



Access to info: City urban economist Claus Rabe with his SA Planning Institute award for his "outstanding" work on the Economic Areas Management Programme (ECAMP), an online research tool that helps both the City and developers to plan more effectively.

A need for knowledge earns Claus a top planning accolade

The "SPUD Wall of Excellence" now boasts two national planning awards presented by the SA Planning Institute to representatives of the City's Spatial Planning and Urban Design Department over the past two years. The latest was awarded to urban economist Claus Rabe for his "outstanding contribution to planning in the public sector" at an event in Durban late last year.

Claus's work on the Economic Areas Management Programme (ECAMP) was what attracted the attention of the judging panel. It's an exploratory research tool that pools the City's administrative data with third-party data, and presents it in a way that is easy for officials to understand. "The tool calculates the potential for a business district to grow based on its size, the availability of land, accessibility, infrastructure, safety, and the skills and disposable income levels of people living in the surrounding area," says Claus. "Having easy-to-understand economic data for over 60 business districts in the municipal area is a first for the City, which has a world-class spatial information system unrivalled by any municipality in Africa."

On the right track

ECAMP has received dozens of commendations from leading urban economists, development agencies, business organisations, National Treasury and the World Bank, and was a World Design Capital 2014 project. "Receiving this award is encouraging because it means that I'm on the right track with trying to find new ways of applying technology to the complex challenges facing our developing cities. The ECAMP intervention toolkit, which recommends area-based interventions based on local business conditions, has been adopted as best practice by National Treasury in its handbook for municipalities, 'The Art of Precinct Management' (2014)."

Claus also credits property economist Rob McGaffin and programme partners IS&T, PBDM, Valuations, Development Information and GIS, and Economic Information and Research for their contribution to the success of the project. Externally, Claus and Rob have forged close partnerships with the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership, National Treasury, SALGA, the Cape Town Partnership, the African Centre for Cities and the UCT School of Property Economics.

A valuable asset

The ECAMP data are available at <http://ctcs.capetown.gov.za/ecamp>, and to date, subscribers have included dozens of major corporate entities, several universities, and all the big players in the built environment who rely on its input for policy decisions.

Claus says he has an uncompromising attitude towards discovery and learning. "All objectives – whether they include making a difference in society, being successful or achieving life satisfaction – flow from an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Guard it closely, as it is your most valuable asset. It's infectious."

He's currently working on building collaborative networks with research institutions, academia, municipalities and development agencies in between time spent lecturing, writing papers and teaching himself how to programme, which – he says – is "really difficult".

To relax, Claus catches up on ancient Mediterranean cultures and spends time with his ginger cat, Huxley.