

Activity 2.2



Inter-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary responses?

Read the attached newspaper article and consider how the sustainable development problem could be addressed by a group of students in a university.

What knowledge and skills from which disciplines are required to address this sustainable development problem?

If you were to use this sustainable development problem in your teaching, would you adopt a multi-disciplinary approach (if so, how would you do it?); an inter-disciplinary approach (if so, how would you do it?); or a trans-disciplinary approach (if so, how would you do it?).

What kinds of teaching and learning approaches would you use if you were involving a group of students in addressing this sustainable development problem?

Try to identify other sustainable development challenges with similar complexity in your country/university/community context which can be used as a focus for teaching and learning activities.

Against the flow



Percy Zvomuya discovers that one of the last wetlands in Johannesburg is about to be concreted over, placing poor people at risk.

Attempts by the Johannesburg City Council (JCC) to sell the Huddle Park wetland in Linksfield, to an empowerment consortium for development before the completion of a thorough environmental impact assessment (EIA) process may have dire environmental consequences for the residents of Alexandra township [an area housing formerly disadvantaged people in low income and informal housing outside Johannesburg].

The park is one of the few remaining open wetland spaces in Johannesburg. The proposed development will require water to be drained away from the wetland, and channelled into the Jukskei river, greatly increasing the rivers' load and putting Alex's shack dwellers at even greater risk of flooding.

The developer's environmental consultants have submitted a 'draft scoping report' to the Gauteng department of agriculture, conservation and environment. A scoping report is a preliminary and less comprehensive document than an EIA.

"In it, they recommend that the scoping report suffices, and that the department dispense with the conducting of a full EIA," says Raymond Drucker, chairperson of the Huddle Park and Environs Anti-Degradation (Head) League, which was formed to stall the sale of it to developers who want to turn the park into a golf estate with residential and retail elements.

Huddle Park is zoned as a public space, which means that the city cannot rezone it for residential purposes without the approval of the provincial department of agriculture, conservation and environment, and a thorough environmental assessment process, argues Drucker.

Marian Laserson, an architect with town planning experience who lives close to the park, says that while the council may sell the public open space, owing to the size of the park they must do an EIA before applying for the land to be rezoned. She says the council is refusing to say how much the land is valued at and how much it will sell it to the developers for. She adds that 1000 members of the public objected to the sale, which means the sale must now be taken to council's town planning tribunal.

But the sale of Huddle Park seems to be a *fait accompli*. A report on the city's website says: "The development of the Huddle Park golf course – well on track with an approved bidder in the city's sights...". The preferred bidder is Tiyani, a consortium led by Investec and Standard Bank, with Peter Malungani of the Peu Group of companies and Cyril Ramaphosa's Shanduka group as empowerment partners. Construction is scheduled to get underway in August this year. If the development goes ahead, this will increase the load on the Jukskei river, argues Paul Fairall, and environmental consultant working for Head.

Wetlands store water and slowly release it. This process slows the water's momentum and greatly reduces the risk of floods. "We will cause floods downstream," says Fairall. "People may have not warning, especially if [floods] come at night. We will have taken the flood plain away and made a bullet of the rain."

The Jukskei has its source near the Ellis Park Stadium in Bertrams, and runs underground for about 8km, fed by storm water run-off from the city of Johannesburg.

While the Huddle Park wetland is currently home to a golf course, it has had minimal environmental impact, having left intact most of the wetland's indigenous reeds and sedges that act as biofilters. The wetland supports a wide variety of species such as honey badgers, fish eagles and otters that come to feed in the wetland, explains Fairall.

The wetland also plays an important role in filtering pollutants out of the water, and its destruction could lead to dirtier water downstream, for communities as far afield as the Hartebeespoort Dam and XaiXai in Mozambique.

Nthatisi Modingoane, spokesperson for the city, dismissed concerns that the city is rushing through the sale, saying that "the decision on the sale of the land rests with the landowner, as in all instances, in this case, the city."

Sizwe Matshinkiza, spokesperson for the department, says the council is entitled to sell the land without approval from the department, and that it may be exempted from doing a full EIA. "The department does encourage the protection of public open spaces within the urban areas and



therefore considers each application for development in public space on its own merits,” he said.

Head says it is keen to know how the development is envisaged and how it will affect the environment, but has been unable to get hold of the master plan for the development, which will enable it to measure the environmental impact more accurately. Drucker says the council refuses to allow the group to inspect the development master plan document but that he has sought a legal opinion and has been told that this refusal is unlawful under the Promotion of Access to Information Act. “We have been told that we have a right to challenge this. We intend doing so.”

Modingoane refused to comment, saying only that the planning document had not been released for inspection “because it contains sensitive information such as the developers’ financial information and intellectual property”.

(article published in the Mail & Guardian Newspaper, March 3-9, 2006:30)

NB. This article can be replaced by any other newspaper article reporting on complex sustainable development challenges.

You can build up a stock of newspaper articles that can be used as starting points for ESD activities or problem-solving exercises. Like this, newspaper articles often provide students with contested vantage points on a situation/issue, which they can then research in more depth. This allows students to deliberate possible solutions, trade-offs and value positions. They can also deliberate short-term and long-term decisions, and their impact and implications, as well as social justice issues associated with development decisions.

