

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1. Introduction

People are drawn towards cities for the economic, social, cultural and recreational opportunities that they offer, (Dewar & Uitenboogaard, 1991:16). Within this context, the practice of architecture finds itself confronted with a new set of challenges.

As the density of a city increases, so do the demands for social and recreational opportunities. With the limited resources of space in urban environments there is a need to look elsewhere to create these opportunities.

The focus is therefore drawn towards areas or spaces within the city that have been fragmented and lost. Trancik (1986:1) defines these areas as lost space, unshaped “anti spaces” that do not form part of the larger fabric of streets, squares or viable open space. These are areas predominantly found along edges of freeways, abandoned industrial complexes, train yards, abandoned waterfronts, degraded urban rivers and parking lots; areas nobody cares about maintaining, much less using (Trancik, 1986:3).

The architectural intervention in this dissertation will focus on one of these areas within the city of Tshwane, within the CBD. It will address these challenges from both a physical and social perspective to create an attractive environment for learning, social recreation and economic growth.

It was these challenges and urban context analysis that attracted the attention of this study to the eastern edges of the historic CBD of Pretoria. The degrad-

ed and fragmented sites along the Apies River were identified as areas with the most potential (see Chapter 7.3: 50-52). These areas could have the most positive effects on the city’s social and economic needs.

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to attempt to fuse space and place. Towards these ends, several theories will be examined, i.e. urban theories, memory and phenomenology.

The brief will be founded on the need for a new mixed use precinct development and post graduate art facility for the Tshwane University of Technology (T.U.T).

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Public green spaces and public open spaces are spaces that make cities liveable and memorable. “If activity between buildings is missing, the lower end of the contact scale also disappears,”(Gehl, 1987: 17).

Several pockets of lost open space were identified in and around the Pretoria CBD and along its edges (see Chapter 7.3: 50-52). These fragments will be fused together to enrich and reactivate the experience of people living and visiting the area.

The objectives of this mixed use creative infill are threefold - firstly; to address the physical needs of the people living in the area. Secondly, it will look at the social requirements needed to activate these lost spaces. Lastly, to reconnect the cultural and historical fabric with the citizens of Pretoria.

1.2 NORMATIVE POSITION

Lost or fragmented spaces are areas within the built urban fabric that are under-used and deteriorating. They provide the opportunity to reshape an urban centre and attract people back to city centres.

By doing so, urban sprawl and suburbanization can be counteracted (Trancik, 1986: 2). More efficient use of urban land will create a more compact and integrated urban form offering the opportunity to recapture lost space (Trancik, 1986:i).

This dissertation will look at reconnecting spaces in Pretoria along the Apies River that have become isolated from their surroundings. As a result, these areas have become infertile environments for living and detract from cultural experience Pretoria has to offer.

Currently, existing enterprises and people living around the area can not interact physically or emotionally with the Apies River or Walkerspruit, thus results in negative undefined spaces that become abandoned and degraded.

These spaces were either originally by-products of modern urban planning or poor urban solutions and have therefore become fragmented or isolated entities.

However, by reconnecting them as a network of spaces, more vibrant mixed use functions and activities, could function more interactively. This network could create an attractive environment in which new economic, social and recreational activities could take place.

1.3 PROJECT AIMS

- The urban intervention will create opportunities and re-activate space for social interaction by linking the edges along Walkerspruit and the Apies river with the core of the CBD, transforming the river from a barrier into a threshold between the suburbs to the east and the historic core of Pretoria.
- Encourage interaction through the spill over of activities and functions from the program of the building onto the edges of the river, to assist activating the edges of the river.
- Create links between recreational activities and specific programs to inspire visitors to interact with the development.
- Stimulate positive development along the above mentioned areas, with the intention of attracting more economic investment and city densification.
- Improve the overall well-being and security for the river park and surroundings, which will stimulate positive attitudes towards city living.
- Design a mixed use creative infill for the Arts Department of Tshwane University of Technology with 'live, learn and work' facilities for their post graduate students. It should accommodate a variety of programs

influenced by the need of its surroundings, toward a vibrant 24/7 lifestyle.

- Enhance awareness of, and make connections with, the surrounding heritage and culture of the site and city.
- The intervention should take into account the surrounding sites and context, and encourage the integration between neighbouring programs, allowing people to flow across and through adjacent sites between buildings as opposed to walking around city blocks (see figure 4.10: 37 and figure 4.12 :38), aimed towards creating a more traditional city experience.
- The buildings and site will form a precedent for other buildings and sites along the river that over time could reverse the negative attitudes developments have in the area. Living and working along the edges of the river could become a very positive and uplift the image of the city.

1.4 LIMITATIONS

The river raises many ecological challenges which need to be addressed in a sensitive manner so as to preserve / enhance the existing ecosystem. This dissertation does not aim to redevelop or return the Apies River to its natural state - it only deals with the edges of the river on the site and, most importantly, the re-integration into the urban fabric.

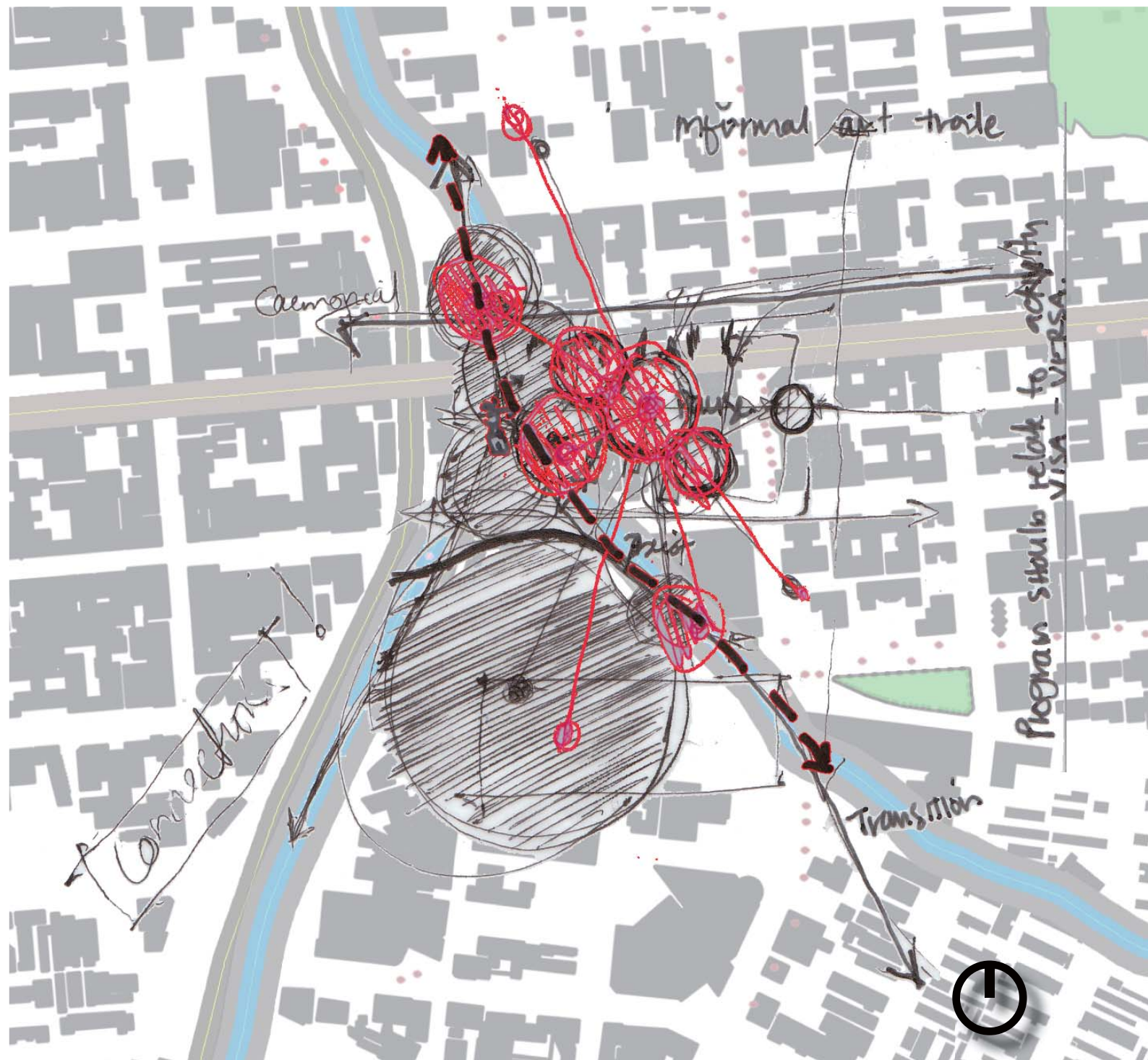


Figure 1.1. Concept of fusing the site with surrounding context and memory, creating series of different connections. (Author, 2011).