

Theoretical Interpretation:

Townships in South Africa pose very interesting problems. They generally lie outside of the central business district (CBD) of city centres and are often situated on more than one side (Pretoria is surrounded by Shoshanguve, Mabopane, Atteridgeville, Ga-Rankua, Hammanskraal, Temba, Mamelodi, Eersterus, and Diepsloot.) They are among the most densely populated areas of our cities, they house the bulk of the city's people who were previously disadvantaged. (Stats SA; 2004) Although they are the least affluent of urban areas in the city, they are often characterized by a strong sense of community and are arguably among the safest areas to live. Children enliven the streets, trade takes place throughout (nullifying the concept of a CBD), poverty is often widespread and this leads to highly industrious initiatives by locals to generate their own economic solutions. It can of course be argued that this communal sense is disappearing, but the author would propose that this is a result of a shift in mindset away from communal Africa to a new capitalist society where it is each to their own. We have developed a false sense of separation and have begun to believe that we can exist alone.

On the other hand, there seems to be a stigma attached to life in the townships, with many residents aspiring to a more westernized form of lifestyle. Traditional construction techniques are often considered inferior and primitive, even if the alternative is an unliveable tin shack.



Fig71: An advert for Channel O; marketing directly appealing to status, image over quality



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Suburbia is perceived as the greener grass on the other side.

Taking a cue from Europe, where problems of polarized wealth distribution and sharp differences between classes have long been a reality, some observations can be made:

“Many cities in Western Europe are confronted with poor economic performance (relative to the rest of the country or the metropolitan region), concentration of unemployment (especially of the long-term unemployed), traffic congestion and accessibility bottlenecks, environmental degradation (pollution of air, ground, and water), a deteriorating housing stock, crime and safety concerns, and concentrations of marginalized groups. These problems are often concentrated in specific parts of a city, notably those neighbourhoods that are the least attractive in terms of housing and other physical characteristics (such as: poor public spaces, proximity to polluting industries, large distance from important services).” (Andersen and van Kempen; 2003) A parallel can be seen here with South African townships and degenerated European suburbs.

“As a consequence, most cities have passed through a frenetic phase of functional transformation, particularly of their core and inner-city areas. Changes have however also affected suburban areas, especially large-scale post-WWII housing estates (as in France).” (Andersen and van Kempen; 2003) The urban

Fig72: Places for public gatherings often take the form of tents



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policies of Pretoria and Johannesburg aim to achieve similar effects, however, very little influence is exerted by these programmes in the townships. It is as if the new government has classified the townships as areas where they can have little or no impact. This only leads to further polarisation.

Policies with spatial objectives are arguably generated and guided by short term and misdirected objectives. Spatial quality in urban areas is envisaged when generating development frameworks, often without addressing the myriad causes for urban degeneration in the first place. This may be an effective strategy historically, but as stated by Andersen et al: “the functionalist approach to urban planning and housing development was... ..popular in the 1960s and early 1970s, although that approach had been developed back in the 1930s. Functional planning can be seen as a kind of activity in which the goals and objectives are taken as given (as opposed to normative planning, where these goals and objectives are themselves the object of rational choice.)” (Andersen and van Kempen; 2003) The normative planning approach thus has the quality of life of the people as objective and special solutions come second to this.

“...functionalist planning belongs to the past, although many people still have to live in the physical results of this concept. In many, though not in all areas that have been built under this regime, the inhabitants suffer from such infrastructural problems as physical decay,



Fig73: Stone wall construction is highly decorative and innovative in some houses

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rapid attrition, dereliction, low demand and abandonment of dwellings, in addition to anti-social behaviour, social and racial tensions and deteriorating housing services.” (Andersen and van Kempen; 2003)

If a rift always remains between the rich and poor, little progress can be made toward improving the life of all South Africans. While the encouragement of inner-city urban regeneration by governing institutions has unquestionable benefits for the city, integrated planning rather than a regional approach could yield larger and more effective results that will be carried over into future generations. “This means that institutional economics is concerned with collective behaviour of people so that their decisions and actions could be modified collectively. As institutions are conceived as the rules, which facilitate and/or constrain human behaviour in the market process, institutionalism deals with institutional changes and individual behaviour in a broader social, political and economic context.” (Omar and Yusuf; 2002) This implies that policies that are to be used as development guidelines must be carefully formulated to address a broad range of issues that will ultimately have a positive impact on the man in the street. The city of Tshwane has an integrated development plan (IDP) which sets out guidelines for various governmental departments to follow with the aim of ensuring an integrated and holistic approach to urban planning (Tshwane IDP; 2006)

Fig74: Livestock is still put to pasture on the slopes of the mountains behind Mamelodi



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The aim of this project in this context is to provide a public facility in Mamelodi, in line with the IDP which will enrich the immediate surrounds while challenging conventional norms of perception.



Selected scenes from around the township

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Social impact and waterfront development:

“One of the leading policy strategies of growing cities is to increase the density of the urban structure in order to advance sustainable development by minimizing investments in infrastructure, energy consumption and emissions from private car traffic. These urban densification processes have intensified the planning and building of waterfront areas near the city centres. Thus, the compaction strategies have provided environmental arguments to redevelop these sensitive areas, which were traditionally difficult and contradictory questions for policy makers.” (Sairinen and Kumpulainen; 2006) Similar policies have been adopted by South African metropolitan municipalities as is the case in Johannesburg and Pretoria where tax exemption incentives are used to encourage private sector investment in selected urban areas. Development in townships, however, is not subject to any such initiatives and although there is a definite trend of development in these regions, this is largely fuelled by the private sector (with some exceptions.)

“Urban waterfront redevelopment as we know it today embodies the historic alteration of land and water uses along the edges of thousands of cities, large and small, throughout the world. Complex and multifaceted, current waterfront redevelopment trend is attributable to a number of factors, notably: (1) Technological changes post World War II, which led to

Fig 83: A sprawling informal settlement can spring up in a matter of days



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abandonment and/or deterioration of thousands of acres of industrial land across waterfronts, (2) The historic preservation movement, (3) Heightened environmental awareness and water cleanup, (4) Consistent pressure to redevelop central city areas, (5) Public (state, federal and municipal) urban renewal and related assistance.” (Sairinen and Kumpulainen; 2006) The proposed waterfront development will have both a recreational and entertainment function and as a public park, should be as accessible as possible. Also, it should be noted that water is the one universal symbol associated with various religious practices throughout South Africa and as such has an intrinsic quality that appeals to almost all people. Water has long been a symbol of life and purity. Although European waterfront development is often commercial and the result of trade requirements this particular case is concerned with the recreational potential of a waters edge facility.



Fig 84: Panoramis view over the park, the avenue of trees can clearly be seen

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Approach to Urban Space and urban theory:

Various definitions to space and spatial theory give sometimes conflicting interpretations about what space is and how it is to be understood although it must be acknowledged that space has never been more than a human idea and is bound in the west to the interpretation of space-time. (Madanipour; 6-7) Many African cultures have interpreted time as an abstract concept that cannot exist without intervention from man; time is made, it does not just happen. Contemporary quantum theory seems to support this concept. (Capra; 94) Tshumi reminisces that there are two approaches “in defining space: the first is to “make space distinct”... ..and the second is “to state the precise nature of space.”” (Madanipour; 6-7)

The construction of any building or architectural entity “functions in the creation of two kinds of spaces: its internal space, completely defined by the building itself; and its external or urban space.” (Madanipour; 8)

An argument has been taking place since the first days of architecture over what space is and how it is to be defined: does architecture mean the definition of internal space or does it mean the resultant spatial experience as the result of fulfilling a desired programme? (Madanipour; 10) It is the dichotomy between form and function, the result of whose conflict gives rise to architecture. This exercise will explore

Fig 85: Hand painted “mkukus” or shacks like this salon create a colourful street



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the relationships between these two concepts (or some form of them) and the resultant experiences which are possible. Public space is necessarily inclusive and thus not usually defined as enclosure. How can spaces be both public and intimate? A systemic approach results in architecture. It is not enough to say that space can be interpreted as an environmental function, nor a social phenomenon. Rather than depart from a notion of what architecture should be, architecture manifests as a series of processes which overlap and are then interpreted in relation to one another. The interpretation allows art to live, while the rational overlaying of feedback systems informs the interpretation.

As Frank Lloyd Wright said “...architecture which is really architecture proceeds from the ground and somehow the terrain, the native industrial conditions, the nature of materials and the purpose of the building, must inevitably determine the form and character of any good building.” (Wright; 86)



Fig 86: Children are always to be found in the streets of Mamelodi. This entrance to an informal compound funnels quickly into legibly private space

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Social Impact assessment:

Resources and identity

According to Sairinen and Kumpulainen the social dimensions of urban planning can be investigated in the following format:

- Main characteristics and strengths of the area:

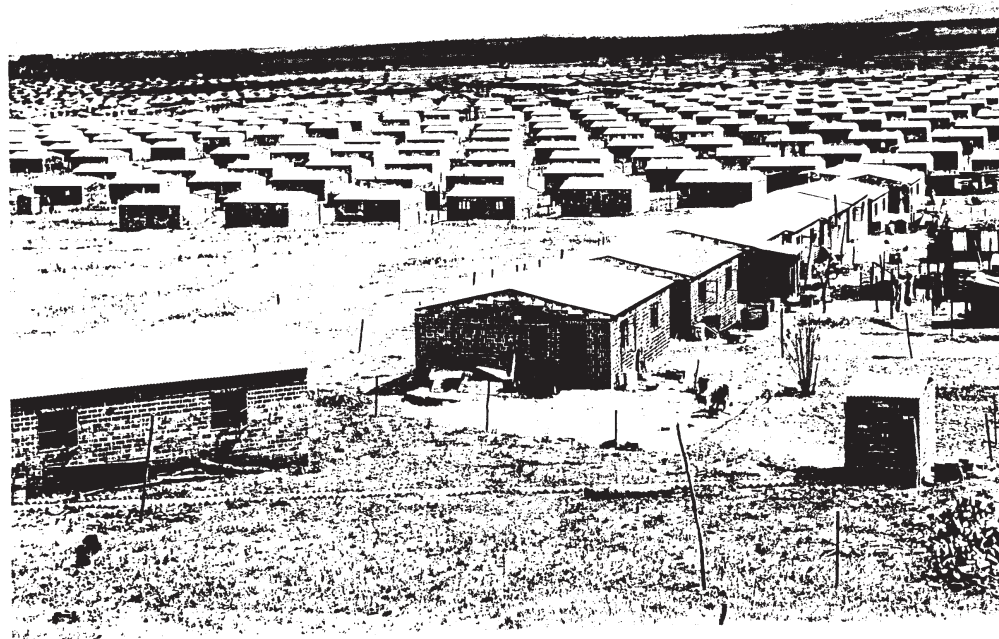
The area lies approximately 20 km east of the city centre, it has an estimated population of 1.3 million (Stats SA; 2004). Mamelodi has a history of freedom struggle, education and music. Physically, it is a very picturesque area, bisected into east and west by the Pienaars River and further fragmented by various perennial streams (the largest being the Moretele Spruit).

- Opinions of the environmental, cultural or historic values:

The Magaliesberg Mountains behind Mamelodi have long been the home of indigenous people, but today there is more than one group with a vested interest in the mountains. Informal settlers have begun to build their homes ever closer to the top of the mountains, while groups of initiates use the mountains once a year for their initiation school. Historically the mountains house no significant archaeological sites; all that remains of Chief Mogale's legacy is the name that the mountain range bears.

- Significance to the visual, social, and cultural identity (city image, community identity)

Fig 87: Early housing developments clearly show a grid logic, something that organically disappeared in Mamelodi's development



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The Magaliesberg Mountain range is the most prominent geological feature of the Pretoria area, having bounded the development of the city to the North from early days. The site for the Transvaal Republic's capital was selected because of its defensibility from the many "koppies" which surround it. Mamelodi lies below one mountain and this feature dominates the setting. During ritual initiation, fires can be seen burning on the highest ridge.

The mountain was also the site of many a skirmish during some of the wars which took place in the region.

Mamelodi's current residents are an eclectic mix of cultures with a strong history of freedom struggle and a traditionally strong community identity. Locals say that it is easy to tell if someone is from "Mams" because they have a distinctive dialect which is easily recognizable.

The river lies somewhat off the beaten path, out of the way at the base of the mountain and is used largely by urban farmers and informal settlers. In the park, the river divides the mountain and the park lawns and allows "tsotsis" to make the slopes their home.

The proposed intervention seeks to bridge this river. An interview with a long time resident, Andrew Saskdjf, revealed that Mamelodi has a history of gangsterism and that thugs traditionally met at a cluster of trees, "Fyfboom" until residents took it upon themselves to drive



Fig 88: Mamelodi housed a British military graveyard during the Anglo-Boer wars



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them out of the area. It is hoped that the effect of a bridge over the river will result in similar result for the mountainside.

Social status

- For whom (social, age or ethnic groups) are the housing and service areas planned and built?

The park will cater for the residents of Mamelodi, children, students, adults and the elderly. Recreation facilities already in place allow for swimming, braais and sport. New facilities will include shelter, food and a tourism and heritage component. The provision of a cafeteria and restaurant will further allow for gatherings and meetings.

- Segregation and/or gentrification processes

Being a recreational area, the park will be fully accessible and provide a base for the expansion of tourism in the immediate area. There will, of course, be no criteria to allow certain users and deny others access.

Access and activities

- Are the waterfront areas accessible to the public?

The waterfront area will be differentiated into various functions, mainly recreational and for reflection. Public access will be possible through the park where a security control will ensure the safety of visitors. This facility is already in place and will continue as it currently functions.

Fig89: he youth are the most likely users of the new park facilities



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- What kinds of activities are possible?

The nature of the river does not allow for many functions other than recreation. Swimming will be restricted to formal facilities. Pollution of the river is a serious concern which will have to be dealt with in conjunction with the community. Livestock which currently uses some parts of the park will not be discouraged, but conditions such as permissible times will need to be revised.

Water dependency

- Easy or difficult approach to waterfront?

The waterfront is easily accessible on foot from the gate of the park and will remain so. Beacons placed throughout the township will facilitate navigation at street level from a vehicle or on foot.

- Traffic and parking questions; waterfront routes

Since the stretch of waterfront under investigation lies within the boundary of a restricted access area, traffic issues are not applicable. Parking facilities will be sized according to the projected number of visitors for formal functions. The majority of visitors are expected to be local residents who arrive by public transport or on foot.

Waterfront experience

- Presence of water (sea, lake, river, etc.)

The river has long been enjoyed by people



Fig 90: The river gets quite stagnant and polluted during the dry months. The pollution problem can only be addressed at a social level and by encouraging lifestyle changes



as either a source of fresh water, irrigation or for various recreational uses. Although some parts of the river bank will need to be stabilised for structural purposes, it is proposed that rehabilitation of as much of the bank within the park as possible takes place and that a clean up be staged to rid the river of pollution.

- Restorative experiences, importance of visual messages, physical touch, tastes, voices, moving in the space, sense of transition as identification

With extensive intervention, the riverfront could become a popular and beautiful area for relaxation, reflection and even rejuvenation.

Fig 91: Festivals draw large lively crowds who congest every available corner of the park



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