spaces in newly developed and neglected areas		

Appendix 2

Century City Boundary Condition.

Area in red represents portion of Century City accessible only by three entry/exit routes indicated with red arrows
(Source: Author, Google Maps)

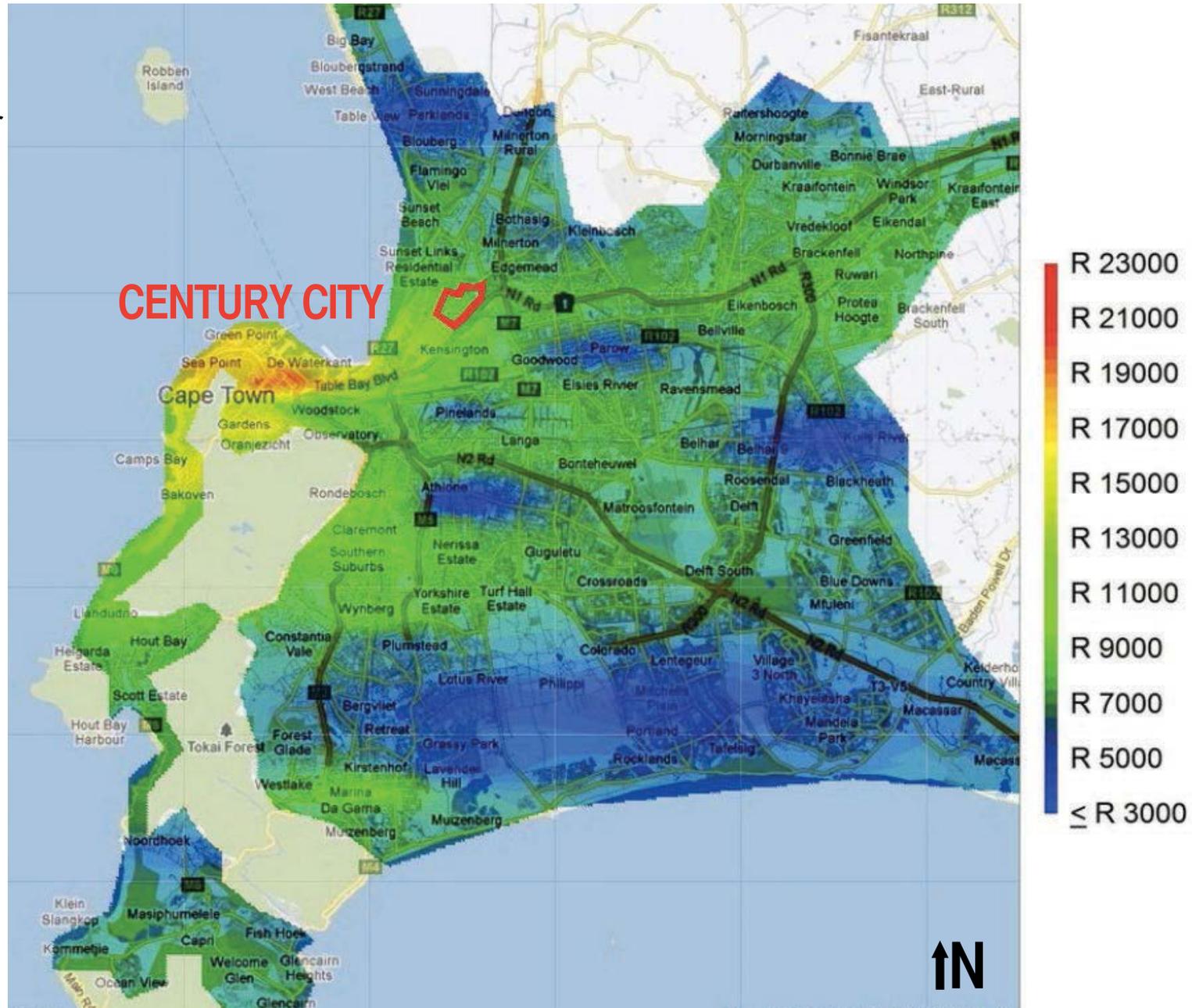


Appendix 3

Cape Town Property Prices: Adjusted Prices in Rands/m² for 2012

Appendix 3 shows that Century City presents an important injection of new building stock at A grade immediately adjacent to the geographically-constrained CBD and Atlantic Seaboard suburbs.

(Source: Author, *Understanding Cape Town Property Prices* n.d.)



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Front cover: Author. Century City, September 2014.

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