

The Impact of Golf Estates in South Africa

The amount of water golf courses use varies greatly depending on the region, but on average they use about 10 800 000 liters of water per year (according to the Golf Course Superintendents Association, US golf courses use, on average, 414 500 000 liters a year). In essence each golf course uses enough water to provide at least 1200 people with their basic water needs for a year. South Africa is a dry country and many people still do not have access to running water.



However, using water-saving measures can cut the water use by a third, and some golf course estates are using recycled sewage effluent to water their greens and fairways. This however has other negative environmental impacts.

Pesticides and Fertilizers

The addition of any nutrients to the system, for example through using fertilizers, impacts upon surrounding ecosystems. Increased nutrients may encourage alien species to invade and discourages indigenous vegetation, which in the Western Cape is adapted to nutrient poor soil. Eutrophication of water bodies may also occur. This is associated with a proliferation of plant life, especially algae, which reduces the dissolved oxygen content and often causes the local extinction of other organisms. While the use of sewage water for irrigation may solve the water problem, it adds even more nutrients to the system, compounding the negative environmental impacts of using fertilizers.



Pesticides and herbicides kill off insects and weeds within the confines of the golf course estate. However these can spread into nearby ground water or river systems. The use of pesticides may affect species higher up the food chain by either reducing the amount of food available, or through the accumulation of persistent poisons in their bodies. Insects also provide important ecosystem functions such as pollination and seed dispersal. Their removal may have serious long-term implications for

habitat viability.

Alien Vegetation

Golf courses may facilitate the spread of invasive alien plants through increased disturbance and nutrient levels. Furthermore, gardens are recognized as an important source of invasive species. The introduction of kikuyu grass, for example, may have devastating effects on surrounding natural habitats.

Golf course estates are essentially upmarket, residential areas located within their own private park. They are generally not located within urban areas. They usually cover large tracts of land and are frequently proposed within pristine areas, where they reduce biodiversity and destroy conservation-worthy habitats. A worrying trend in the Western Cape is that golf course estates sometimes occur on prime agricultural land. In the short-term the overall monetary value of golf course estates may be greater than that of farming. However, in the long term, these short-term monetary gains, which benefit only a few individuals, may be eclipsed by a shortage of food-producing areas, affecting all South Africans.



Urban Sprawl

Many golf estate developments are on the urban edge or in semi-rural areas. This results in urban sprawl and can create unplanned-for development nodes where infrastructure does not exist. This places an added burden on local municipalities and the community at large, for example, through increased traffic congestion and demand for services.

In general these developments consist of clusters of 500 housing units, or more. In effect they are creating small towns. This has enormous impacts on water demand and sewage services, especially where such large-scale growth has not been planned for. As these are housing developments for the upper end of the market, where are the resources to be found for the lower end, disadvantaged communities development?

Socio-Political Issues, Equity and Access

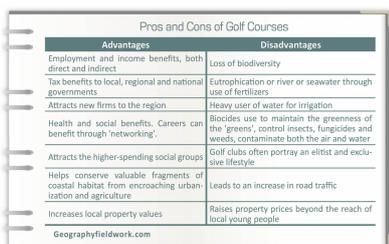
This is probably the most serious weakness of golf courses. Golf course estates are frequently elitist enclaves, isolated from surrounding communities. They have thrived on people's fear and insecurities in the face of increasing levels of crime and violence. They are populated by people who have accumulated sufficient wealth to do something about this, but rather than use their considerable

resources to assist in addressing the problem, they attempt to block themselves off from the rest of society.

At its most benign, this takes the form of fencing and closing off residential areas to the public, limiting access to public open space. At its most extreme, it means guards, razor wire and electric fences. For society, this cannot be healthy, creating divides between the elite and the surrounding communities, and fostering resentment and tension between the haves and the have nots. By limiting access to natural resources such as arable land, fuel, water, food and medicinal plants, golf estates further impoverish poor communities, both economically and psychologically.

Increasingly, attempts are being made to compensate communities for these losses by making substantial financial contributions, or by offering to build facilities for the affected community.

In summary, it would appear that golfing estates are less about golf and more about the widening and increasingly prevalent gap between the rich and the poor. Golfing estates are an aggressive, and environmentally and socially destructive method used by the rich to insulate themselves from what they regard as uncomfortable realities.



Pros and Cons of Golf Courses	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Employment and income benefits, both direct and indirect	Loss of biodiversity
Tax benefits to local, regional and national governments	Eutrophication or river or seawater through use of fertilizers
Attracts new firms to the region	Heavy user of water for irrigation
Health and social benefits. Careers can benefit through 'networking'.	Biocides use to maintain the greenness of the 'greens', control insects, fungicides and weeds, contaminate both the air and water
Attracts the higher-spending social groups	Golf clubs often portray an elitist and exclusive lifestyle
Helps conserve valuable fragments of coastal habitat from encroaching urbanization and agriculture	Leads to an increase in road traffic
Increases local property values	Raises property prices beyond the reach of local young people

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