

context

one that is capable of responding, transforming and perfecting the way that it can support the survival of its inhabitants

a city that works is

Rem Koolhaas, The Lagos Charter

The modern city consists of a number of dynamic processes set in a complex urban situation. Urban spaces are in a constant flux of presence, energy and knowledge. City operations do not only occur on economical level, but also on cultural, social and political levels. Public places are key attractors for a variety of people, events, expressions and programmes, and provide the playground for society.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the production of social urban space, in order to reconceptualise architecture as a space of flows and interrelation between individuals and processes. The creation of public space, which promotes equality and appeals to the cultural diversity eminent in South Africa, is used as a point of departure to propose an urban public centre in the city centre of Pretoria. It also aims to provide a backdrop for restorative action through the lived experience of the user.



fig. 1.01. Aerial photograph of sites and surrounding area

Site investigation takes place through the identification of three relevant sites for the social production of urban space. All three are degraded urban sites in need of an intervention to restore its civic value. All three sites are tested against the proposed spatial theory of production of socially generated public space in order to generate an appropriate identity and programme for the intervention.

The proposed sites are distinct through the specific purpose and position they have in the urban fabric. These positions are defined by *infill*, *insert* and *reroute*. Although diverse in character, the three terms above may be used on all three sites, to describe related characteristics on all the sites.

While all three operations define a condition, they also suggest an action, because they exist in the form of verbs as well as nouns. All three are used as if they possessed this dual sense.

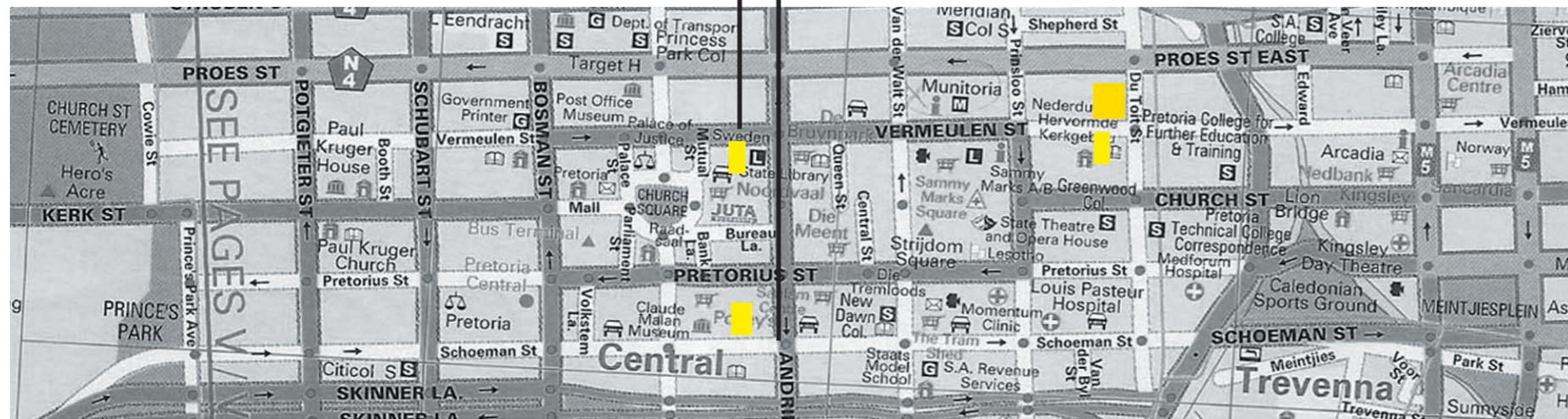


fig. 1.02. Street map with site positions indicated in yellow

infill >>

>> action as part of conception of a given boundary



fig. 1.03. Pan-handle entrance to Infill-site

insert >>

>> establish cohesion of the figure/ground formulation of the city

The following characteristics are present on all three sites, to qualify as commendable areas to propose interventions on:

- >> possess a strong public and pedestrian presence
- >> within walking distance of each other
- >> presently unutilised sites
- >> in boundary of new Pretoria area



fig.1.04. Insert-site

reroute >>

>> new approach to integration of existing public space

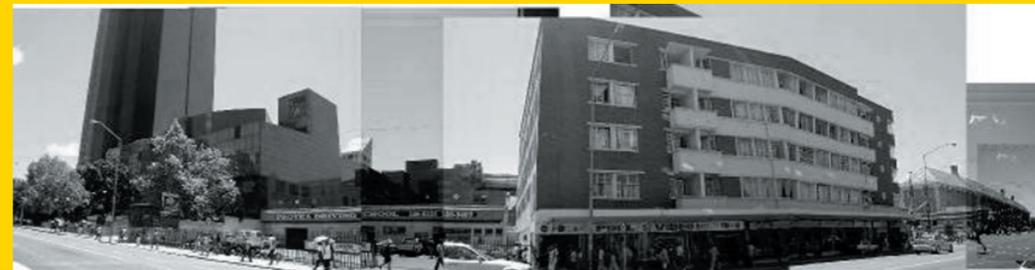


fig. 1.05. Reroute-site with NHG building on the corner

The site is situated in the inner-city of Pretoria, in the block directly north-east of Church Square. Heading east in Vermeulen Street, **north-east from Church Square**, one notices a slim gap in the built fabric between the Noordvaal Thoroughfare and the decorative State Library building on the corner. The three storey library building is stepped back from the street edge with no attempt to engage with pedestrian movement. The building is soon to become vacant, as a new civic Public library is being built in Struben Street. The Noordvaal Thoroughfare runs parallel to the site on its western edge, linking Church and Vermeulen Streets. There is adequate pedestrian movement around the site, but the site exists unnoticed by arcade users, because of the boundary wall.

A deteriorated single vehicular entrance does not attract adequate pedestrian attention, but carries one into the mid-block. It consists of two properties: the northern consists of the National Library of South Africa, with the southern being a pan-handle erf that functions as a service courtyard and storage facility for commercial ventures on Church Street. One is immediately aware of the scale of the tall buildings surrounding the urban gap, as if they are looking down onto it. Arrays of textures of the surrounding buildings offer the visitor a visual experience. The Old-Mutual building's basement wall forms an imposing eastern boundary for the site. It feels as if the site sits silently next to the massive off-shutter concrete wall of the building. The concrete wall neighbours the back of a red face brick building, roofed with corrugated iron. Although situated in the heart of the city centre, the visitor becomes aware of the decrease in city noise, and a feeling of seclusion.

The site has a modest quality as a result of being hidden between the surrounding buildings. Its distinct characteristics of the unpredictable, accidental and unknown space in the urban realm make it a worthy scenario to investigate. It is proposed to explore the value of an 'infill' of public presence on the site as an accidental activity. The importance of accidental public space is that it is not dependant on activity around it to sustain the impact, relevance or success thereof. A welcome and sought after pause. Receiving limited sunlight, with exposure to direct sunlight only at midday. An assortment of shadow positions are created by the adjacent buildings, covering the site in a combination of sun and shadow patterns throughout the day.



fig. 1.07. Vehicular access to site
fig. 1.08. Boundary wall of Old Mutual Building
fig. 1.09. Existing buildings on site
fig. 1.10. Vermeulen Street entrance to site



1.08



1.09



1.10

infill

Enormous red capped bollards welcome one at the southern entrance of Polley's Arcade in **Schoeman Street**. Polley's Arcade slices midway through the city block to encourage movement towards the pedestrianised area of Church Square. The inviting sidewalk with marble mosaic columns support the built mass above, and the stepped back facade on ground floor level attempts to engage with pedestrian movement. Heading east in Schoeman Street, just past Polley's, the parking area on your left announces a vast break in the street facade scale and built proportion. The site announces a sudden gap in the urban fabric, with a dense population of parked cars on the erf in the otherwise cohesive facade of the rest of the city block between Paul Kruger and Andries Streets. Rude black palisade fencing isolates the site from any public activity in the street.

Once inside one's perception changes. A concrete and gravel surface leads one to an array of stepped back facades at the back which creates the illusion of added depth. The open facade in Schoeman Street is the only visual link with the site. The other three boundaries are screened off with up to nine storey buildings, limiting direct sunlight to midday. Although imposing for the visitor, the varying city skyline is still visible, and the framed view of Schoeman Street connects one to one's surroundings. Herbert Baker's prominent St Albans Cathedral resides directly opposite the parking area with the Wacthuis on the western edge, both adding to the visual quality from the site.

Insertion of a social space is proposed on this site, in order to enhance the already existing public presence in the area. The concrete surfaced space 'notices' its environment through the definite boundaries of the three adjacent buildings, but needs a gentler approach to make it a compassionate public space. Possible spatialising of a social activity, can help to generate restorative urban fibre through the experience of the users.

fig. 1.11. Polleys Arcade
 fig. 1.12. Insert-site
 fig. 1.13. Street facade of adjacent building
 fig. 1.14. Site seen from street

insert



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1.12



1.13



1.14

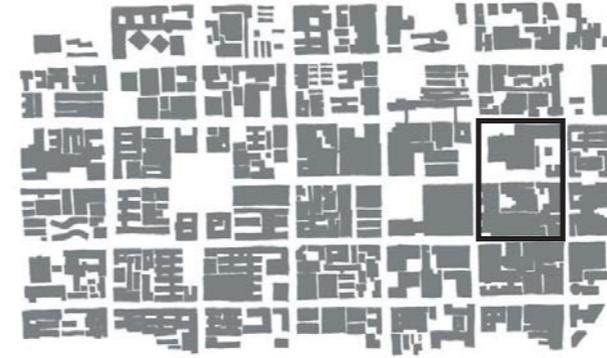


The area of investigation is not pinned down to a particular erf, but **stretches over two city blocks on both sides of Church Street, between Prinsloo and Du Toit Streets.** Street characteristics of Church Street up to Du Toit Street include buildings of an average of four storeys high drawn close to the road. The imposing Reserve Bank building marks the immediate city area. The top block houses the stark granite facade of the Reserve Bank and recently built parking arcade, which enfolds the Dutch Reformed Church on the north-west. The art deco NHG apartment building inhabits the south-eastern corner, with set back open area partly used as a driving school directly west of it in Church Street.

A vehicular pan handle entrance on the opposite side of Church Street directs to a useable area which currently functions as a waste collection area. Black palisade fencing currently shuts one off from the cobbled surfaced church grounds. Trees provide adequate shaded grass areas to sit on. A mixture of textures surrounding the sacred building gives a feeling of tranquility to the site. The church and NHG apartment building shields one from the busy intersection of Church and Du Toit Streets. Interesting mirrored images of the red face brick church building reflect in the facade of the Reserve Bank. The Reserve Bank is drawn away from the street and therefore not in line with the built street edge. The space around the building is well looked after with waterfalls and greens, but dead due to the inaccessible building behind it.

Newspaper vendors and some veranda's create a pleasant variety in the spatial structure for pedestrians on both sides of the road. Crossing over the busy Church Street, an unnoticed covered entrance directs one from the sidewalk into a deteriorated open space, filled with recyclable waste material. Feeling a bit misplaced between the heaps of waste, one is still aware of the dynamics and skyline of the city around it. Although a number of apartment blocks look down upon the area, the site still receives direct sunlight for most of the day. The Pretoria Technical College in Du Toit Street guarantees sufficient pedestrian movement. A possible redirecting of movement through the open space around the church on the corner of Church and Du Toit Streets is considered, together with occupying the 'wasted' refuse space in Church Square for a more appropriate public use in the area. New excitement is produced by rethinking the route. Only action can prevent dispersion, therefore the user becomes the subject in time and space to produce and understand it.

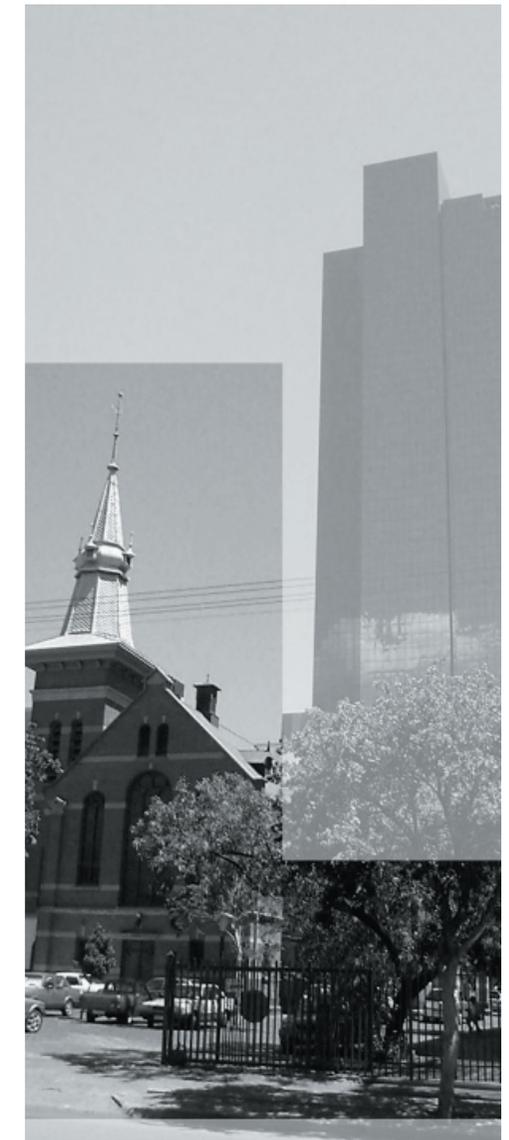
reroute



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fig. 1.17. View down Church Street
fig. 1.18. Entrance to waste area
fig. 1.19. Dutch Reformed Church

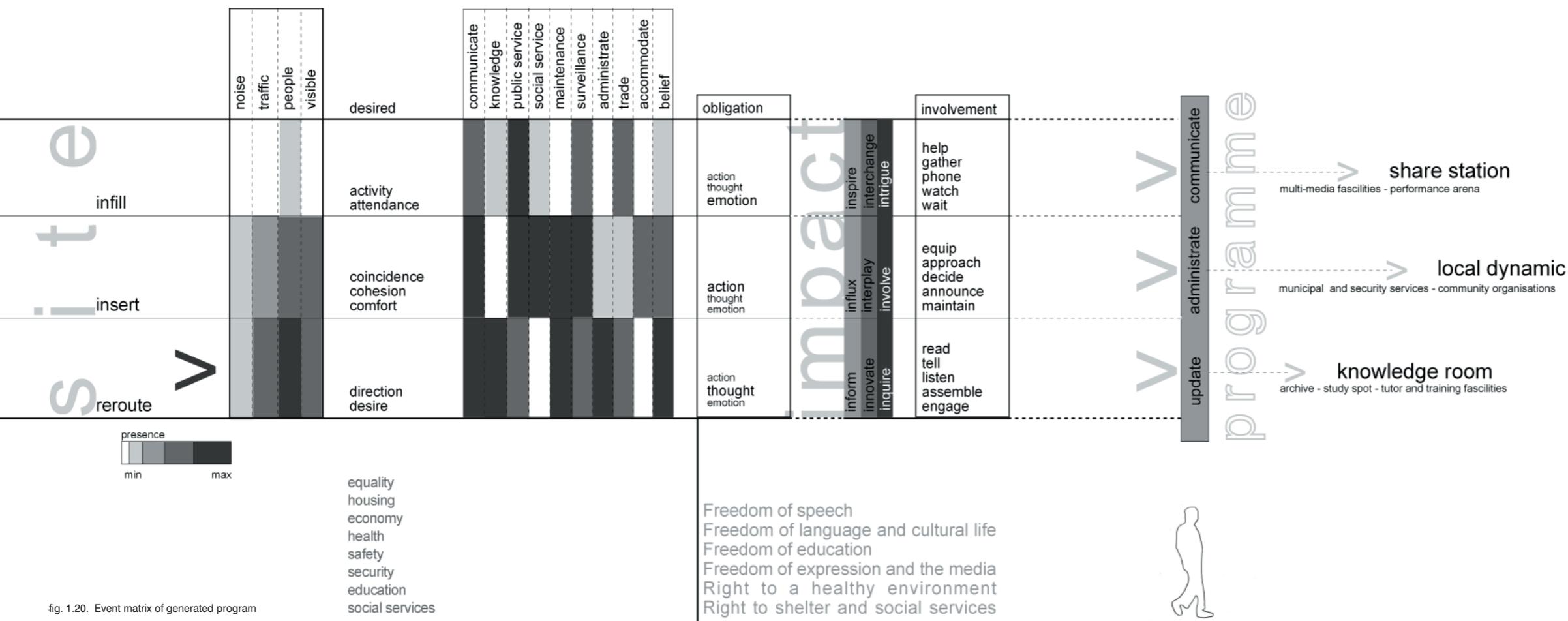


fig. 1.20. Event matrix of generated program

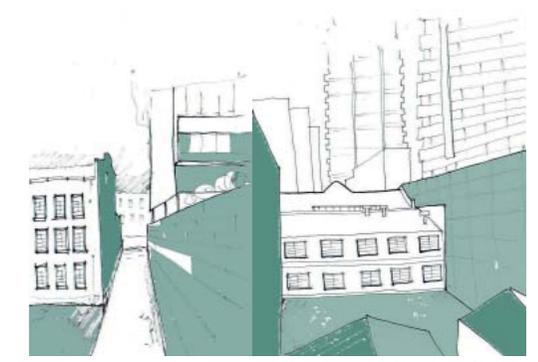


fig. 1.21. Sketches of Infill-site

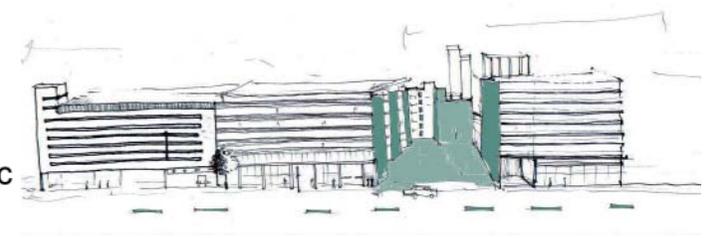


fig. 1.22. Sketch of Insert-site

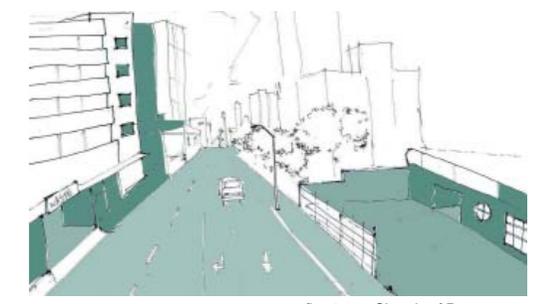


fig. 1.23. Sketch of Reroute area

SITE AS PROGRAMME GENERATOR

The characteristics present on the sites are weighed against desired activities, and obligations in the urban area which provided a list of activities related to involvement on each site. Site obligation is threefold and can be described by action, thought and emotion. Although the degree of presence varies, all three obligations are present on all the sites, which emphasises the relatedness of the three sites. Desired activities on the sites lead to a verb describing the preferred event on each site being communicate, administrate and update.

Each programme is given a new identity in order to provide a fresh, exciting and inclusive interface for familiar activities. The generated programmes act as portholes for activities and services not previously publicly accessible. They are interconnected and cross-programmatic activities are encouraged. The generated identities read as follows:

- An infill of emotion. Communicate @ the Share Station.
- An insert of action. Administrate @ your Local Dynamic.
- Reroute your thoughts. Get an update @ the Knowledge Room.

The proposal includes that the intervention should be an infill of action, emotion and thought, in order to generate a successful public realm on the currently degraded urban gap. **The desired criteria for all three sites are combined to be applied to only one specific site. Infill.**

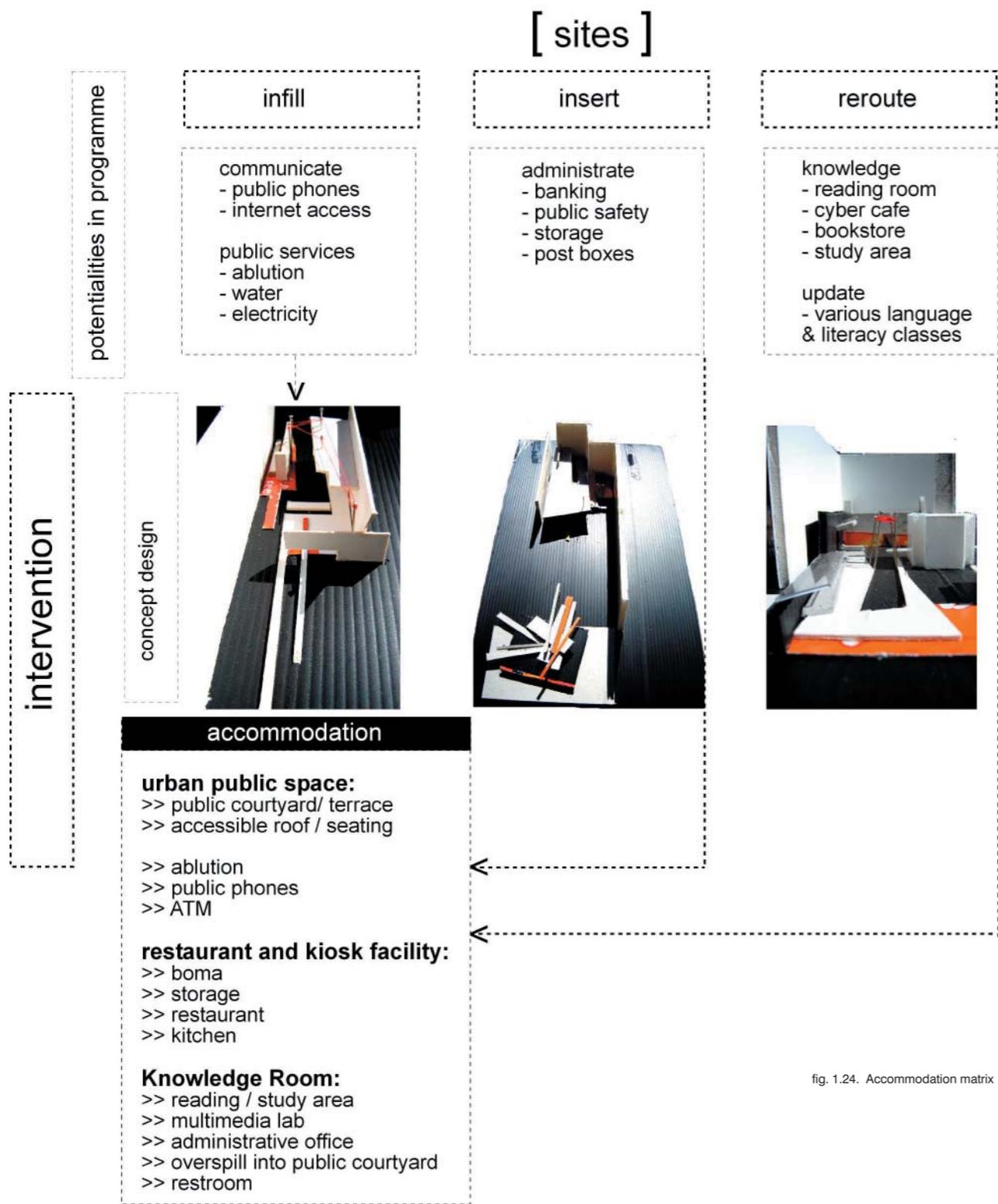


fig. 1.24. Accommodation matrix

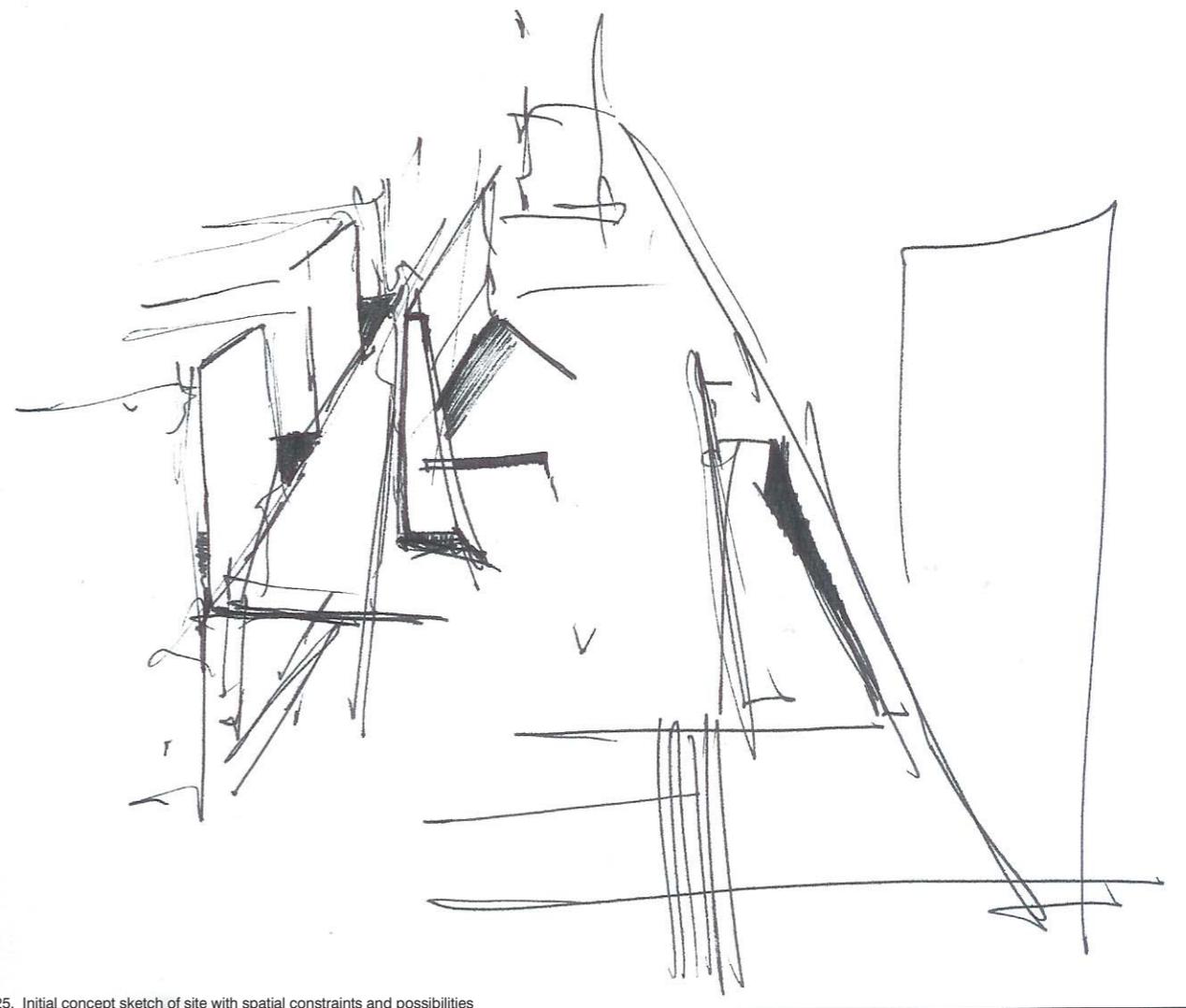


fig. 1.25. Initial concept sketch of site with spatial constraints and possibilities

The initial design concept initiated a spontaneous design response to each of the three sites. The proposed identities to each site provoke a response that relates to the desired activities and involvement on the particular sites. The interventions on each individual site appears self-centered and isolated from each other, therefore leading to a more integrated and complex intervention on only one site. The intervention joins the desired influences and attributes of the concept development on the individual sites, to manifest together on the infill site.

PROGRAMMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF INTERVENTION

Undesirable urban areas which are in need of redesign are described as lost space and antispace, where they make no positive contribution to the surroundings or users. They are ill-defined, without measurable boundaries, and fail to connect elements in a coherent way (Trancik 1986:3). The intervention proposes the regeneration of lost space by inserting a public area in the urban gap by providing basic functions, including ablution facilities, running water, communication facilities, an ATM, shaded areas, and open public areas with a food outlet. The intervention functions as a support system to the neighbouring arcade, and not as a competitor. The emphasis being on the usage of public space, and not on commercial activity. The value lies in the adding of another layer of engagement in the existing area.

The SA National Library is situated on the corner of Andries and Vermeulen Streets. The library complex consists of five buildings which form the northern edge of the proposed site. The building directly north of the site was constructed in 1918 by the Public Works Department, and became the State Library. The building is classically symmetrical and decorated with eclectic detail. The complex was not designed to accommodate a library or related functions, being one of the reasons for the relocation of the SA National Library. An opportunity exists to reinvent the urban memory of the library and for the future use to be more publicly accessible. The memory of knowledge and information embodied by the State Library is used to generate a new programme for the soon to be vacant building. The memory of the library is used to re-introduce a layer of information and learning in the city through refurbishment of the building into a Knowledge Room. The Knowledge Room will function as a support system for the new SA National Library on the corner of Struben and Andries Streets by providing additional facilities, including an online reference area, multimedia centre, cyber café, and study and reading areas. The library is to operate as a community resource, i.e. a place where you can seek information, borrow books, CD's and even DVD's.

The intervention includes both the use of the existing building of the State Library, as well as the leftover site at the back of the library, to transform both into useable urban space. The intervention in the existing building firstly proposes the building to become more publicly accessible, as the State Library was never accessible to general public. The building being more pedestrian orientated will engage with the pedestrian flow of the neighbouring arcade and Church Street Mall. Both interventions on the site are an inverse of each other. The public area is generated in the urban gap, whilst the addition to the existing building to become the Knowledge Room occurs inside the existing building. This duality is important in understanding the relatedness of the two interventions.

public places
are increasingly being seen simply
as opportunities for consumerism.
The intervention will therefore
intentionally operate through the
subconscious and conscious spatial
experience of the urban dweller,
whilst satisfying human need on a
social and cultural level. It should
also account for truly new and
challenging forms of cultural
practice and identity formation
produced within the urban context.

Pretoria has a temperate climate with an average day temperature during the summer months of 29°C, and in winter 20°C. Duration of sunshine exceeds 80% of the possible during winter and 60% of the possible during summer. Proposed design should optimise the ideal climate and direct sunlight in outdoor activities.

The position of shadows created by tall neighbouring buildings on the perimeter of the site should be taken into consideration. The desired character of outdoor areas should determine the appropriate use of cooler shaded areas, and areas exposed to the sun. Differing degrees of shelter and enclosure can accommodate a range of different kinds of urban spaces.

Pretoria in general is wind still. Occasional moderate winds blow from a north easterly direction, except during thunderstorms or weather changes, when the wind has a southerly component. The site is protected from wind exposure by neighbouring buildings. This can result in a lack of natural ventilation and should be accounted for in the design.

Average annual rainfall varies between 380mm and 700mm. Rain season occurs from November to March, reaching its peak in January. Late afternoon thunderstorms can be expected. Water elements can contribute to the sensory experience in a public area.

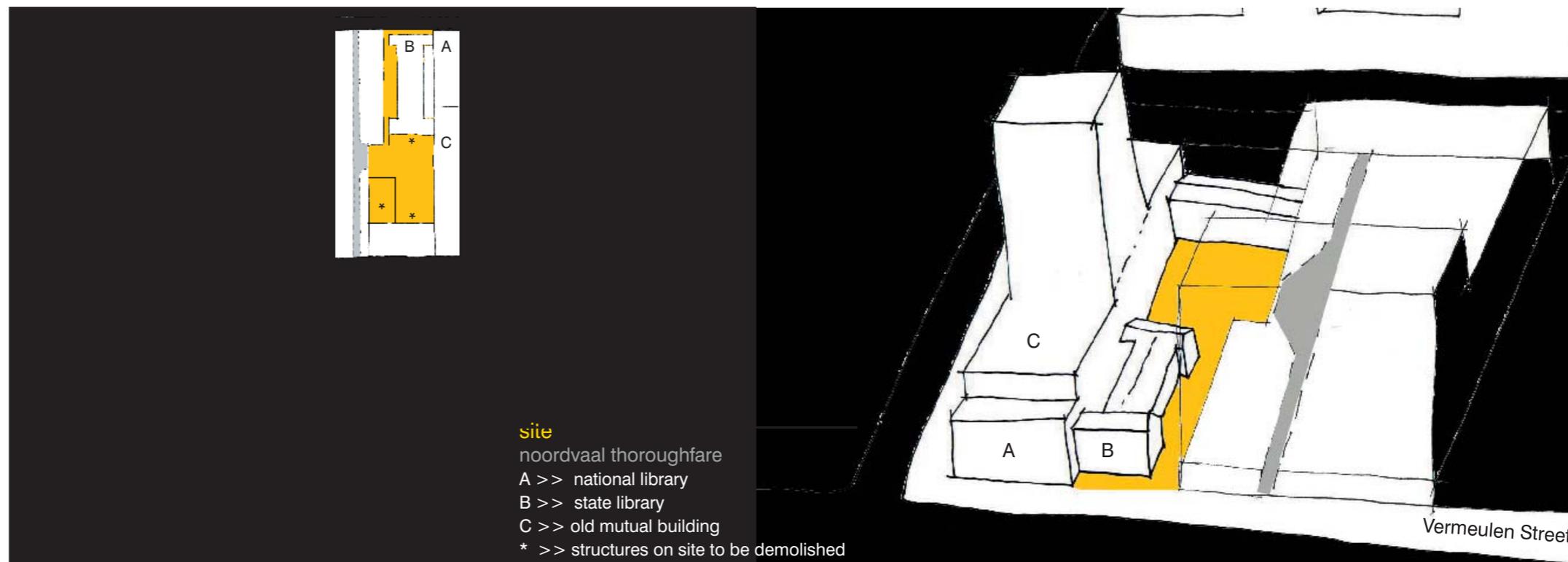
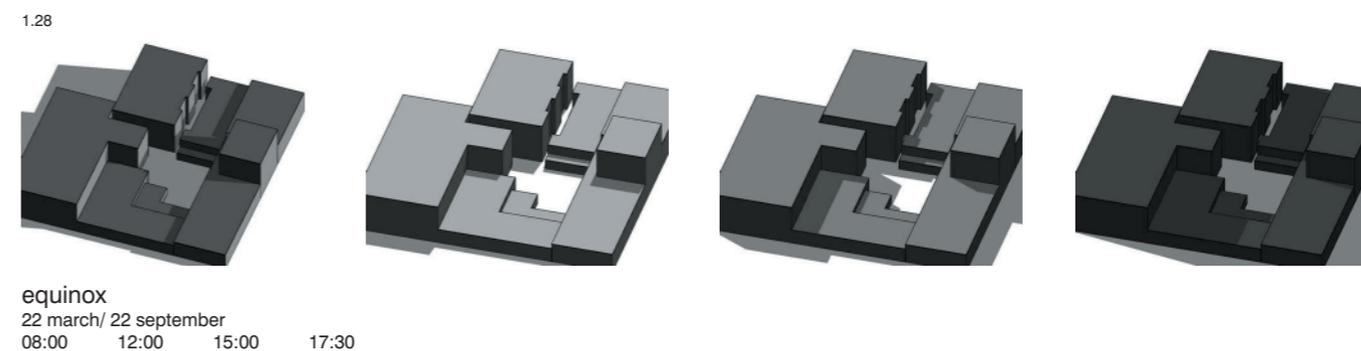
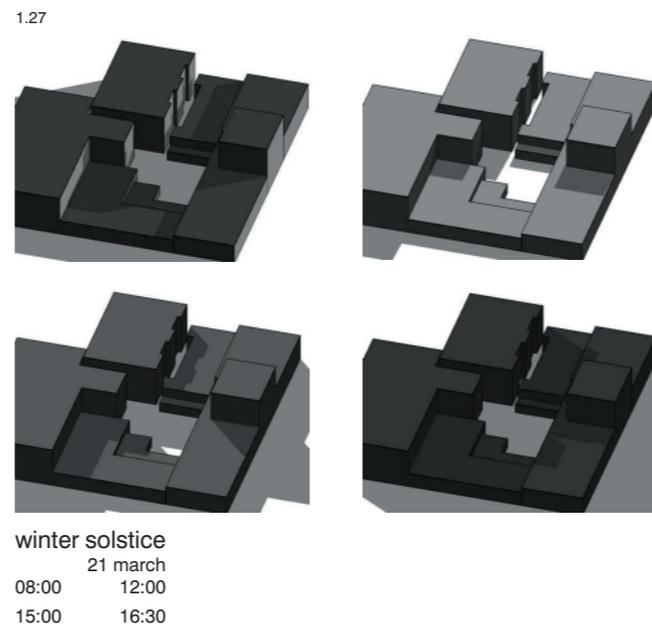
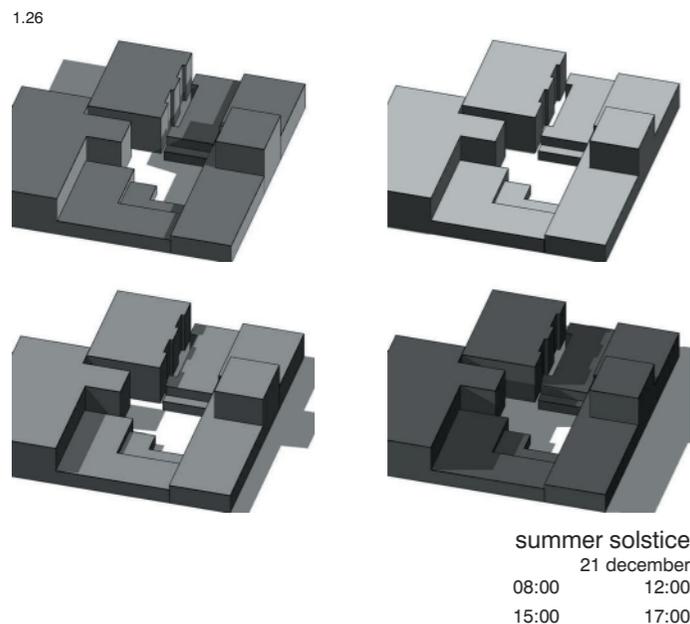


fig. 1.29. Position of Infill-site and Noordvaal Thoroughfare in city block



ISDF Vision:

To be the Hub of a World class City as the Capital of Africa by being a friendly and vibrant all-day-all-night People's Place catering for the social and human needs of all its people which proudly calls it Our city and Our Home (Capital Consortium, 1999).

The Integrated Spatial Development Framework (ISDF) is a document compiled by the Capitol Consortium in Pretoria. The ISDF is aimed at providing a set of guidelines for the management and understanding of the nature of the changing inner-city of Pretoria. The ISDF allows for flexibility and should rather be seen as a tool than a blueprint.

The Apartheid state brought about a massive restructuring programme of residential space within the city. This programme of extensive residential segregation and clearance of slums, manifested itself in the clearing of Marabastad and the establishment of Atteridgeville and Mamelodi. These areas were defined on the periphery of the city, which meant that not only was there a lack of opportunities but also a separation between place of work and place of residence. The poorer exploited community had to, therefore, travel long distances to opportunities, economic activities and cultural traditions. Tendencies of urban sprawl and decentralisation are still apparent in the current development of Pretoria. The decentralisation of activity from the central business district leads to the formation of edge cities (Capitol Consortium 1999:5). Activity and public presence should therefore be brought back into the city centre to revive the energy that used to be contained in the CBD.

The ISDF suggests the following:

- >> Promote urban space to be 'politically neutral'.
- >> Creation of a people's place, with vibrant human activities for 24-hours per day and 7-days per week.
- >> Planning should take place with needs of people in mind.
- >> OPEN SPACE CONCEPT_open spaces in the Inner City should be optimised to cater for human, social and recreational needs.
- >> Suggest a network of secondary open spaces routes, mostly east-west orientated, linking existing and new secondary open spaces and nodes.

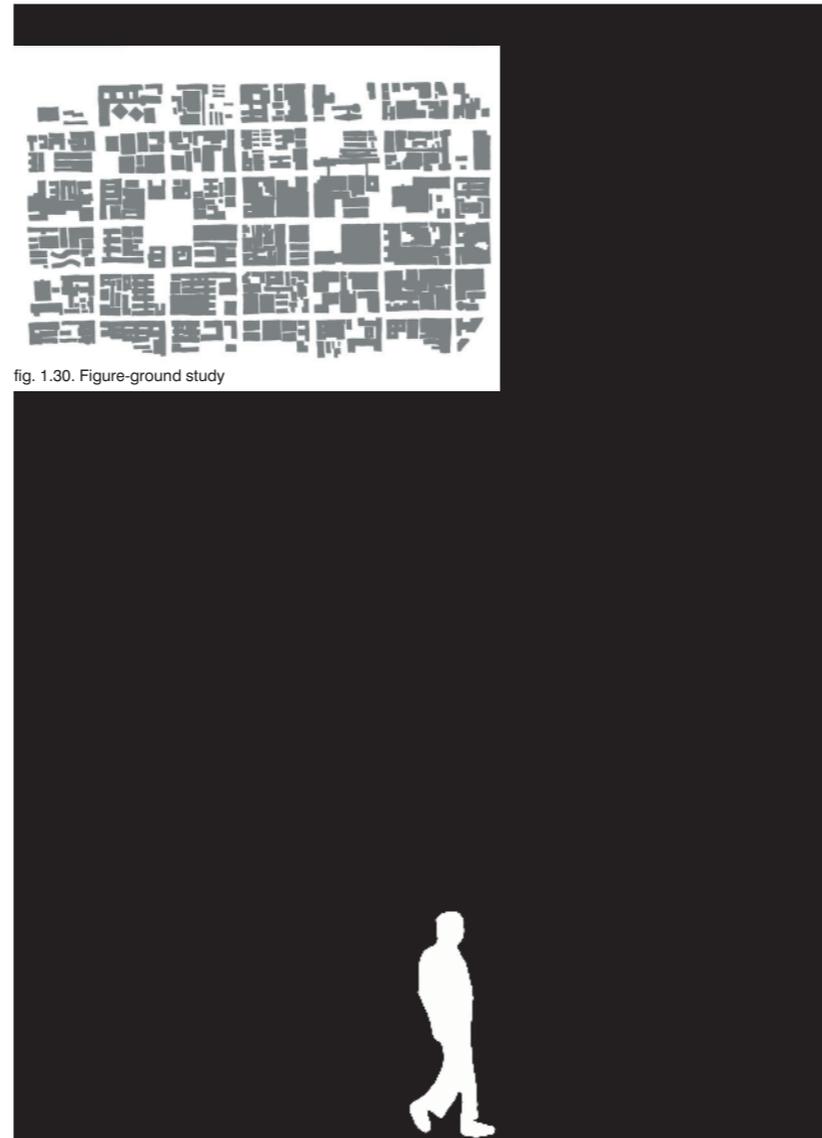


fig. 1.30. Figure-ground study



fig. 1.31. Ground-figure study



fig. 1.32. Linkage of open public spaces

The current public realm has been neglected and abandoned spaces between city buildings lack the sense of dignity associated with well-planned cities. On an urban scale, the principles to be followed are primarily those of a multi-functional approach towards streets and public spaces, robust building forms, vitality through diversity, sustainable neighbourhood structures, continuity in open space structures and environmental management.

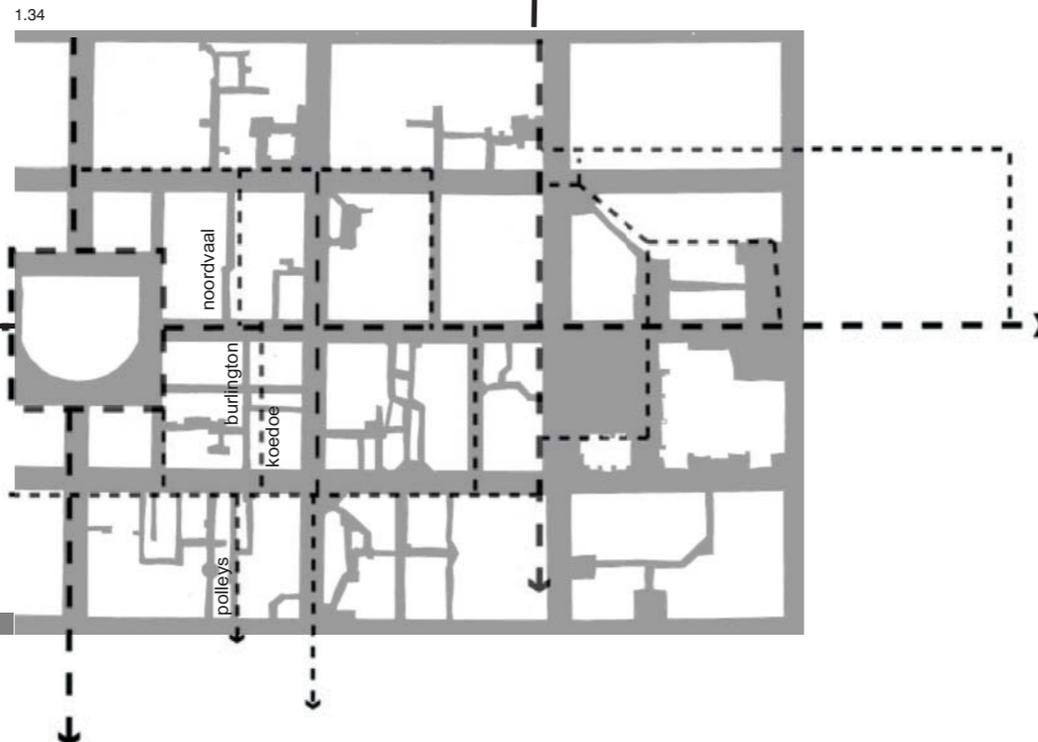
The following principles are of specific importance for the proposed redevelopment in the area:

- >> Create a **meaningful public realm** and coherent urban open space system, in order to enhance the overall quality of the inner city's built environment, identity, its uniqueness, sense of place and capital city image.
- >> Create an awareness of the environment by designing places with an **understandable layout**. This means the ability to see and understand the significance of what is around and what is ahead.
- >> Develop places that can be used for a **variety** of uses and purposes
- >> Promote a **vibrant** and **lively** city by providing facilities for a wide variety of possible users and uses.
- >> Develop **nodes of activity** in the open space that serve to activate the space.
- >> All interventions must be of an integrated nature. Redevelopment must place special emphasis on spatial and **pedestrian** qualities.
- >> Establish a clear civic presence in the city by developing a **civic spine**, a series of links at mid-block between significant civic spaces, arcades, squares and building atriums.
- >> Promote plurality of culture in the city. Acknowledge the cultural plurality of the city through facilitating **diverse social activities**.



1.33

fig. 1.33. Entrance to Noordvaal Thoroughfare
 fig. 1.34. Arcade network with indicated pedestrian movement
 fig. 1.35. Entrance to Polleys Arcade
 fig. 1.36. Entrance to Koedoe Arcade
 fig. 1.37. Entrance to Burlington Arcade



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Street blocks in the CBD of Pretoria are almost twice as long as those in Johannesburg, measuring 225m in length and 140m in width. Longer distances have to be crossed between north-south connecting routes. A mid-block arcade network surrounding Church Square has north-south pedestrian routes increasing permeability in the Inner City. The arcades provide opportunity for commercial ventures along their busy pedestrian routes. The resulting permeability is successful in certain areas, but a lack of cohesive planning has resulted in disorientation, confusion and dead ends in many areas.

Burlington Arcade and The Noordvaal Thoroughfare operate successfully as pedestrian routes and commercial areas, as both connect to the east-west pedestrianised route of Church Street. Mid section areas that are open to the sky and the skylight in the Noordvaal Thoroughfare create a welcoming space for users. The city arcades have different levels of legibility; Koedoe and Polleys Arcade are examples where level changes and various entrances confuse pedestrians, while Burlington Arcade with a short and direct route is more pedestrian friendly (Bothma 2003:14). Burlington Arcade continues to both sides of the cityblock, with the Noordvaal Thoroughfare to the north, and Koedoe Arcade to the south.

The Noordvaal Thoroughfare is an important western neighbour to the site, as it is an established pedestrian route. Successful connection to the Thoroughfare will assure sufficient public activity in the desired area. The intervention does not intend to draw attention away from the Thoroughfare, but act as a support destination from it. Activities present in the Thoroughfare will not be used as anchor programmes in the intervention, to eliminate any competition. Commercial types present in the Thoroughfare are: a pharmacy, hair salon, bakery, medical practitioner, optometrist and psychologist, flower shop, credit facilities, african restaurant, fast food outlet and an electronic and cell phone supplier.

Space as a reflection of society formed through the social processes, politics and culture. The city ought to encourage the acknowledgement of differences in public spaces through:

- >> organisation of public space
- >> human understanding of the use of space
- >> the relationship of new interventions with older fabric of the city



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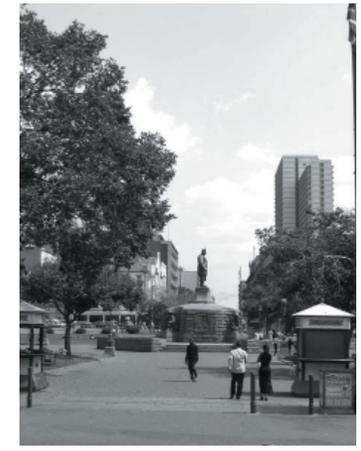
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green - green space
yellow - recreational space
red - controlled public space

The Inner City contains a number of parks and open spaces, but they tend to be scattered, isolated, neglected or inaccessible. There is a need to create usable public open space. At the moment, open space tends to be mono-functional and in some instances blatantly synthetic and harsh i.e. Sammy Marks Square (Bothma 2003:14). The current array of urban open space includes recreational space for mainly sport activities, green space consisting of urban parks and public gardens, and controlled public space which describes urban squares and open institutional areas.

The problem with the squares in the inner-city is that they lack definition and character in the urban realm. Sammy Marks Square, and the rebuilt Strijdom Square do not possess any square qualities, and are only uncomfortable spaces to cross as a pedestrian. The vast impersonal concrete platforms currently present need to be softened and defined clearer, in order to enforce a square quality. Church Square and Pretorius Square can be seen as successful public places with sufficient shaded green areas between the paved paths, to ensure adequate public presence and activity on them. Both are used by city dwellers, and are popular visiting spots for tourists.

The intervention should operate as a popular urban place that meet known and unknown needs, that are flexible, that will encourage possible new forms of behaviour and new relations, a place that will promote friendliness, discourage violence and eliminate the conditions that engender fear and loathing. To succeed, an urban place needs to reconnect to people.