

Design development

This chapter explores the design development of the project. It explains the design development process and urban framework investigation done for the site.

The proposed project involves the creation of a Cultural Centre for the Visual and Performing Arts. It is centered on an urban activity square which incorporates the existing Oeverzicht Art Village buildings. The project does not merely involve a Cultural Centre, but also incorporates a wide variety of everyday activities, that take place in restaurants, retail spaces, residential apartments, offices and galleries thus creating a diverse and vibrant environment that will enhance the experience of the place. Ultimately the project is intended to create heightened public awareness and appreciation of various aspects of the visual and performing arts industries

The chapter shows the development of the proposed scheme and highlights the design parameters and influences that have led to the proposed architectural intervention.

Inspiration



FIG 5.1_Urban performance space, Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia



FIG 5.2_Social interaction at Melrose Arch



FIG 5.3_Quality of urban realm at Melrose Arch



FIG 5.4_Visual connection between passers by and dancers at the UJ arts centre



FIG 5.5_Digital media screens activating public space in Times Square, New York

Design concept

“The earth is the stage where mans daily life takes place” (Nornerg-Schultz, 1980:40)

The aim of the project is to introduce a development that not only promotes and celebrates the cultural identity of South Africa but also acts a catalyst for future development and urban regeneration within the area. This development of the Oeverzicht precinct celebrates the unique setting and history of the site. It will spatially integrate the site into the MDC and into the Tshwane inner city by creating and promoting links and connections to other important cultural activities in the city.

The aim of the proposed project is to develop the Oeverzicht Art Village to act as a cultural gateway into the Tshwane inner city, where visitors and residents will be greeted with a sense of arrival celebrating the cultural identity of the Tshwane and South African context. The idea is to develop the Oeverzicht precinct as a destination point, rather than just a crossing or thoroughfare.

In conventional cultural centres of this nature, the various aspects of the visual and performing arts are catered for in isolation and little is done to attract the general public into the centres. The general public is conventionally not allowed to see into

and participate in the creative process. However this project aims to encourage public participation in the creative process by introducing a heightened awareness and understanding of, as well as connection with the artists in both facets of the visual and performing arts.

The project intends to provide a platform for social interaction between the general public and artists, while encouraging pedestrianisation within the precinct.

“Cultural facilities and activities are significant in generating inspiration, self-confidence, debate or ideas exchange as well as the creation of a city’s image... Consuming high-profile arts and cultural activities has less strong transformative effects on individuals than direct participation, whose impact is greater in terms of human development and tapping creative potential.” (Landry, 2000:123)

It is proposed that an urban activity square be created, which is enveloped by the proposed cultural centre. The design of this space is intended be included in the project and for the activities of the centre spill out onto this space.

The functions of the existing structures of the Oeverzicht Art Village will be maintained and used to highlight the character and experience of the newly constructed urban activity square. Through the creation of the square the various facets of the project, such as visual and performance arts spaces, restaurants, retail spaces, residential apartments and offices, will be bought together through this common connection and shared space.

The flowing connection between the internal and the external spaces will also enhance the users’ experience of the space. The movement and circulation through the internal and external spaces of the project must create a memorable journey for the user, as it is the journey of experiences that gives architecture character and makes the space memorable. This experience is as important as the destination itself.

The centre caters for both the visual and performance arts, however these factions can be broken up into smaller sub-categories. Performance art is made up of music, dance and drama and, although the various facets of the visual arts are too numerous to mention, the main facets include; sculpture, painting and digital media. Each sub category of the visual and performance arts has different venue and spatial requirements. Therefore, the project requires an extensive and specific programme in order to successfully cater for the various requirements of the sub-categories without exclusion or prejudice. By including and facilitating these various functions, the project will have a greater appeal to the general public. The diversity of facilities, performances and experiences available will also enhance the general public's understanding and appreciation of the arts.

The aim of the development would ultimately be to develop a synthesis between arts, culture, economy and urban vitality by creating a platform for the arts.

In order to formulate informed design decisions, this chapter seeks to fully substantiate and explore all design decisions that have been taken. Investigations into contextual influences, and artistic and architectural requirements and responses have been undertaken and have ultimately manifested in the resultant architectural form of the project.



FIG 5.6_ Informal outdoor performance



FIG 5.7_ Urban activity space, Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia

Users and participants

As the users' experiences of space are the most important factor in the design decisions for this project, it is important to identify and categorise the users and participants of the space and their potential spatial requirements.

Four potential user groups have been identified for the cultural centre for the performing and visual arts:

- People who visit the centre as paying audience members in order to experience one or many of the various performances or facilities accommodated for in the centre.
- General public that use the square, centre and general facilities on a day to day basis.
- People who visit the centre in the hopes of gaining exposure to the worlds of the performance and visual arts in either a passive or active manner.
- The artists and performers, as well as supporting staff. The centre will provide facilities for both professional and aspiring performers and artists to develop their skills in their respective fields, and ultimately allow them to share their talents with the public.

This cultural centre is intended to be a 24/7 hive of activity. It should appeal to a broad spectrum of users from different cultural backgrounds and, in doing so provide a platform for these different cultures to interact and engage with each other. The aim of this project is that interaction between the previously identified four user groups be encouraged and supported, so that each party can inform and heighten the experience of the others - a part of experience that is usually forgotten in traditional centres of this nature.



FIG 5.8_Performance dancers



FIG 5.9_ Activity in times square, New York, USA



FIG 5.10_Performers, dancers and artists

Initial space planning

The western edge of the site is bordered by Nelson Mandela Drive which forms the intersection of the two city grids. As the existing buildings on the site respond to the urban grid adjacent to the eastern edge of the site, the initial design response was generated in response to this urban grid. However, it was subsequently decided that the western edge of the building needs to respond to the urban grid adjacent to the western edge of the site, thus enabling the building to bring together the two intersecting grids.

Initially it was decided that most of the existing structures on the site were to remain and be restored. However it has been decided that the existing structures in the centre of the site be demolished to make way for the new cultural centre. This is due to the low density nature of the structures, which is not in keeping with the guidelines of the MDC urban development framework, as well as the restrictive design constraints their presence would force on any new structure surrounding or in the centre of them. They would also interfere with the new centrally placed urban activity space which has been proposed. All aspects and functions of the centre

are to flow on to and be related to the square. The M.O.T.H. club building and Breytenbach Theatre were included in the initial spatial design response, with the M.O.T.H club being reused and converted into an additional gallery space for the cultural centre, and the Breytenbach being retained and used as additional performance spaces for the centre.

The proposal has been divided into four principal groupings of spaces, namely performance art spaces, artists, studios, galleries and apartments, retail and commercial spaces, and the existing Oeverzicht structures. The spaces between each of these spaces will be an important connector, allowing the functions of the spaces to overlap and become multi-use, thus reducing the need for and duplication of service spaces. The distribution of each of these functions has been carefully considered in accordance to the various requirements of each space.

It was decided that the principal performance spaces will be located on the western edge of the site, they do not require extensive natural lighting, thereby limiting the need for glazed western facades. Initially, the artist studios', gal-

leries and apartments were to be located centrally on the site and alongside Nelson Mandela Drive. However, it was later decided to place the and along the edge of the Apies River channel, This was done to provide the artists and apartments with greater privacy and a sense of tranquility alongside the river and greenery.

Although the commercial and retail spaces are located throughout the building, they are concentrated on the northern edge of the site, in relation to the commercial aspects of the DTI and Esselen Street.

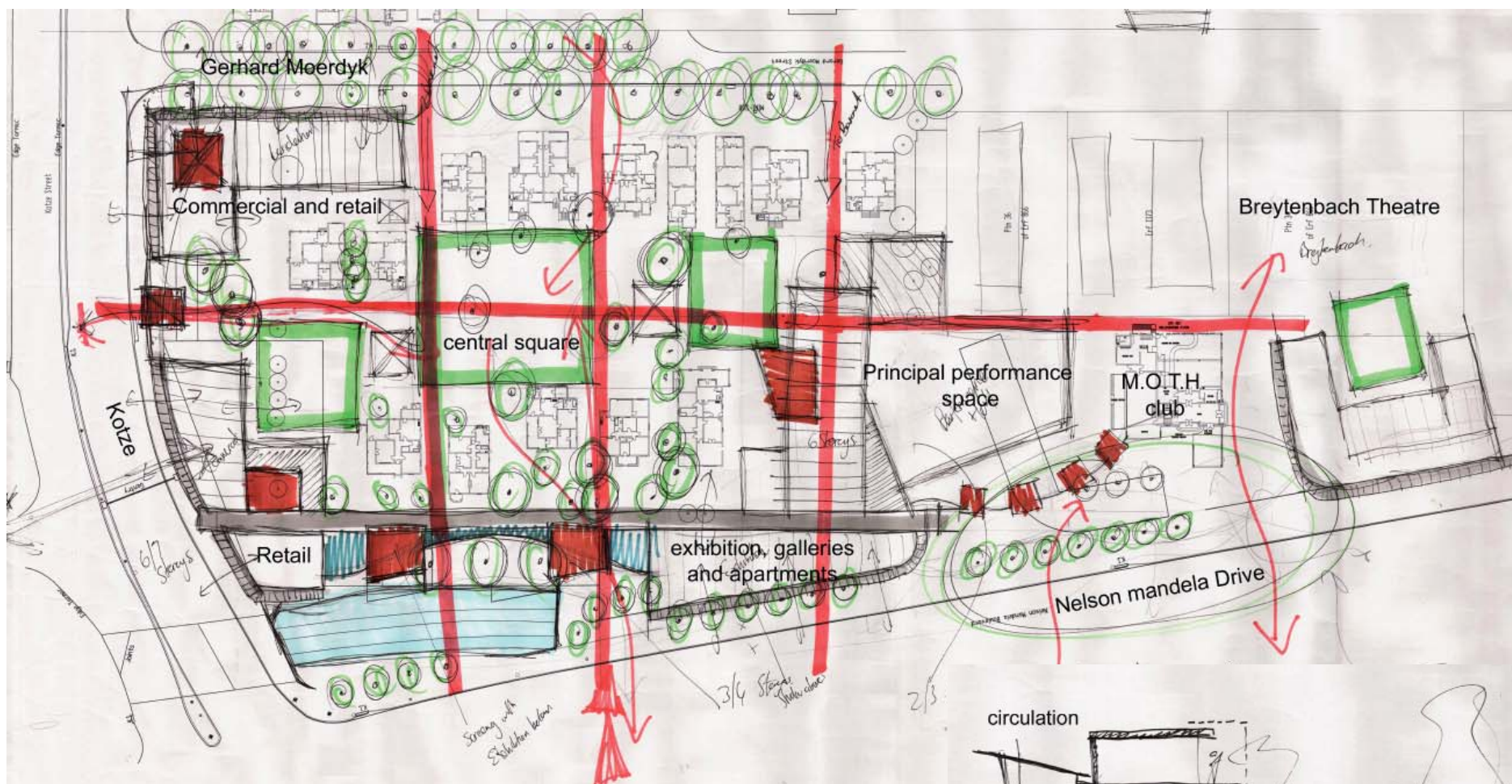


FIG 5.11_Diagram depicting initial space planning response

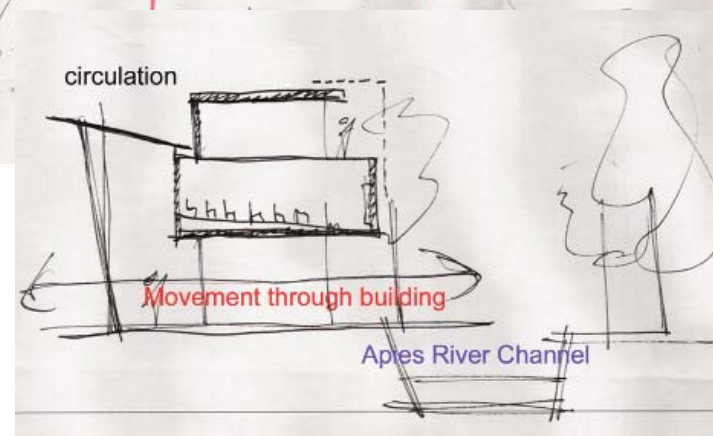


FIG 5.12_Diagram depicting initial response in relation to Apes River

Conceptual approach

The overall architectural concept employed throughout the design process can be explained as the influence of architecture on the senses.

“The building must create an experience and a sense of place for its increasingly demanding audience” (Hammond, 2006:24)

This notion has been explored on 3 scales:

- Firstly, on an urban scale, where the activity square has been designed to entice and manifest informal and formal events and performances, and to act as a stage for the everyday lived experiences of the public and artists/performers.
- Secondly, on an individual scale, as the role of the project is to create an awareness in users of the various facets of the visual and performing arts and the processes involved in the creation of artworks and the production of performance.
- Thirdly, on a public scale, the interaction and connection between the urban activity square and one’s movement through the building, which allows the public to experience the various facets of the arts industry first hand.

These 3 aspects are manifested in the form of 3 basic design concepts:

Firstly, in the creation of a central activity spine which runs through the project. The activity spine manifests in the form of a central atrium which connects, associates and brings together the various facets of the project and square. This central spine orientates the users, guides their movement and articulates their experiences of the spaces with the project.

Secondly, through the creation of visual connections between the users of the public activity square and the performers and artists in the studios, in order for users and passers-by to gain a better understanding of the various facets and processes of the visual and performing arts.

Finally, through the wrapping of the external skin of the building in digital screens. This will create an environment that is constantly changing and will evoke a greater emotional response for visitors and users of the centre while heightening the users’ experiences of the centre and square.

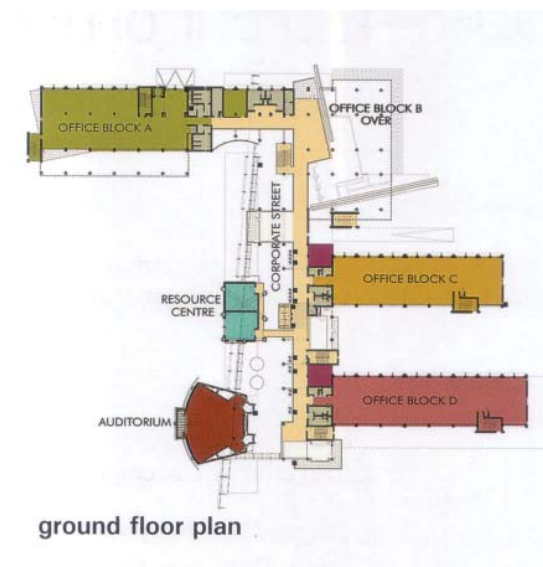


FIG 5.13_Precedent - Head Office Department of Science and Technology
- Central movement spine - ‘corporate street’

Gerhard Moerdyk

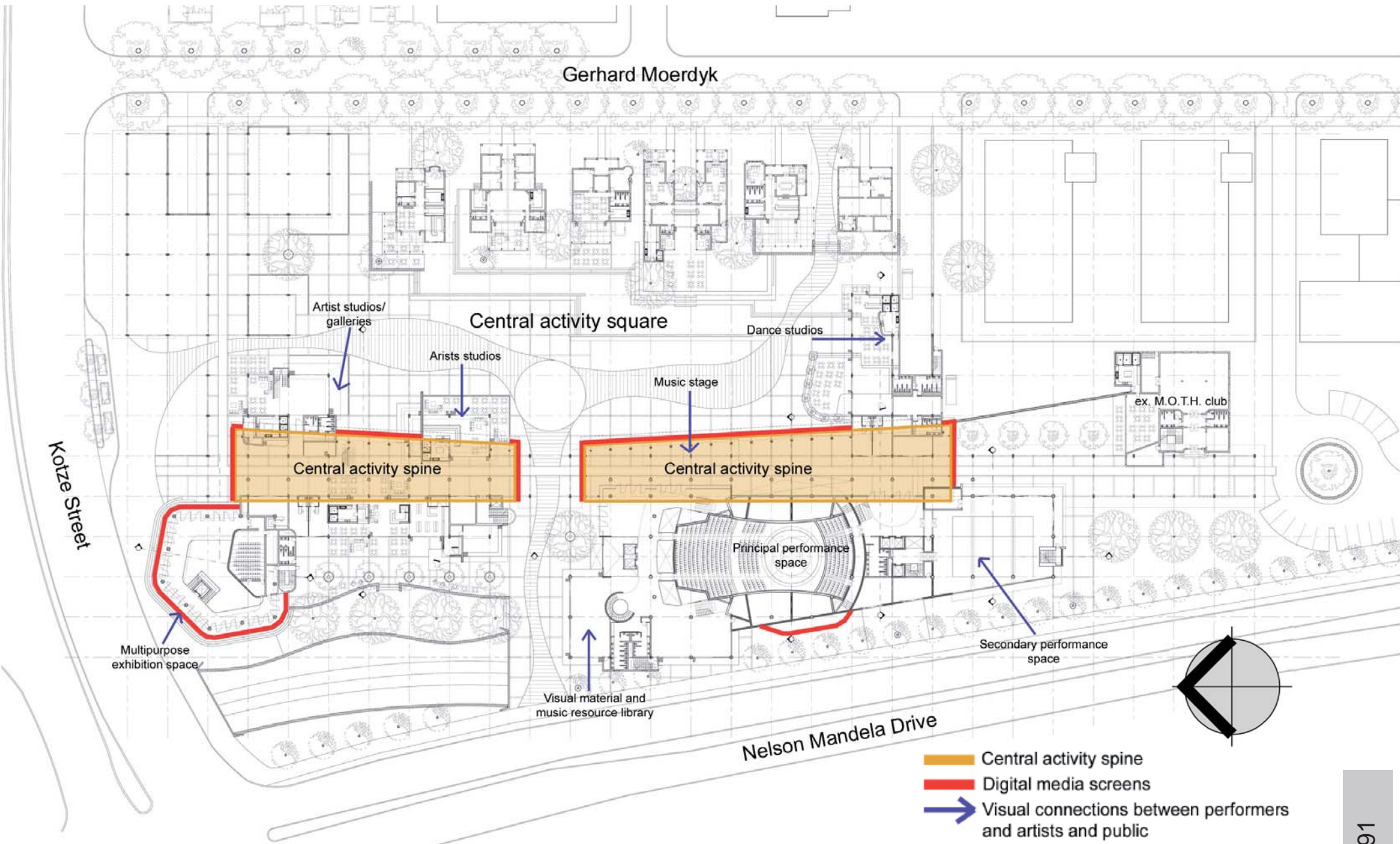


FIG 5.14_Diagram depicting the conceptual approach of the project

Planning

The central activity spine or atrium represents the programmatic and tectonic divide between the external and internal functions of the project. It acts as a semi-private transitional zone between the external skin of the building and the various internal activities involved in the production of the visual and performing arts.

The external experience of the public activity square will partially be created by the digital skin of the building and partially through the visual connection the users of the activity space will have with the various artists through the largely glazed exterior facades of the various studio and rehearsal spaces. The internal experience is, however, only understood and appreciated once one has entered the central activity spine, as the various artistic processes are experienced in closer proximity. On a spatial level, the square will form a vibrant activity space, while the atrium will be experienced as a semi-private internal space, which allows one to fully experience the sensory nature of the artistic process on a more intimate level. It is also intended that passers-by experience the various facets of the industry so that they will be enticed to enter the cultural

centre, thus expanding the user base together with public understanding and knowledge of the visual and performing arts. This will be achieved through the placement of glazed facades on various rehearsal and performance spaces which face onto main pedestrian and vehicular routes. A landmark structure is to be located on the corner of Nelson Mandela Drive and Kotze Street.

Movement and circulation routes through the atrium will be set back and slightly separated from the main functions of the buildings, which allows the public moving through the space to be part of the artistic process, but still gives the artists and performers sufficient privacy for their creative endeavors to continue undisturbed. As connectivity and flow between the internal and external spaces of the project are of utmost importance, all circulation will be housed in or just off the central activity spine.

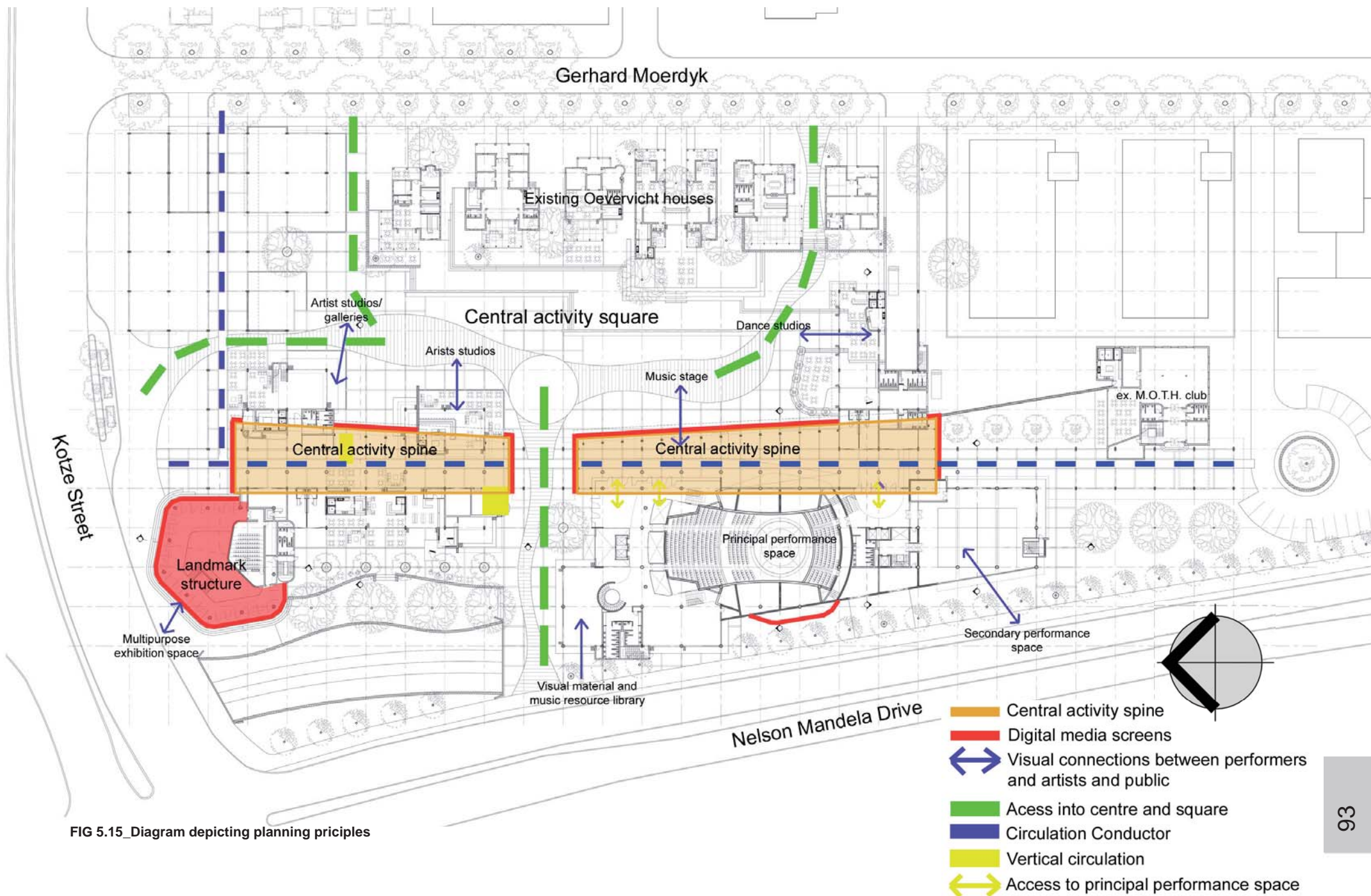


FIG 5.15_Diagram depicting planning principles

Design process

As the cultural centre needs to be connected with an external public activity square, the primary concerns explored of the initial design sketches explored how the building should enclose this new activity square. Ways of guiding people into transitional spaces and central activity space in between the centre, as well as the central square are explored. The design had to respond to the existing eastern urban grid, as well as the existing structures on site. Spatially, the building needed to create a solid, put permeable edge to the square, enabling people from the surrounding community and passers-by to filter into the square. However, the secondary spatial layout depicted in image 5.16, 5.17 and 5.18 had no connection to the M.O.T.H. club building and Breytenbach Theatre, which was felt to be to the detriment of the development. The centre was fragmented and the central circulation space/continuous roof element did not tie the centre together as originally intended.

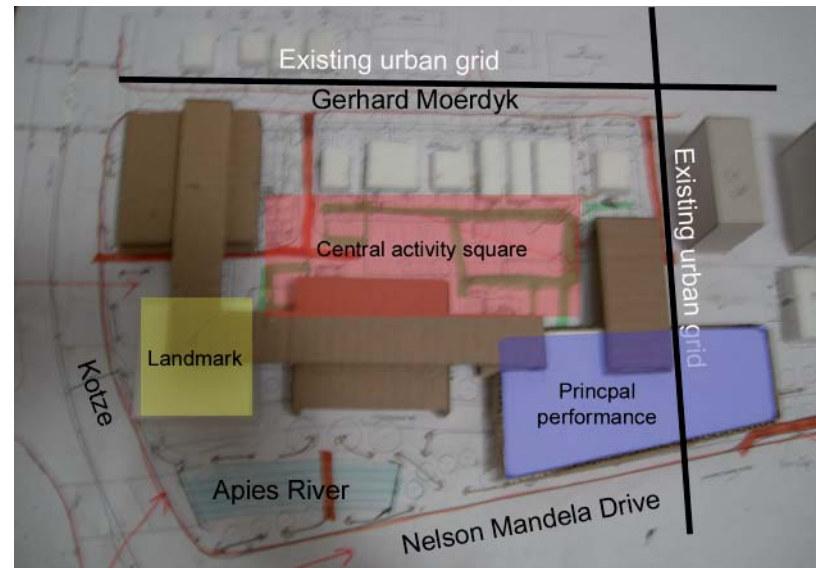


FIG 5.16_Design response to existing urban grid (25 May 2009)

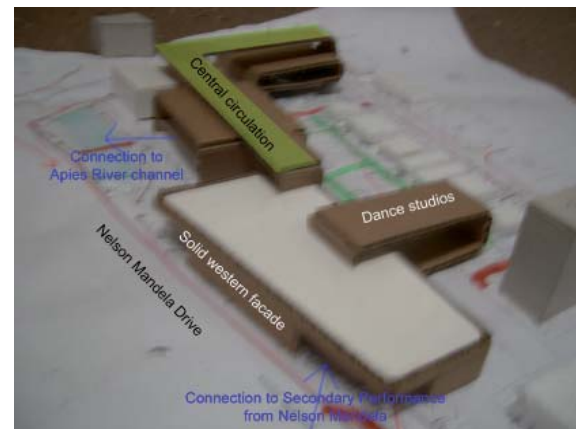


FIG 5.17_Creation of connections to passers by

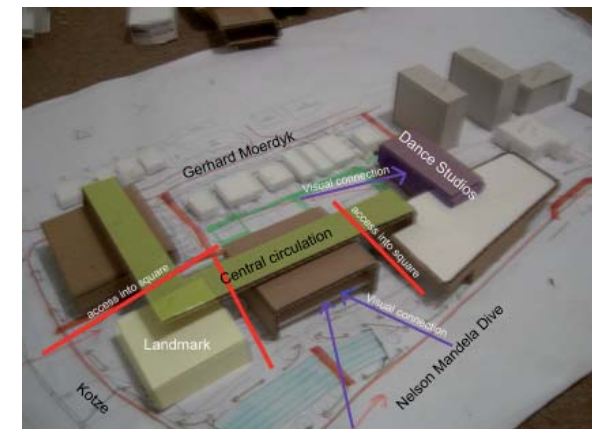


FIG 5.18_Access into central square and visual connections

After the initial design responses, it was realised that better connectivity and improved circulation routes between the various facets of the centre was needed. Thus a central activity spine connecting all the spaces was included in the design proposal. In this version of the design proposal only the landmark element and principal performance space protrusions were to be clad in GKD mediameash, with the aim of showing the performances happening in the centre to passers-by and enticing them into the centre. Apartments and studios faced east onto the public activity square, which raised the issue of the residents' privacy. In addition, the building which was 5 storeys tall and towered over the existing Oeverzicht houses, would almost certainly destroy the existing character that initially drew the author to the site.

Access to the M.O.T.H. club building and Breytenbach Theatre was included, but its suitable integration into and connection to the development had yet to be achieved.

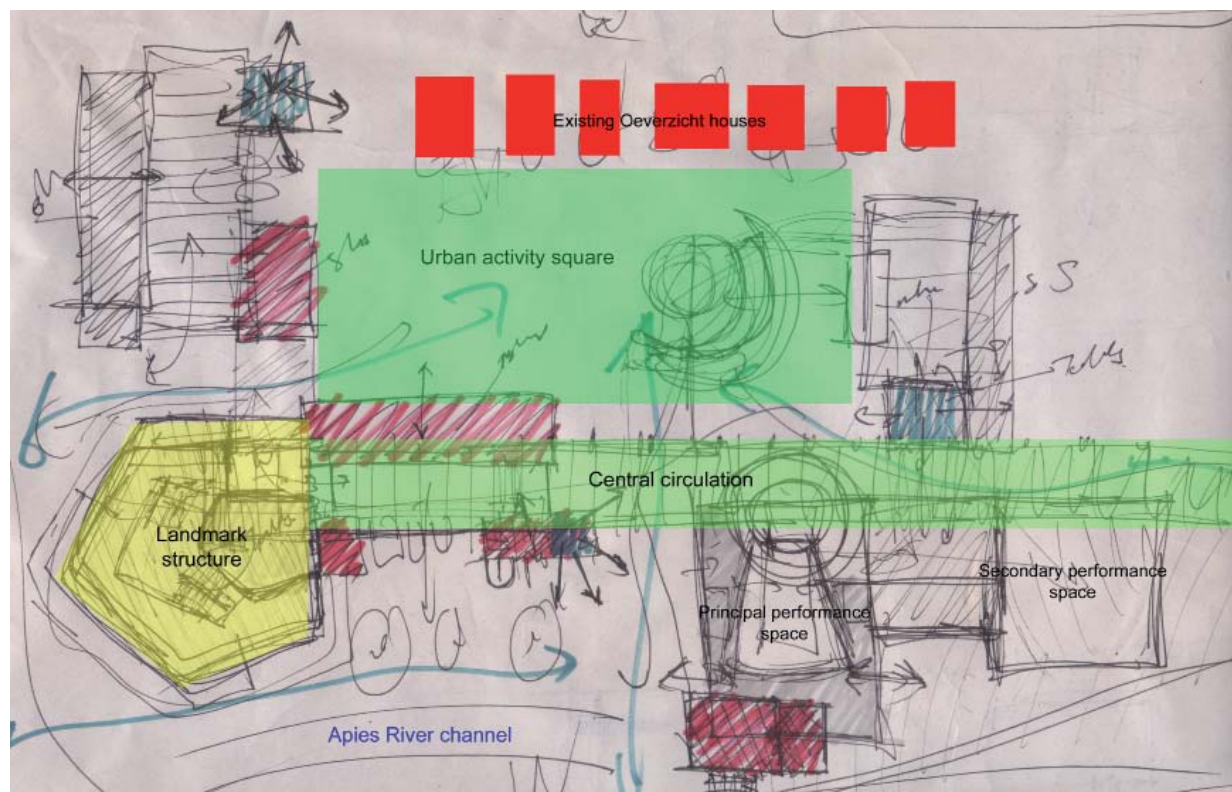


FIG 5.19_Planning - relationship of centre and square and inclusion of central circulation and activity sapce

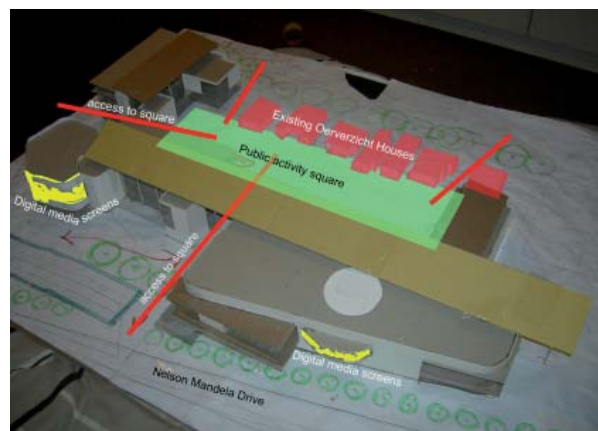


FIG 5.20_Inclusion of Digital media screens and access to site



FIG 5.21_Wrapping of landmark structure in media screens to entice general public into centre

At this point good, visual connections had been achieved between the artists and performers and users of the square. Activities spilled out onto the surrounding streets and square to further animate and activate the spaces and centre- however, there needed to be a greater physical and emotional connection created in order for the user to have a heightened experience of the centre.

The proposal for the secondary performance space needed to be re-addressed from a practical and structural perspective.

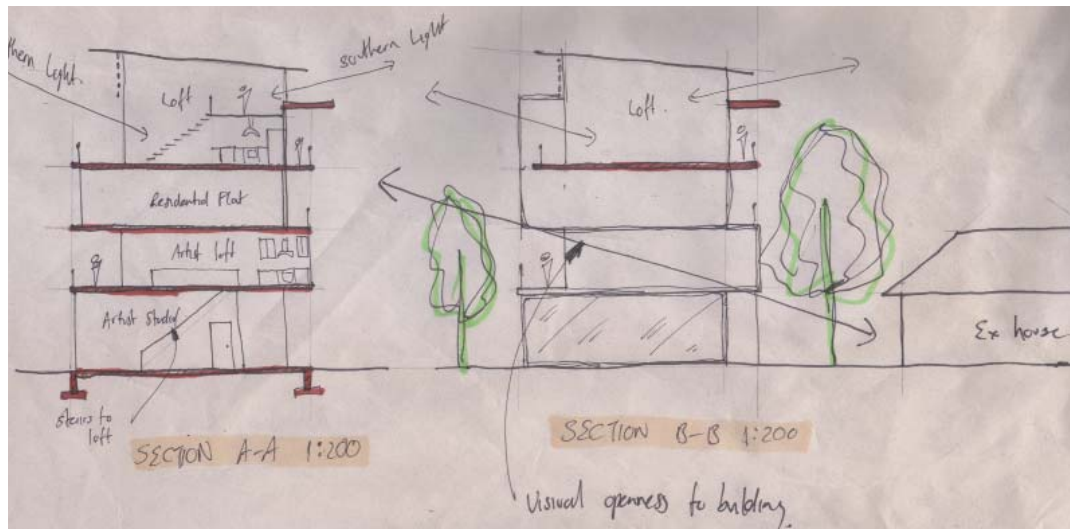


FIG 5.22 Section through residential apartments (06 June 2009)

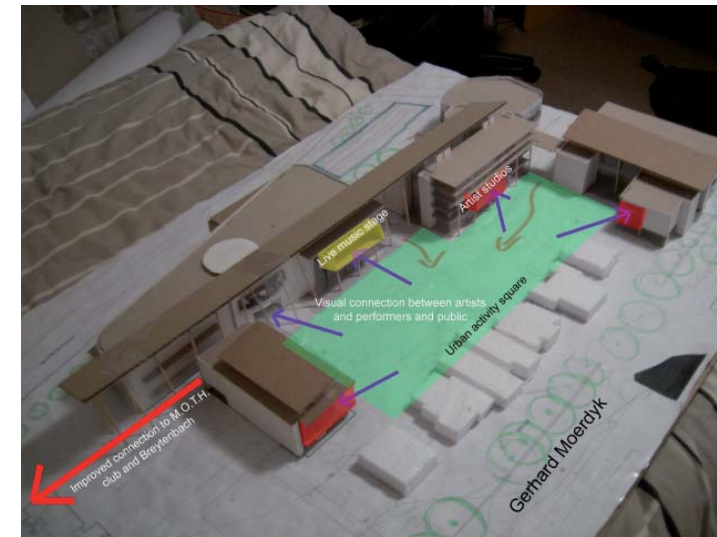


FIG 5.23 Visual connections between artists and general public utilising the square and improved link to Breytenbach and M.O.T.H

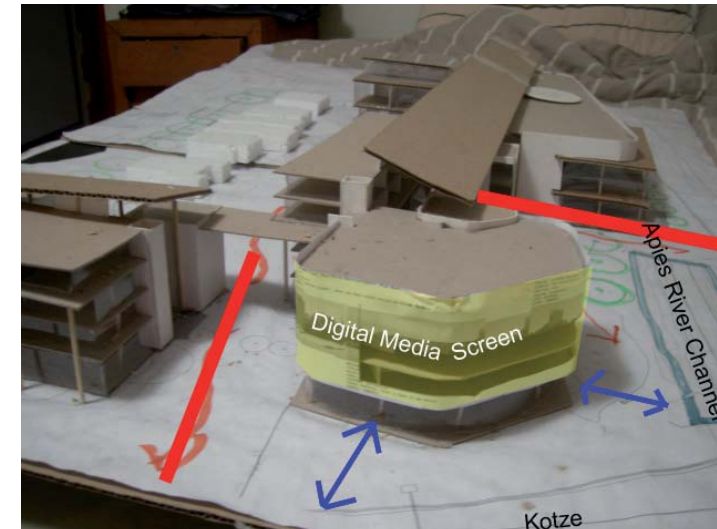


FIG 5.24 Activities from multi-purpose exhibition space spill onto street and digital screens defining landmark element

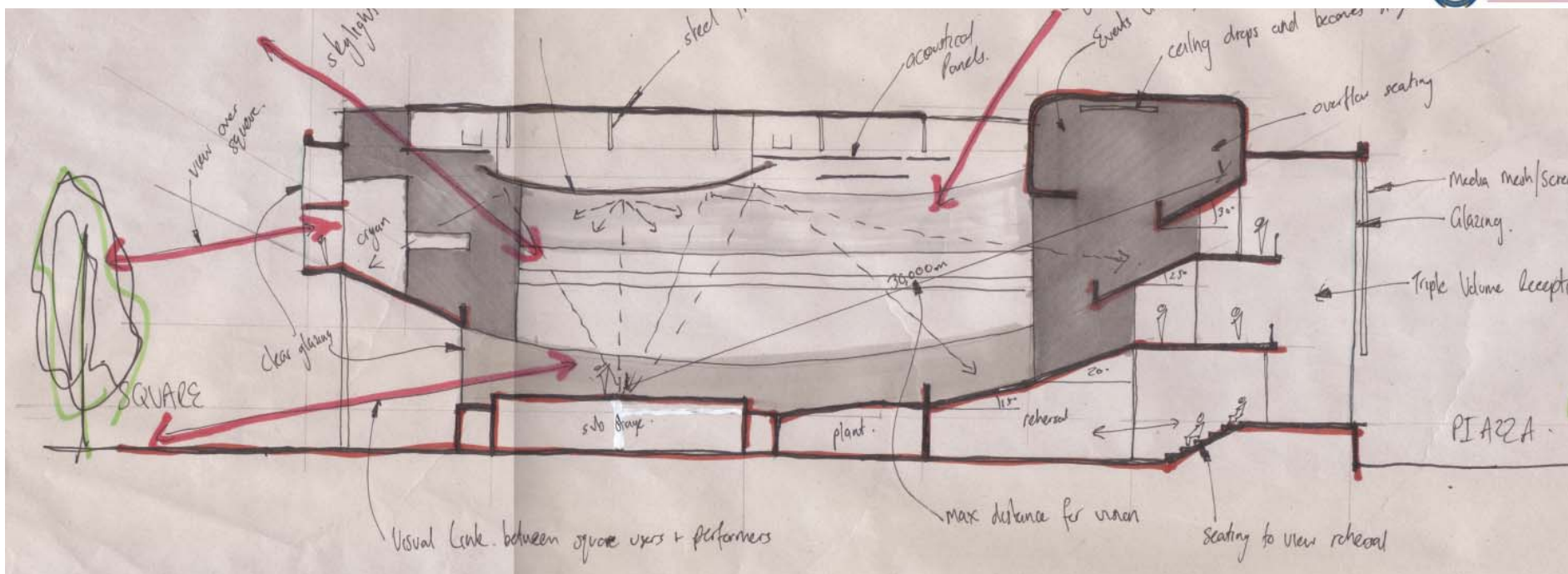


FIG 5.25 Section through principal performance space (06 June 2009) - showing that the scale and height of building was too large for site

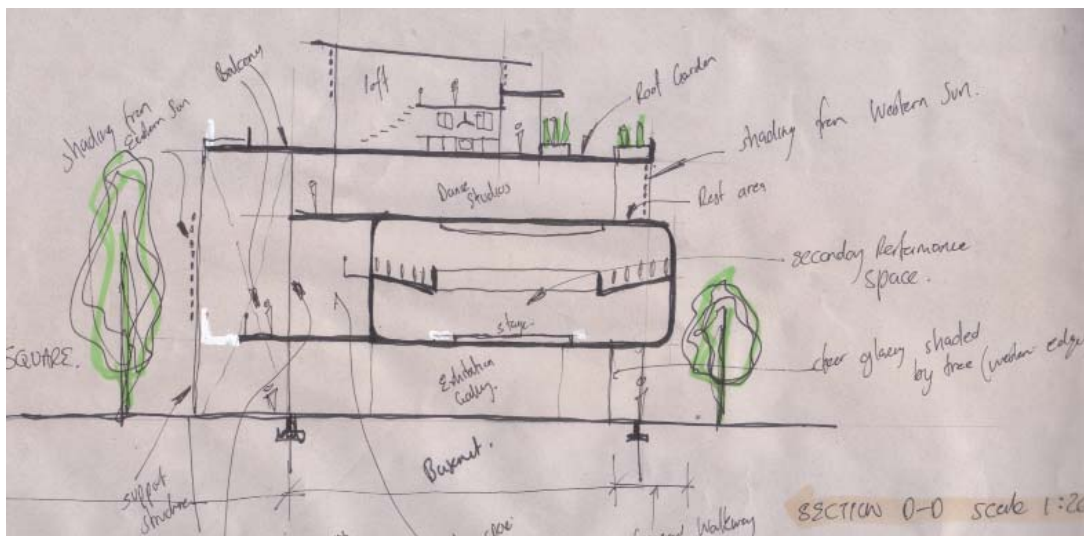


FIG 5.26 Section through secondary performance space (06 June 2009) - difficult structure

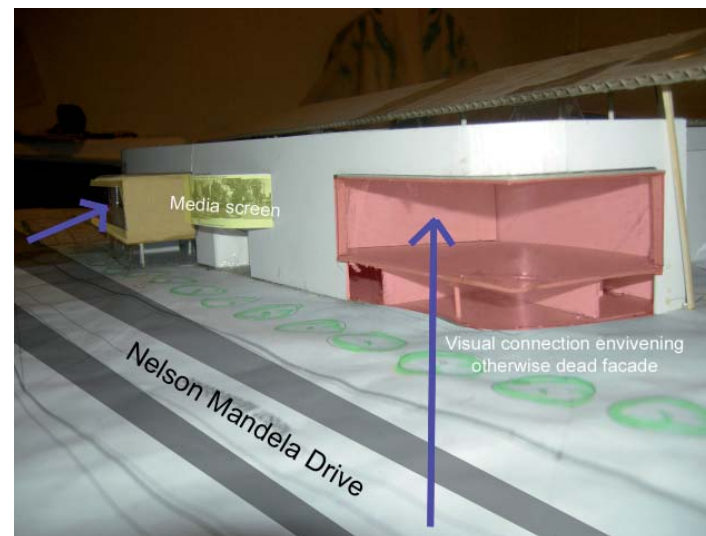


FIG 5.27 Activation of western facade through large glazed openings in secondary performance space and inclusion of media screens

The creation and extension of the central urban activity spine enabled the creation of semi-public/private spaces that would enable the visitors of the centre to interact with and feel a connection with the performers and artists. At this point, the apartments were moved to the western edge of the site alongside the green open space and Apies River channel in order to improve the residents' sense of privacy. This enabled the studios to be moved onto the eastern edge of the square, improving the visual and physical connection with the square.

GKD mediamesh screens were added to the eastern facade facing the square to activate the square and to create a transparent but physical demarcation of the threshold between the public and semi-public/private spaces.

The building was also reduced to a height 3 storeys and some spaces moved into the basement to reduce the scale, height and mass of the building, bringing it down to a more intimate human scale.

The existing M.O.T.H. Club was included in the design of the centre to create better movement and circulation through the site as well as to establish a connection with the Breytenbach Theatre.

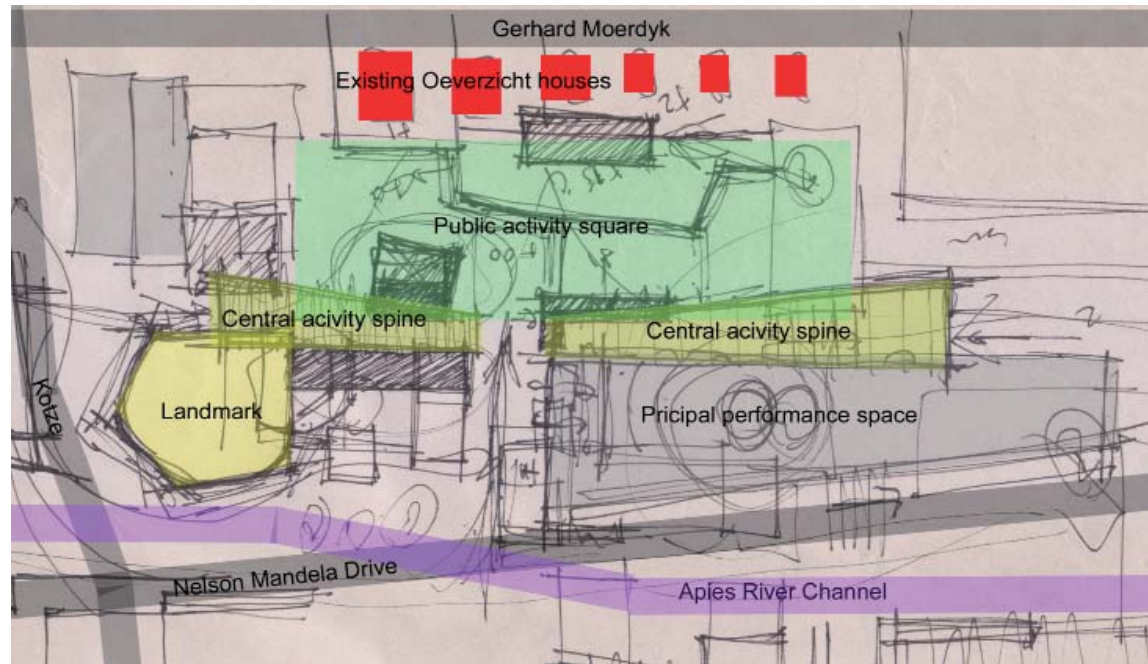


FIG 5.28_Conceptual planning of final design layout

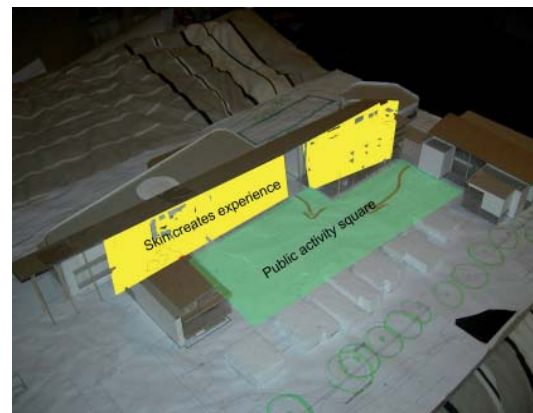


FIG 5.29_Activation of public activity square through media screens

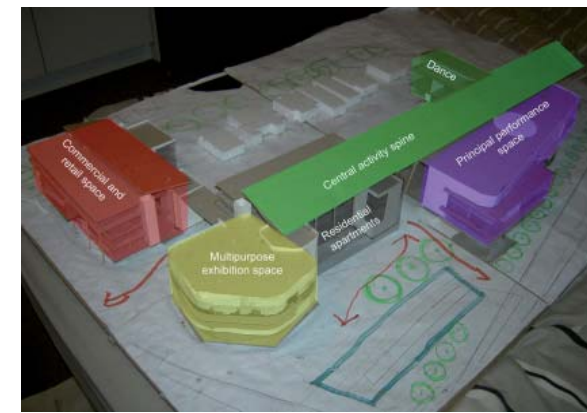


FIG 5.30_Concept model 3 showing positions and locality of various facets of centre