



Call for applications: PhD bursary for 2022

Fostering sustainable, just and resilient urban futures in Africa

Deadline for applications: 12 June 2021

Project background

Two out of every three people will live in urban areas by 2050, meaning that the continued development of cities will increasingly shape human well-being. Africa is urbanizing faster than any other part of the planet, with half its population expected to be urban by 2035. Many of Africa's greatest social and environmental challenges, such as climate change, public health, and poverty alleviation will be determined by the form, pattern and function of urban environments. As Africa's cities are facing increasingly complex sustainability challenges, more and more urban leaders are turning to creative, cost-effective solutions, including 'nature-based solutions' (NBS). Unfortunately, much of what we know about the potential of NBS to improve the well-being and resilience of urban communities is based on research and experimentation from developed countries. Visions of future cities incorporating NBS are heavily influenced by western notions of what sustainable, "green", and equitable cities look like, and often rely on urban planning and development frameworks developed for the Global North. There is currently a dire lack of creative future visions for African cities, especially visions that explore how the "African Urban" might integrate and centre NBS.

The lack of inspiring visions for African cities is problematic, because visions of the future can help chart a course, direct actions, and enable policymakers to identify opportunities for facilitating change. One approach to exploring and creating more positive future trajectories is presented by the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes (SOGA) initiative (<https://goodanthropocenes.net/>). SOGA aims to inform and contribute to deep, systemic transformations towards socially and ecologically desirable, just, and sustainable futures, by identifying and connecting initiatives that currently exist at the margins of society, and have the potential to grow, change and combine in surprising ways to create a variety of possible, radically alternative, positive futures (see Bennett et al 2016¹).

Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs, who holds the DST/NRF South African Research Chair (SARChI) in Social-Ecological Systems and Resilience, and a team of researchers at the Centre for Sustainability Transitions including Dr Maike Hamann, a NBS and futures specialist, have played a lead role in the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes Project and related scenarios work. We pioneered the novel Manoa mash-up method used to develop visions of sustainable futures (see Pereira et al. 2018²) and have developed an innovative set of regional scenarios using this approach (see Hamann et al. 2020³). This project builds on our previous work, and focuses specifically on visions of sustainable urban futures and pathways to sustainability from a southern African perspective, and how these may differ from perspectives and approaches in other parts of the world.

Centre for Sustainability Transitions, Stellenbosch University

The Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST, <http://www.sun.ac.za/cst>) builds on a strong history of transdisciplinary research and complexity studies at Stellenbosch University, providing a vibrant research hub for solution-oriented sustainability science that hosts leading scientists and students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds in a state-of-the-art research centre. The primary objective of the CST is to provide transformational knowledge on the dynamics of multi-scale social-ecological change, and strategic insights into the new modes of research and governance that can bring about a just transition to a more equitable and sustainable society, in southern Africa and globally.

¹ Bennett E et al. 2016. Bright spots: Seeds of a good Anthropocene. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 14(8): 441-448.

² Pereira LM et al. 2018. Using futures methods to create transformative spaces: Visions of a Good Anthropocene in southern Africa. *Ecology and Society* 23(1): 19.

³ Hamann M et al. 2020. Scenarios of Good Anthropocenes in southern Africa. *Futures* 118: 102526.

Call for applications

We seek motivated individuals interested to pursue a PhD linked to the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes initiative, who have a keen interest in urban sustainability and sustainability transitions, an interest and ability to integrate across the social and natural sciences, and who enjoy collaboration and working in teams. Interested individuals should have a strong academic track-record, participate in the events and activities of the CST, and be interested in developing a career around topics such as social-ecological systems, urban resilience, futures and complexity thinking, social innovation and sustainability transformations. A variety of potential topics could be pursued, relating to one or more of the following:

- An analysis of existing visions of African urban futures, and the values and trade-offs they embody.
- A comparison of African visions to other (regional or global) archetypal visions of urban futures, with a focus on the role/structure/functions of NBS and ideas of “green” urban development.
- Further innovative advancement of the participatory visioning method piloted in southern Africa (see Hamann et al. 2020), and development of a set of African urban future visions that uplift and re-assert indigenous and decolonized perspectives
- An analysis of trade-offs and synergies between Sustainable Development Goals in urban futures, with a view to identifying pathways that enhance synergies and reduce trade-offs.

The study will be linked to ongoing projects at the CST (e.g. FORMAS “Inequality and the Biosphere Project”, and the Southern African Resilience Academy) and grounded in the southern African context. Supervisors will include Dr Maike Hamann, Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs, and one or more CST researchers, depending on the specific focal areas of the project. Studies will generally be registered within the CST’s PhD in Sustainable Development in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, but other options can be considered.

Funding

Bursaries will be funded from the DST/NRF SARChI chair held by Prof Biggs. The NRF minimum academic requirement for PhD funding is 65% average for the preceding Masters degree. Applicants for doctoral funding must be 32 years of age or younger in the year of application.

Successful applicants will be funded either at Full Cost Study (FCS) or Partial Cost of Study (PCS). The FCS funding will be awarded to South African citizens and permanent residents only, who are either financially needy (i.e., those whose combined household family income is less or equal to R350 000 per annum), living with a disability, or exceptional academic achievers. PCS funding will be awarded to 5% of international students including South African citizens and permanent residents who could not be funded under FCS but meet other minimum requirements for the NRF scholarship funding criteria.

Subject to availability of funds, CST aims to top-up NRF funding to R 138,000 pa (R 11,500 per month). Tuition and reasonable running and travel expenses will also be covered where possible. Successful completion and defense of a research proposal within the first year will be a pre-requisite for continuing with the PhD.

Requirements

Potential PhD candidates should have completed a Masters degree or equivalent. Experience with participatory methods will be an advantage. All candidates should show evidence of strong scholarly performance. Based on the National Research Foundation’s funding guidelines, strong preference will be given to South African nationals and under-represented groups.

To apply

Applications will follow a 2-step process:

Step 1. Apply to CST

All interested candidates should first apply to the CST by emailing the following documents to cstenquiries@sun.ac.za by **12 June 2021** with the subject line “**PhD application: African urban futures**”:

- a motivation letter (detailing your previous academic and work experience, and how your experiences and skills speak to the proposed research topic, as well as your specific interests with regard to the proposed project),
- a detailed CV that includes your academic record, previous work experience, any scientific publications on which you have been an author, and the names of at least two academic referees,

- transcripts of academic qualifications,
- at least one example of recent written work (e.g. a paper, report, thesis chapter).

Step 2. Apply to NRF

Suitable candidates will then be instructed to apply on the NRF system by **1 July 2021**, and link their application to Prof Biggs' SARChI Chair. Instructions on this process will be communicated to successful applicants in step 1.

Please note that funding will only be awarded to candidates selected and approved by the NRF.

Enquiries

Enquiries can be directed to cstenquiries@sun.ac.za. Please use the subject line "Enquiry: PhD African urban futures", as enquiries about multiple adverts are being directed to this address.