

Memorialising the Freedom Charter: contested imaginations for the development of Freedom Square at Kliptown, 1991-2006.¹

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An abandoned landscape at the heart of historic Kliptown was the site for the 1955 ‘Congress of the People,’ (COP) an anti-apartheid gathering of people from across the entire country which inaugurated the declaration of human rights known as the Freedom Charter. In 2003 a national architectural competition was held for the design of Freedom Square (located on the historic site of the COP), a project later renamed ‘The Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication.’ The design competition for Freedom Square was conceived in recognition of “the spirit of human hope that animated [...] the ideals of the Charter. (JDA 2002: 11)” The site marks a thoroughly inclusive event in the history of South African politics; yet as physical geography, this open terrain is also rooted in a specific urban local, an area with a long history of neglect. The apparently ‘indistinct’ nature of the site has framed crucial questions of economic empowerment, of participation and ownership of the scheme. Freedom Square’s main ambition has been to commemorate an event, the historic traces of which have all but vanished, and neither the programme nor the site – indeed not even ‘the client’ (for initially at least, there was none) – could be called upon to provide clear direction. The story of Freedom Square raises difficult questions as to the role of architecture and planning in the context of post-Apartheid heritage. This paper will present a critical developmental history of the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication, to highlight successive imaginings that have sought to interpret the public significance of the site, and the contestations that ultimately were produced by the winning scheme.

Key Words: Freedom Square, Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication, Congress of the People, Kliptown, Architectural Competition, post-Apartheid Identity

Impikiswano Yemibono Eyavela Kusukela ngo1991-2006 Makuhlelwa Indawo lapho Kwashicilelwa khona Imigomo Yesikhumbuzo Senkululeko Yabantu

Lendawo lapho kunesikhumbuzo segalelo likaWalter Sisulu, yindayo ebeyihlezi inganakwa ngumuntu kusukela kwalotjwa umshicilelo obe ukhuluma ngemigomo yenkululeko yabantu ngo 1955. Kusukela ngo 2003 lendawo yacala ukunakwa ngokwenza umzamo wekuvusezela isikhumbuzo sethamba labantu ngenkululeko ngokuthi kwenziwe umchudelwano wokuthola ompetha abangabadwebi bezakhiwo nabahleli bamadolobha ezweni jikelele. Yize lomchudelwano bewufuna ukushintja lendawo kuze ikhombise ubunye bomphakathi nesiko lokuzwana kwezinhlanga, bonke ompetha abebasebenza kulochudelwano kanye nalabo bebafuna kuthi ithuthukiswe lendawo bebanganawo umcondo okhanyako wokuthi bezenjani kuze lendawo ihlale iyisikhumbo salembizo yokushicilela imigomo ekhuluma ngenkululeko yabantu okwenzeka ngo 1955. UJohathan Noble uloba umlando obuza imibuzo eminingi mayelana nalokudwetjwanokuhlelwakwalendawo. KuleliphaphauJonathanusitjelangemicabango eziningi eyavela kubadwebi nabahleli, naleyo eyenza kuthi lomchudelwano ubemazima kulabo abaphuma phambili.

Amagama abalulekile: Ibala lenkululeko, Ibala lesikhumbuzo sika Walter Sisulu, Inhlangano yabantu bomdabu, Umchudelwano wekudwetjwa kwezakhiwo, Amasiko abantu ekupheleni Kwe-Apartheid

“**G**od, I tell you. By the time we were ready at three o’clock it was just a sea of heads. You know, we couldn’t understand where those people were coming from. Bus loads. Lorry loads. Motor cars. People walking by foot. They were coming from everywhere,” Chetty remembers (Suttner & Cronin 1986: 88). According to official figures, 2,884 delegates were present at the Congress of the People (COP), as well as some 7,000 spectators. The event took place over two days on 25 and 26 June 1955, on an abandoned patch of land in Kliptown, and was planned to allow representative delegates from across the country to vote on the final form of the Freedom Charter (FC), a declaration of fundamental freedoms and human rights. The FC was ratified by the African National Congress (ANC) a year later in March 1956. Commentators have observed that the COP marked a turning point in South African politics. For the first time, liberation movements in SA had transcended a politics of resistance, and a coalition was formed around a positive intent. Suttner and Cronin have described the event as “the most representative gathering in South African history” (Suttner & Cronin 1986:

86). The FC is “a people’s document [...] created through a democratic process, unprecedented in this country and probably in most other countries of the world” (Suttner & Cronin 1986: 128).

Situated some 20 kilometres south-west of Johannesburg, Kliptown is one of the earliest urban settlements within the greater Johannesburg region, predating nearby Soweto by approximately 60 years.² Officially speaking, the Transvaal Provincial Administration had control of Kliptown, “but since its office was based in Pretoria they rarely visited the area” (Kliptown Our Town Trust Museum). Like other infamous ‘grey areas’ in South Africa, such as Sophiatown and District Six, Kliptown was a place where different cultural and racial groups lived together: African, Indian, Malay, Chinese and European. Interracial marriage, later banned by the Apartheid Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, was not uncommon. As one resident of Kliptown confirms, “the government [...] didn’t allow mixed marriages in the Transvaal [...] People would get married in the Cape or in Kimberly or Laurencio Marques or even overseas [...] Then they will come back and live here. They were never harassed” (Kliptown Our Town Trust Museum).

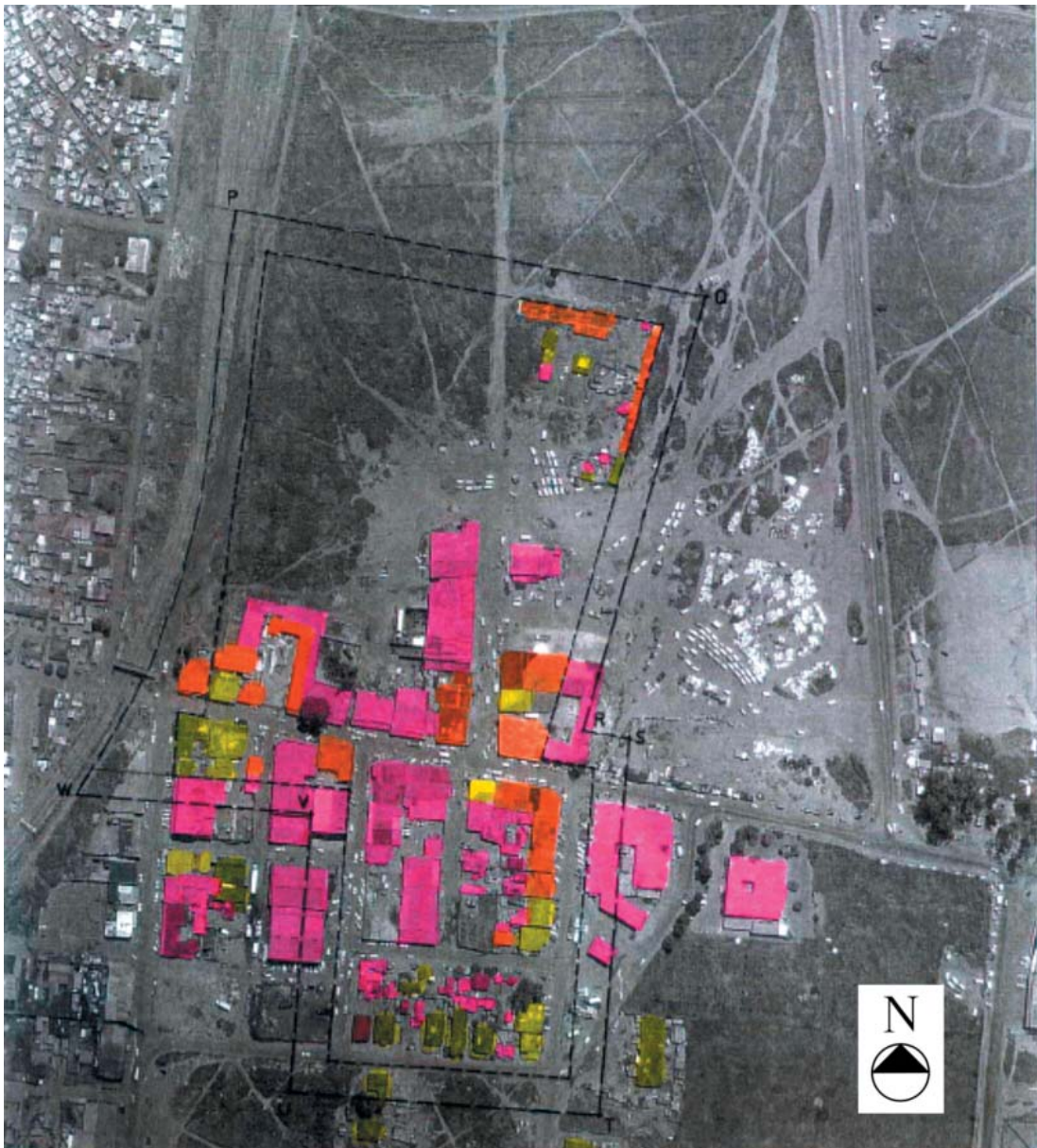


Figure 1
Aerial photograph of the site (1996) with proposed conservation precinct indicated with dotted lines (JDA 2002: Appendix D).

Despite its historical significance, the site of the COP has remained something of an enigma. One of the greatest public events in the history of South African politics occurred here, on a largely desolate stretch of land, etched by the paths of pedestrians who used to criss-cross as they journeyed from home to work, in an highly impoverished area, on the margins of greater Johannesburg (Figure 1). In 2003 a national architectural competition was held for the design of Freedom Square (FS), a project which was later renamed 'The Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication' (WSSD). FS was conceived in recognition of "the spirit of human hope that animated [...] the ideals of the Charter" (JDA 2002: 11). Yet despite these good intentions, the exact nature of the required development proved difficult to define.

The site marks a thoroughly inclusive event in the history of South African politics; yet as physical geography, this open terrain is also rooted in a specific urban locale, an area with a long history of neglect. This project frames crucial questions of economic empowerment, of participation and ownership of the scheme. WSSD would belong to whom? What kind of programme would be promoted, and whose interests would it serve? WSSD's main ambition has been to commemorate an event, the historic traces of which have all but vanished, and neither the programme nor the site – indeed not even 'the client' (for initially at least, there was none) – could be called upon to provide clear direction. This paper will present a critical developmental history of the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication, to highlight successive imaginings that have sought to interpret the public significance of the site, and the contestations that ultimately were produced by the winning scheme.

A false start

Sometime in the early 1990s, a firm of commercial property developers, Nkosana Investment (Pty) Ltd, acquired developmental rights for the site. Nkosana Investment (NI) struck a deal with Stocks and Stocks Properties (SS) to develop this site the precise details of which remain obscure.³ However, the first architectural drawings for the development of the area, prepared by Meyer Pienaar Smith Architects (MPS), are dated November 1991. The design is conceived as a number of open-air courts connected by internalised streets (Figure 2) (MPS 1991). This unique, hybrid programme was envisaged as a commercial development grafted onto existing patterns of trade and movement that are prevalent in Kliptown. But, as Ellis explained, this proposal proved untenable because financial institutions were nervous to commit funds. Raising finance for development in a marginalised 'black' area such as Kliptown, at this time, was almost impossible. Nevertheless, a second scheme was formed not long after, this time by Louis Peens Architects (LPA), which was designed as a more conventional shopping mall, in an attempt to secure finance (Figure 3a-b). Finally, a third shopping mall type design was prepared by MPS – a design which was eventually resubmitted as MPS's entry to the architectural competition for FS (Figure 4).

In 1994, the intended shopping mall development was noted by the regional branch of the National Monuments Council (NMC). A conciliatory letter authored by the NMC, addressed to SS, of the same year states that "[a]lthough the Committee was not opposed to the development of the square, the square should be commemorated in some way [...] A suitably worded NMC plaque could be erected at the new development" (Birch 1994). A newspaper report of June 1995, however, would raise the alarm: "[f]orty years ago today it was the site of history; soon it will be a shopping mall" (Onselen 1995: 3). Despite this protest, a Site Development Plan for the intended mall was submitted to council authorities, and was considered by a sitting of the NMC on 7 March 1996 (Jager 1996). By July NMC resistance had begun to mount, with minutes noting that, "[t]he adoption of the Freedom Charter was too important an idea to be

relegated into a small and insignificant open space in the midst of a modern shopping mall” (NMC 1996). Finally, in November 1996, it was decided that the site should be ‘provisionally’ declared a ‘national monument,’ and the idea of an international architectural competition was promoted by the NMC (NMC 1998).

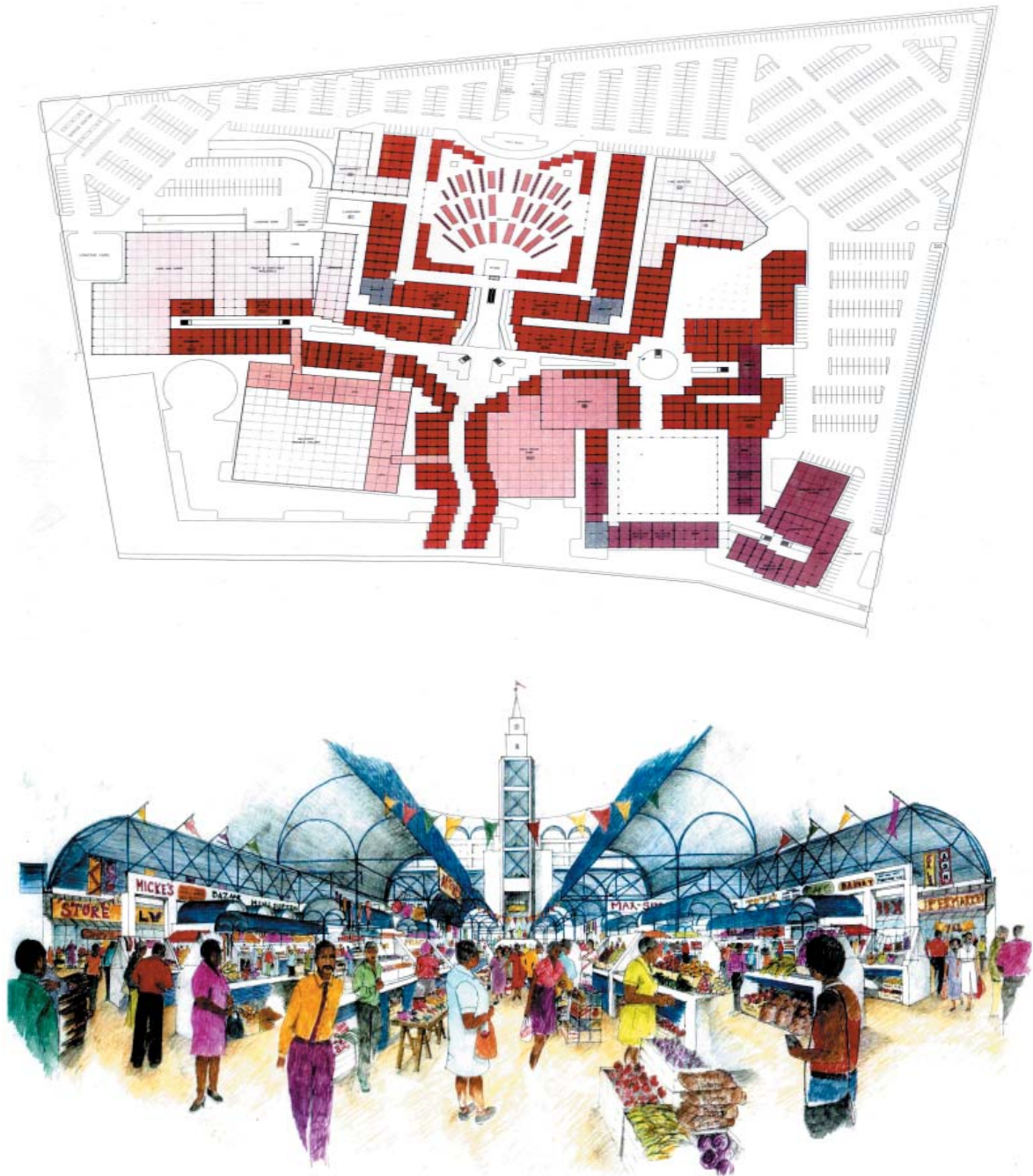


Figure 2 Plan and Perspective of the market square, MPS (Courtesy MPS).

A participatory vision

At this time, the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Chamber (GJMC) began to strategise development for the Kliptown area, and by May 1997 the Greater Kliptown Development Framework Plan (GKDFP) was established (SWK 1997). Promoted as a “‘must see’ site for domestic, national and international tourists,” Kliptown is to be “put on the map” (SWK 1997). A Freedom Square Project Implementation Team (FSPIT) was formed within the GJMC to mastermind the future of FS, and to establish a brief for the intended competition.⁴ The work

done by this team was crystallised in their Business Plan (FSPIT 1997), which emphasises the international significance of the FC, and joins this to performative forms of commemoration. The stated purpose of the project is “to achieve the proper celebration of this site’s international, national and local historical significance” (FSPIT 1997: 1). In this, it is hoped that FS will transcend the constraints of a nationalist narrative, to inspire “an international commitment to the support of the struggles for freedom and human rights” (FSPIT 1997: 1). Prof. Hamilton (member of the FSPIT) explained that for many years Kliptown had been marginalised and that she was hoping to focus resources and interest into the area. “We were trying to think big, to think International,” she said.⁵ This orientation was also premised upon the hopes of foreign investment into the project, as confirmed by the GKDFP (SWK 1997).



Figure 3a
Perspective, LPA (Courtesy Lindsey Bremner, photograph by Henia Czekanowska).



Figure 3b
Perspective, LPA (Courtesy Lindsey Bremner, photograph by Henia Czekanowska).

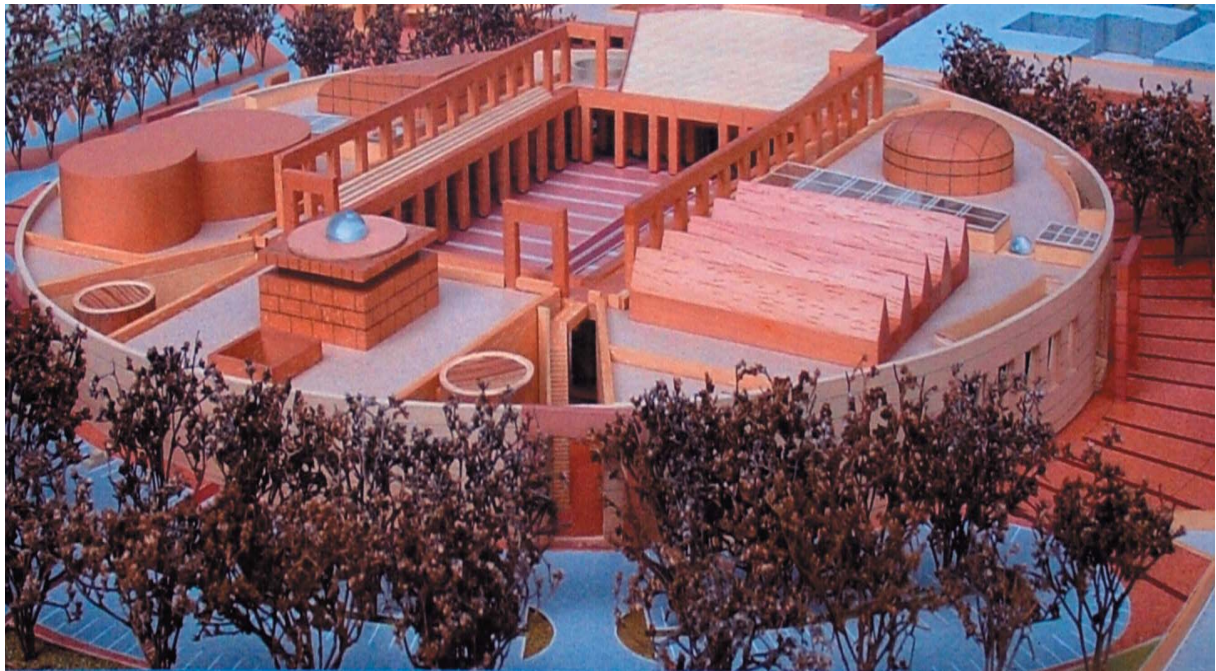


Figure 4
Competition entry by MPS (Photograph by author, Kiptown Our Town Museum).

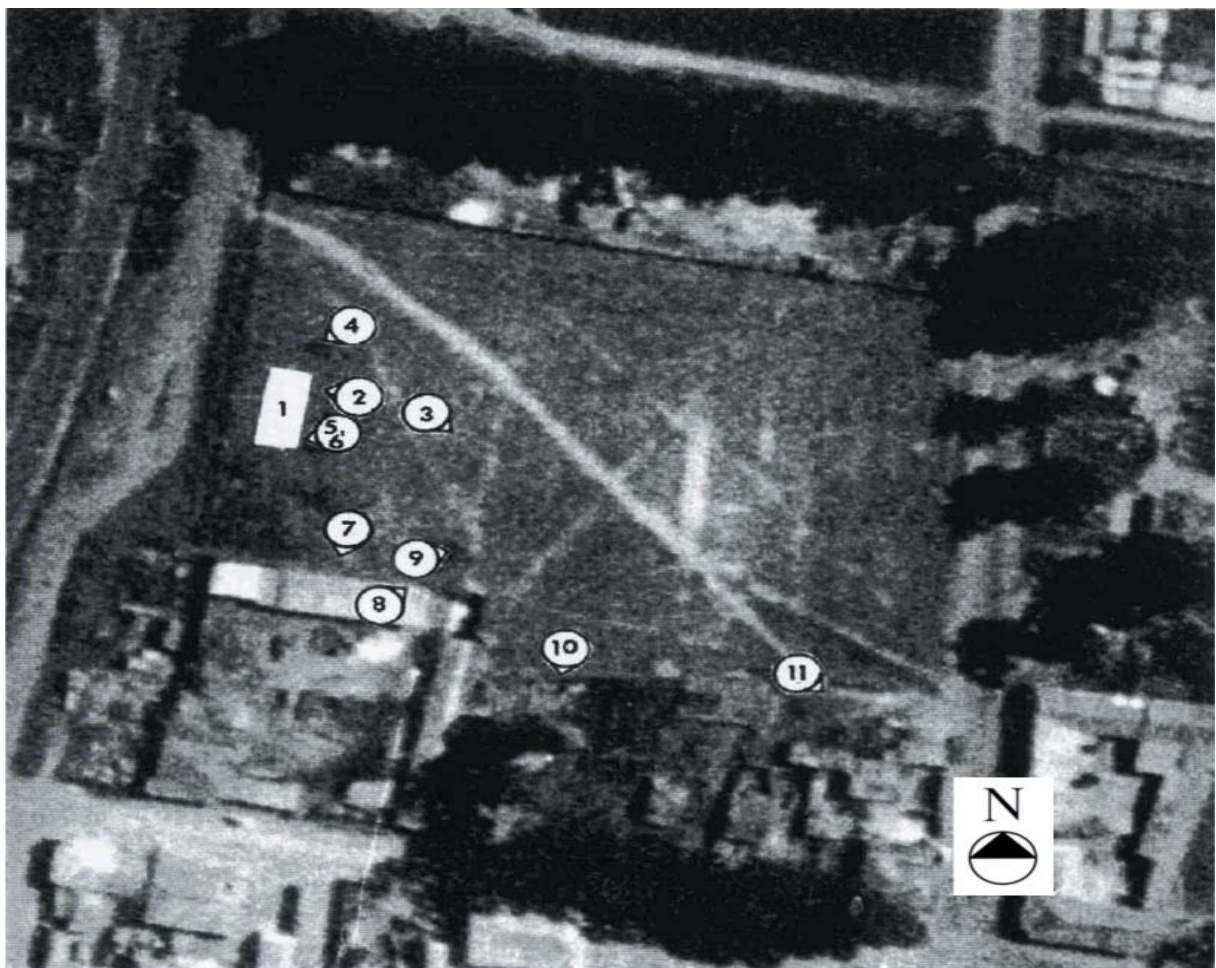


Figure 5
Recreation of the COP using a 1952 aerial photograph (Rodd 1998: 69).
No. 1 shows postulated position of the speakers podium, 2-11 are supporting views
referring too Eli Weinberg's photographs of the historic event.

This broad vision was coupled to an equally diverse programme, “a place in which a multiplicity of uses will occur, co-existing and complimenting each other” (FSPIT 1997). The report lays down a conceptual plan for a two-stage, international design competition. The first stage would be “open to all,” and would “call for conceptual designs for the area against a comprehensive brief” to be identified in terms of “community needs” (FSPIT 1997: 6). During this first stage, a parallel process was to be established, to allow “other disciplines” and, importantly, “communities who live and work in the area” to participate in the project and to “give expression to, the unique history of the site” (FSPIT 1997: 6). A series of performative events were to be staged in Kliptown to create “art works and performance pieces that convey their interpretation of the site” (FSPIT 1997: 6). Local artists and community groups were to be involved in this process, and local histories were to be recorded. A multi-disciplinary involvement was also intended to include research input from anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and historians, as well as performing and visual artists. These participatory events and research inputs were to be orchestrated as an “innovative” form of “public culture,” the results of which were to be included in the brief for the second stage of the design competition (FSPIT 1997: 9). Regrettably, these participatory intentions were never realised.

Defining conservation guidelines

The involvement of academics Prof. Hamilton and Prof. Bremner (both members of the FSPIT) had contributed to what I shall call a *socio-discursive* vision for Kliptown, one in which international prestige is co-joined to grass roots participation. This intention had the potential to spark a public awareness of the legacy of the FC, and a public discourse on the theme of human rights. Unfortunately, this vision was abandoned. In the meantime, however, a somewhat different although not incompatible agenda, was put forward by the NMC. The NMC’s contribution was formed around what I shall call a more *scientific-historical* emphasis on heritage concerns that was initiated by Rodd et al’s survey of the site (Rodd 1998) (Figure 5). This survey sought to establish the facts of the case: where the COP took place, what Kliptown would have looked like at that time, and, by inference, which aspects of the site constituted ‘authentic’ heritage. The survey comments on the status of buildings in Kliptown, especially along Union Street, which in many cases were rebuilt through time, so that the surrounding urban tissue would have been somewhat different at the time of the COP. It stated that “no old buildings of intrinsic architectural merit have been identified,” yet the desirability of preserving the “vibrant social and economic character of the area,” was noted (Rodd 1998: 77). This vibrant character can be experienced on Union Street, which is probably the oldest surviving ‘black’ retail strip in greater Johannesburg. Running in an east-west direction, Union Street borders the southern side of the open landscape associated with the COP. This retail strip is remarkable for the symbiotic relations that used to exist between formal and informal trade, where mostly black street traders would hug the pavements selling their wares in front of street-level shops, most of which were occupied by Indian shopkeepers (Figure 6).

The survey’s contextual considerations initiated discussions amongst NMC representatives, whose primary concern was to establish conservation guidelines for the area. Minutes of regional NMC meetings held over the period June 1998 to February 1999 demonstrate the contested and uncertain nature of this undertaking. “[T]he big issue is what are we trying to conserve,” and indeed, how to create a “tangible memory of an event which was not very tangible in the first place (NMC 1999a).” Union Street was identified as the only “sign of place” that was linked to FS, and it must be noted that written accounts of the COP have commonly identified the site as being the open ground behind the shops on Union Street (NMC 1999a). Union Street was thus considered to be the concrete trace of the COP. Debate then ensued as

to whether the NMC should be concerned with a “restoration [...] of certain buildings so as to conserve the street,” whether the “street-scape” should be conserved, or whether it is the general “ambience” of the area that must be preserved, rather than “actual buildings” (NMC 1999a). At a later meeting, these deliberations were complicated by the realisation that preserving Union Street might be construed as “celebrating poverty,” and the possible involvement of the local community in addressing this issue was debated (NMC 1999b). By October 1999 these discussions had produced a set of conservation guidelines and principles, which were later included as an annexure to the final competition brief.



Figure 6
Informal trade on Union Street (Photographs by author).

The competition brief

The next stage of the project is associated with the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) who came on board to manage developmental initiatives of Greater Kliptown. The competition brief, promoted by the JDA, was conceived as a national competition to be adjudicated in a single stage. The key element in this shift away from a prior commitment to a two-stage, international competition, was a project deadline that was established by the JDA and Blue IQ. Graeme Reid, who was previously a member of the FSPIT, and then later chief executive of the JDA, explained that 2005 was set as the public celebration for the opening of FS, a showcase for the achievements of Blue IQ (a Gauteng provincial public entity, involved with infrastructural development), and a date which was established for commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the 1955 COP.⁶ This deadline, it would seem, allowed little time for the complex administration of a two stage (let alone international) competition.

Section A of the competition documents explain that: “[t]he brief for Freedom Square is as open-ended and as non-prescriptive as possible. Such an approach is in keeping with

the participatory nature of the writing of the Freedom Charter” (JDA 2002: 2). Consequently, competitors are invited to “write their own brief,” and are asked to do so in the context of a one-stage competition, which privileges conceptual design, without any clear programmatic or aesthetic criteria (JDA 2002). In so doing, the commitment to social participation that was fought for in the early stages of this project is translated into an open-ended abstraction, which merely exists to affirm the arbitrary imaginings of the designer/architect, who is invited to draw on paper without any involvement, or guidance drawn from social players. The client, after all, was redefined as the JDA, who in this context, appeared to act as a development agency with a bag of money, but without clear ideas for their own initiative.⁷

The brief pays scarce attention to actual needs. Admittedly, this omission is remedied somewhat by section C, where possible functions are discussed. But the text is exceptionally vague, stating for example the need for “community development,” and “more housing” (JDA 2002: 17-18). These needs, which were inadequately researched and inadequately specified, “serve only to inspire an informed response from competitors” (JDA 2002: 19). Conservational requirements, by contrast, are better specified, hence FS “needs to be developed in relation to the adjacent shops in Union Street, nearby points of transportation [...] houses to the south [and] informal sports and meetings activities” (JDA 2002: 20). In particular, “[t]he role of Union Street needs to be acknowledged [and] [c]ognizance should be taken of the lively culture of informal trading which characterises the area adjoining the Square” (JDA 2002: 21). The brief also support a contextual approach to design, but the terms of this commitment are not clear.

Failure to clarify key questions of need, context and character, meant that the competition jury was being asked to adjudicate without clear assessment criteria, and were asked to do so in the context of a single stage, ideas-based competition, which was to commemorate an intangible event, on an equally indistinct site. It is therefore not surprising that debate as to appropriate design resolution were largely overlooked by the jury.

Comments of the jury

A total of 34 design entries were received, which were examined over two days in June 2002 (Competition Jury 2002: 2). Interviews with Jurors emphasised that the winning selection was unanimous, yet I heard differences of opinion as to the success of the final scheme. Jurors’ comments highlighted the fact that the winning scheme was chosen for its concepts and developmental intentions, whilst questions of architectural resolution were suspended because it was anticipated that the project would be refined through a further process of detailed design.⁸ The jurors’ written report sets out a list of “reservations” and “recommendations” with respect to the winning scheme. Problems of scale and architectural character were noted: “if not handled with greater sensitivity than is evident, the buildings may be out of scale, formalistic and inappropriate in the context of what Kliptown should aspire to become” (Competition Jury 2002: 7). Hence, “[t]he scale of the buildings around the square should be reduced [...] Serious consideration [should] be given to the design of these buildings and in particular to their height” (Competition Jury 2002: 8). No protocol was, however, established to ensure that these problems would be addressed. Key architectural considerations regarding programmatic requirement, urban context, architectural character and design resolution were left to the discretion of the client who, it would seem, was ill equipped to deal with these complex matters, especially given the fast-track deadlines that were chosen for this scheme.

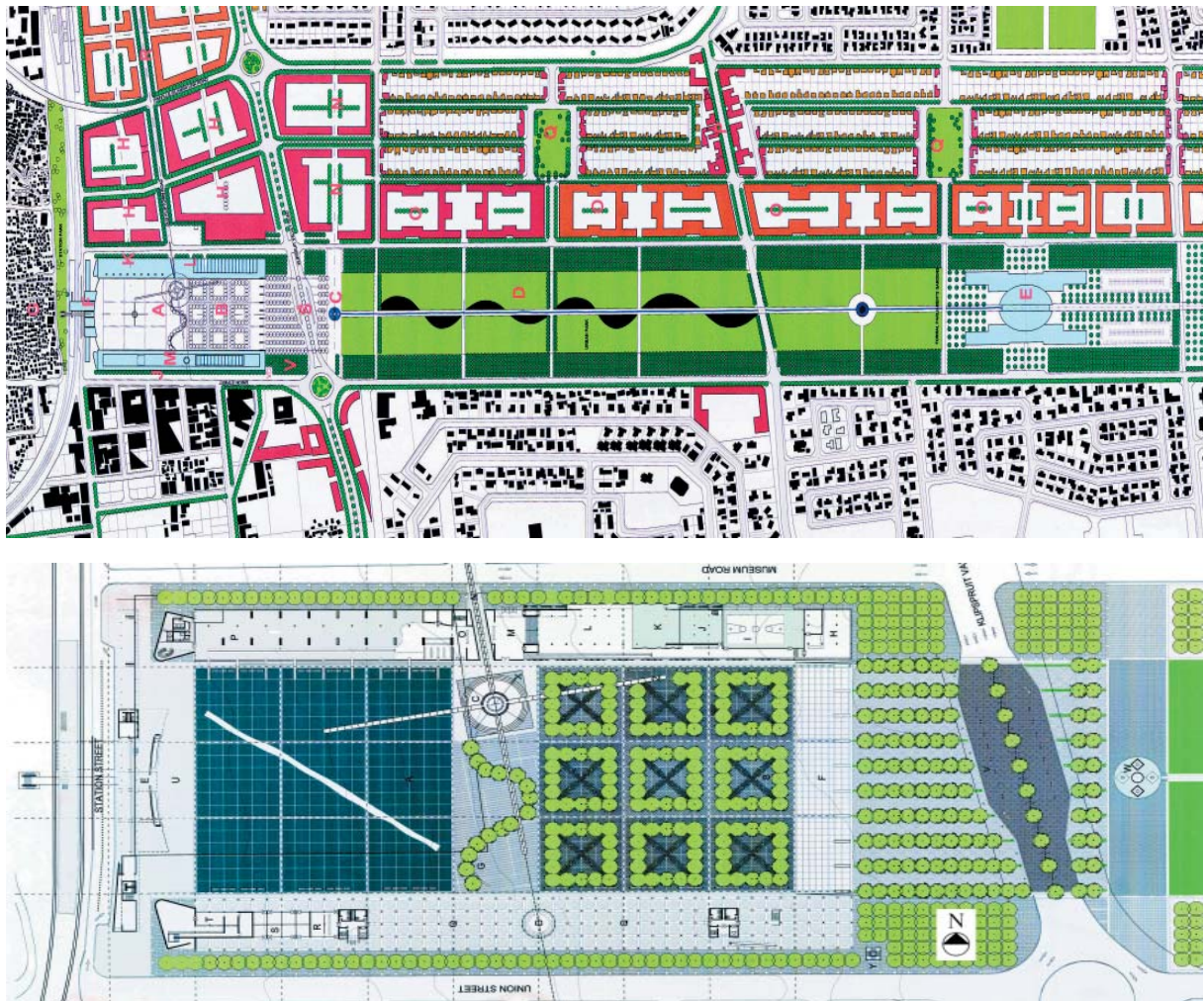


Figure 7
Urban Plan (above) and Floor Plan of FS (below), SM (Courtesy of SM).

The winning submission

The winning design by StudioMAS (SM) was a presentation of distinctive quality.⁹ Ten large A0 panels – comprising written text, sketches, photographic images and rendered drawings – detail a project that was unique in that it joined large-scale urban strategies with symbolic interventions. A key feature of this submission is the geometric grandeur of its vision. A Beaux Arts axis runs in an east-west direction along the Kliptown golf course, linking informal settlements on the west side of the railway tracks through to the N1 motorway in the east (Figure 7). This east-west axis is terminated by a relocated railway station in the west, and a proposed new South African Parliament complex to the east. It is unlikely, however, that either of these intended relocations will come to fruition. The golf course, which formerly used to double as an apartheid-style buffer strip between white and black urban areas, is to be redesigned as urban parkland, and provides formal gardens in front of the parliament. Three- and four-storey perimeter housing blocks line the northern side of the park, complementing existing housing situated to the south. This geometry projects into the FS precinct, formed from two long blocks of accommodation, defining the north and south borders of the site, the so-called North and South Structures (NS and SS) (Figure 7). The SS, a colonnaded arcade, provides a covered market for informal traders and replaces the old urban fabric on the northern side of Union

Street. The less permeable NS is positioned to the other side of the square, accommodating formal commercial and community functions. These two arms, with the intended train station positioned at its head, establish somewhat defensive boundaries to the historical site. The open space so formed is sub-divided into two open public squares (the Old Square and New Square), situated to the east and west of a cross-axis derived from the position of Old Kliptown Street. The competition jury were impressed by the visionary nature of this design, praising the scheme for “its bold scale and [...] its exemplary potential to change Soweto into a city” (Competition Jury 2002: 3). The scale of this vision would ultimately translate into the Kliptown Urban Design Framework, prepared by SM, a document which details infrastructural, environmental, housing and commercial development of greater Kliptown (SM 2003a).

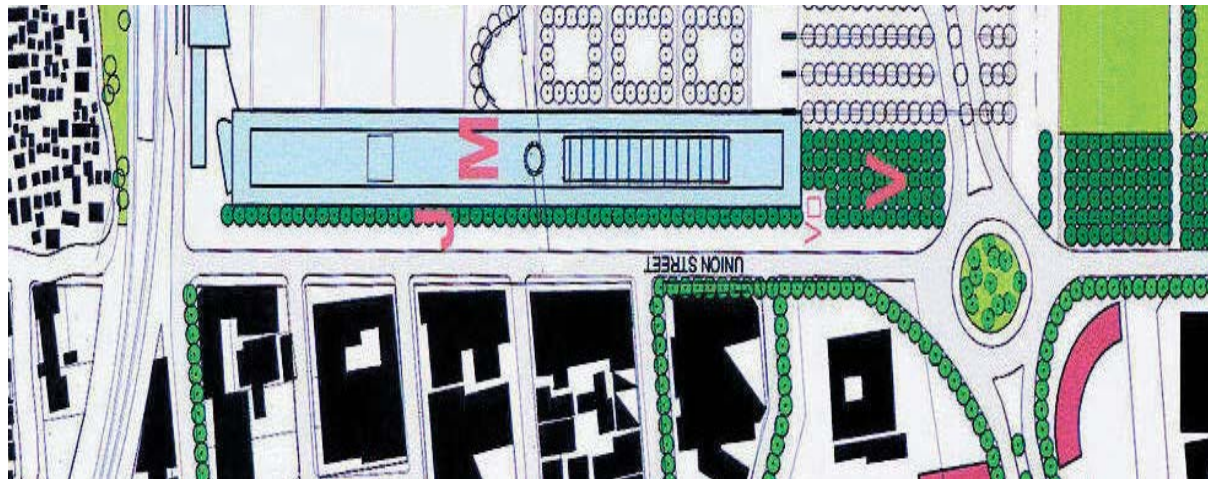


Figure 8
Close up of site plan showing relation of the SS to Union Street, SM (Courtesy of SM).

Contestations

The winning scheme was unveiled at a formal ceremony held in Kliptown on 26 June 2002, a date chosen to coincide with the 47th anniversary the COP. By this stage, Freedom Square had been officially renamed the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication (WSSD), in honour of the late ANC leader, Walter Sisulu. Construction commenced a year later, with a sod turning ceremony held in June 2003 (Sapa 2003: 2). Despite the recommendations of the jurors’ report, the diagrammatic nature of this design was frozen from the start, and the built project suffers from inadequate design development, as well as inattention to issues of scale and programme. The post-competition period was marked by a series of conflicts that emerged between the differing interests of various parties, which in most cases only resulted in small, incremental adjustments to the overriding order of the scheme.

Perhaps the most significant contestation was with respect to the destruction of Union Street. In SM’s competition drawing, it may be seen that the long SS replaces the existing shops that line the northern side of Union Street (Figure 8). The erasure of Union Street was in direct contravention of conservation guidelines drawn up the NMC – guidelines which were included as an annexure to the competition brief. The architects submitted their design presentation to the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) on 1 August 2002 (SAHRA 2002). The SAHRA archive contains a series of alarmed submissions from members who were strongly opposed to the heritage implications of the design. Individual submissions were collated into a formal written response. On the question of political and architectural identity, the report states that “the use of the ancient Greek symbolism for the concept of democracy in the design

is not considered relevant to the national identity of South Africans” (SAHRA 2002).¹⁰ A key recommendation was that “[t]he overall scale of the proposal should be revisited to be more in keeping with the understated nature of the surrounding area” (SAHRA 2002).

The architects prepared a response to SAHRA’s criticism in the form of a 46-page report, which describes important changes to the original competition design (SM 2003b). The built project largely corresponds to the amendments that are detailed here. The resulting redesign for the SS is now set back from Union Street, with the inclusion of trees to line the eastern part of Union Street (Figure 9). Historic retail stores of Jada, Takolia and Epstein are preserved, together with newly created urban infill which is built to accommodate informal trade in the area between Jada and Tokolia. The SS also flies, uninterrupted, above these low-lying structures, in a late attempt to accommodate fragments of old Union Street (Figure 10). Jada, Takolia and Epstein are respectively reused as a museum, food market and opportunity for informal trade.

Further perspectives on the redevelopment of Union Street were provided by ‘Indian’ traders in the area. I interviewed Unice Jada, Rashid Jada, Abdul Samad Takolias (who prefers to be called Sam) and their counsellor Mohamed Saeed Cachalia, as well as Indra Hansraj, the former owner of Epsteins. From them I heard the distressing story of how the traders of Union Street were forced to vacate their shops. With the exception of Epstein, the shopkeepers along Union Street were renting their shops, a pattern from apartheid laws which had prohibited ‘non-whites’ from purchasing land. Without security of tenure, the traders found themselves in a vulnerable position, as their interests were not accommodated by the intended development. Jada and Takolia approached Cachalia, an attorney and councillor with the city of Johannesburg, to assist them in discussions with the Joburg Property Company and the JDA. A series of meetings were held in an attempt to resolve the matter and, unfortunately, negotiators for the project “tried to bully Sam and Jada [...] to victimise them [...] they were told to go,” Cachalia said.¹¹ But, the shopkeepers stood their ground, and eventually a deal was struck, whereby new land was made available along Klipspruit Valley Road, at an attractive price, and new premises were built at the traders expense.¹²

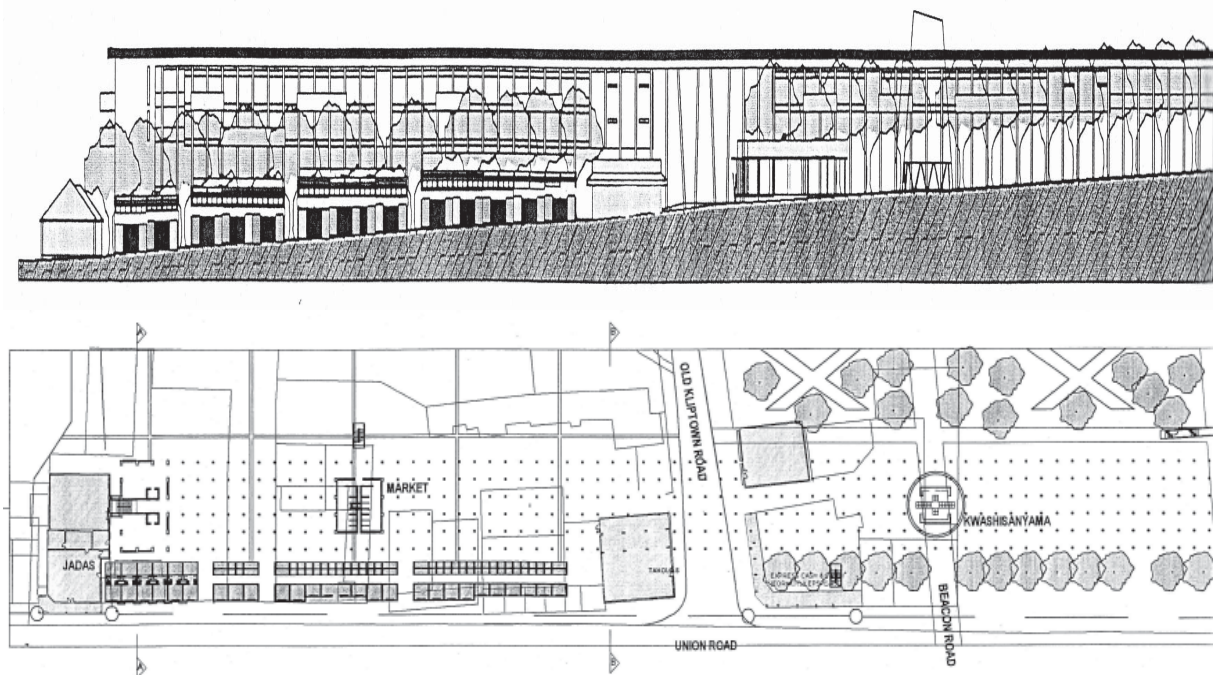


Figure 9
Revised elevation and plan of the SS, accommodating existing shop stores, shown in yellow from left to right: Jada, Tokolia and Epstein. SM (SM 2003b: 16).

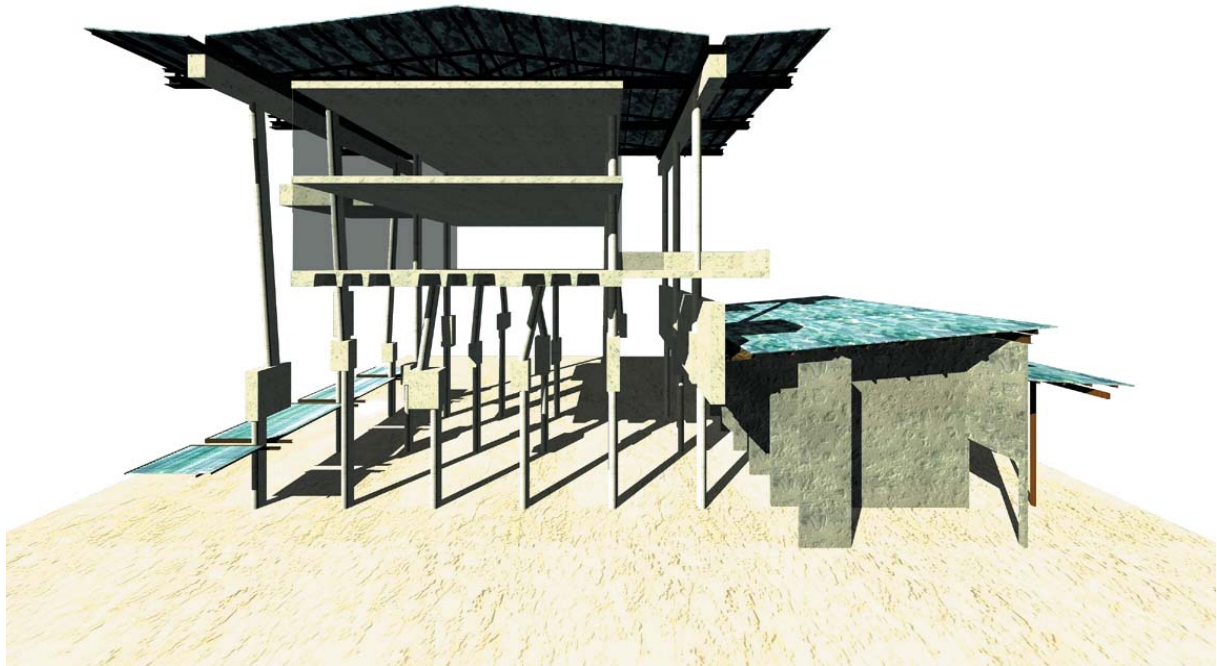


Figure 10
Sectional model shown relation between the SS and existing shop stores along Union Street, SM (SM 2003b: 27).

Sam was outspoken and emotional, explaining that he and the others had been trading in the area for some 75 years, only to face the irony of forced eviction in the post-apartheid era:

I was 12 years old when the COP took place. The cops raided our shop. Nelson Mandela hid in our house, and my father protected him. Walter Sisulu hid in Jada’s house [...] At the end of the day I will give my keys to Nelson Mandela, and walk away [...] we were treated badly.¹³



Figure 11
Hansraj showed me old photographs of his family and their shop (Photographs by author).

I asked Sam for his views on the redevelopment of Union Street, to which he replied, “[i]t was a disaster. The road should never have been destroyed. We were never taken into consideration.”¹⁴ Unice and Rashid Jada, on the other hand, seemed pragmatic, explaining that they were initially upset and did not wish to move, but after three years of negotiation “we got what we wanted.”¹⁵ “You know you can’t fight the giants, you have to work with them,”

Unice said.¹⁶ Hansraj's story is a little different, as he claims to have been the only true land owner amongst the traders of Union Street.¹⁷ And it was with great pride that he showed me old photographs of his family and their shop (Figure 11). Yet, he too was forced to leave. "We were unhappy to go, but there was no choice [but] in the end we got a good deal."¹⁸

I was left to ponder the implications of this unnecessary conflict which, due to persistent and defiant negotiations, was eventually resolved in a manner that was beneficial to the traders. Yet the process was not without consequences. Barry Friedman, one of the project managers for this job, explained that the protracted negotiations between the client and the traders of Union Street caused awkward delays and unexpectedly added to the extent of the project because new shop premises had to be built.¹⁹ In the case of Jada and Badat, the last shopkeepers to relocate, early construction operations were forced to manoeuvre around the obtrusive presence of these shops, which could not be demolished until the negotiations were resolved. Friedman also told me about further unexpected conflicts which delayed the building programme, especially with the informal taxi operators who had been using the square but had not been accommodated in the original plan. These episodes could have been avoided had local voices been included in the formation of the design brief. The destruction of the historic fabric along Union Street, in particular, was completely unnecessary, especially given the large extent of unoccupied land available in the area. On a programmatic level, it makes little sense to erase existing shops, only to replace them with a costly, new retail market. It is also alarming to note that the winning scheme was the only competition entry to have proposed, what amounted to, a systematic destruction of Union Street.

Programme, scale and need

The functional programme of the WSSD, as it has been realised in the final scheme, is governed by a tight financial logic which privileges sustainable, rental space. The JDA's strategic intention has been to inject a lump sum of developmental capital into Kliptown, in the hopes that this investment will boost a sustainable, local economy. Bluntly put, the idea has been to kick-start and to bail out. Accordingly, the WSSD has to be self-sustaining, and there are good reasons why this should be the case. Yet this approach has also resulted in the marginalisation of social needs. This can be seen in the final programming of the WSSD, which is dominated, almost exclusively, by rentable space, and where social functions have been excluded. SM's competition design showed a balance of commercial, tourist and social elements intended for the local community. In the completed project, however, the only social element is the community hall – a space which may be hired out for various functions. Training spaces, sports facilities, a police station and community advice centre that were included in the original design have been removed. Instead, the completed project accommodates a down-sized museum, various small shops at ground level, banking facilities, an enlarged tourist centre positioned as the primary gateway to Soweto, conference facilities, as well as an intended restaurant and hotel. The 'flexible' nature of the building superstructure, and the dominance of generic leaseable, commercial space resembles the investment logic of a conventional shopping mall. In what way does this development improve upon the commercial logic that inspired the earlier shopping malls that, scandalously, were envisaged for this site?²⁰ The first shopping mall design intended for this site, in fact, proposed a unique (or at least unique for a mall-type development), mixed programme, which included commercial, tourist, as well as various social functions. This early commercial design included more social programme than can be found in the completed project. It remains to be seen whether the chosen programme will be viable or not: for instance it remains to be seen whether high-class conference facilities in Kliptown will be used.

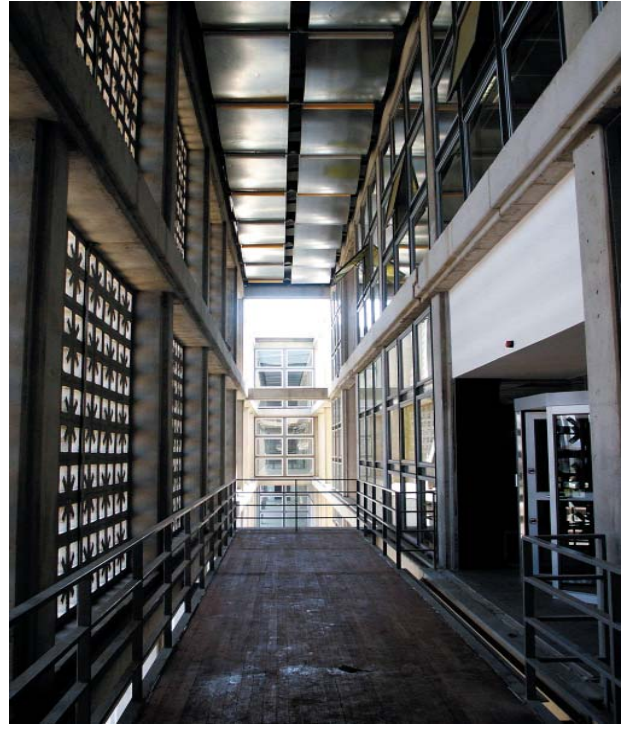


Figure 12
Internal spaces of the NS (Photographs by author).

Wandering around the upper levels of the NS, one is amazed by the sheer scale of the interior spaces (Figure 12). This is architecture ‘on-the-loose,’ unencumbered by the discipline of ‘actual’ needs. One gets a similar feeling in the informal market of the SS, with its lofty, cathedral-like expanse of wasted space, and one cannot but wonder why the informal traders could not have been accommodated in a more modest fashion (Figure 13). The barren quality of open space positioned at the centre of this scheme stands in contrast to the slick commercial image that was used to promote it (Figure 14-15).

The windswept terrain of the old square, with its seemingly endless hard paved surface, devoid of places to sit or opportunity for shade from the harsh sun, is quite uninhabitable, and one struggles to imagine how this space might be used by the residents of Kliptown on a daily basis.

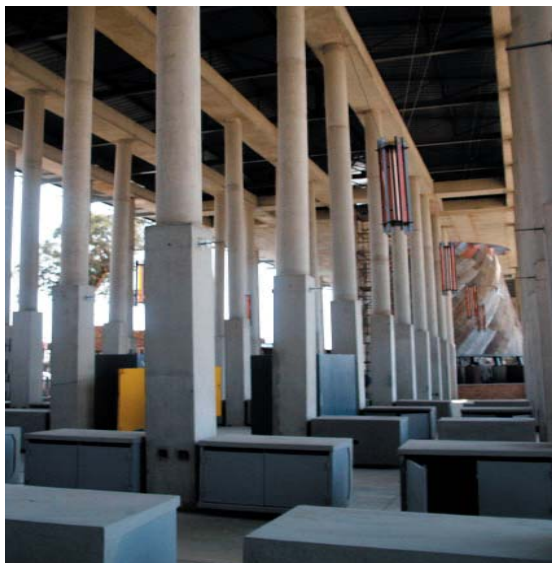


Figure 13
Cathedral like expanse of the SS (Photographs by author).



Figure 14
A perspective view of the Old Square which formed part of the original competition drawings, SM (Courtesy SM).



Figure 15
The Old Square (Photographs by author).

The excessive scale of the superstructure stands in marked contrast to the needy social life of surrounding Kliptown. A detailed 106-page survey of the Greater Kliptown area was conducted by Manto Management (MM), aimed at identifying “priority needs” (MM 2004: 3).²¹ Since this report was only commissioned late in April 2004, however, the public money that paid for this study had no influence upon the design for the WSSD. The report details numerous practical programmes that could begin to address local needs, and it is a great shame that these recommendations were not considered in the design for the WSSD. For example, a health and wellness centre, a community advice centre, and educational facilities of some kind could, indeed should have been included in the WSSD. Furthermore, these social facilities could have been afforded had the design been less extravagant in other areas. The running costs could have been cross-subsidised by the predominance of leaseable space. Instead, the JDA’s KDBF has effectively divorced economic and infrastructural development from social development:

a policy where social development is marginalised under sub-project 6.1, which merely flags the need for “a long-term social development strategy,” together with sub-project 6.2 which identifies “[n]umerous interim programmes or quick wins” (JDA 2004: 16).²²

Concluding remarks

The FS wished to memorialise the COP – a heritage site that was set to commemorate the local, national and international significance of the FC. A design was required that would mediate between local, national and international concerns. The multicultural history and complex, hybrid character of the area, was rich in spatial and architectural clues for how this intention could be fulfilled. Yet, despite his remarkable fact, the complex qualities of the site, or so it would seem, did not provide a clear perception of ‘locale’ – be that institutional, geographical or symbolic. The perceived lack of a clear context teased successive imaginations for the square. This paper has demonstrated how urban professionals wrestled to form a clear directive for the square. The developmental process culminated in a competition brief which, in effect, relinquished responsibility for the scheme, inviting participants to draw on paper without the adequate specification of actual needs. The abstractions of the brief produced a winner design that has sought to impose its own architectural geometry, a gesture which has shown scarce regard for the historic character of the site – especially the historic fabric along Union Street, which was treated as a tabula rasa. Regrettably, the architecture of this project did not establish a genuine conversation with the urban and socio-historic nature of Kliptown, and as such, the project has failed to capture the participatory spirit of the FC. Ultimately, the imposing quality that informs this design has produced a physical geography that is divided against itself, and the role of architecture at this heritage site remains contested and uncertain.

Notes

1. This paper is reworked from the author’s PhD thesis (*White Skin, Black Masks: On Questions of African Identity in Post-Apartheid Public Architectural Design, 1994 – 2006*) which examines questions of African identity in post-Apartheid public designs (Noble 2007).
2. The name ‘Soweto’ was officially adopted as late as 1963, yet the residential areas of present day Soweto may be traced back to Orlando, which was laid out in 1935.
3. Graeme Reid, Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) chief executive and then member of the Johannesburg City Council, remembers that developmental rights were sold to the developer in question, who in turn sold these rights to SS (Interview with Reid, Johannesburg, September 2005). The architects who worked on this option confirmed their involvement with SS and Irvine Khoza, of NI (Interviews with Patric McInerney, of Meyer Pienaar Architects, Johannesburg, November 2005 and December 2005. Interview with Louis Peens of Louis Peens Architects, Johannesburg, January 2006). George Ellis, then development and leasing director for Stocks and Stocks Properties, recalls that SS had acquired developmental rights for the site, and that some business arrangement had been established with Khoza, but was unclear as to exact dates or further details (Interview with Ellis, Johannesburg, February 2006). I also tried to secure an interview with Irvine Khoza, formerly associated with NI, and now Chairman of the Premier Soccer League, but without success.
4. The FSPIT was a mixed committee, with representatives from the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, National Monuments Council, the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, and two Wits University academics, namely Prof. Caroline Hamilton (Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Science, GSHSS) and Prof. Lindsey Bremner (Department of Architecture), as well as various representatives associated with Kliptown
5. Interview, Johannesburg, (November 2005).
6. Interview, Johannesburg, (September 2005).
7. This observation, however, is not the full story, because the JDA’s objectives are clarified

- elsewhere in “Joburg2030,” which sets out a thirty-year vision for greater Johannesburg – placing economic objectives ahead of social-service delivery (City of Johannesburg 2002). A similar emphasis is also apparent in the updated Kliptown Development Business Plan (KDBP) which speaks the language of international tourism and sustainable business investment, but where “social development” gets marginalised (JDA 2004: 16).
8. This expectation was in keeping with requirements of the competition documents which reserved the right for the competition administrator – in consultation with the JDA project board – to modify the terms of the winning brief (JDA 2002: 3), a provision which suggests that the final design would be clarified at a later stage, with input from the client.
 9. Further discussion of some of the other schemes that were submitted to the design competition is provided by Bremner (2004) and Noble (2007).
 10. Criticism of the reliance upon ‘Greek symbolism’, was presumably made with respect to architects competition drawings, which elaborates upon their choice of a square grid motif for the paving of the Old and the New Square. SM explain “that the grid evokes the central principle of Greek democracy, isonomea, meaning equality, equal distribution, equilibrium, balance, equality of political rights” (SM 2002: dwg 3). And possibly, this criticism also refers, in a more general sense, to the neo-classical like geometry that underpins this design.
 11. Interview with Cachalia, Johannesburg, (November 2005).
 12. Heads of Agreement between City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality herein represented by the City of Joburg Property Company (proprietary) limited (council) and Jada’s Economic Stores (proprietary) limited (Jada) registration no. 61/00509/07. Kliptown, Jada’s Economic Stores.
 13. Interview with ‘Sam’ Takolias, Kliptown, (October 2005).
 14. Ibid.
 15. Interviews, Kliptown, (October 2005).
 16. Ibid.
 17. Interview, Kliptown, (October 2005).
 18. Ibid.
 19. Interview, Johannesburg, (October 2005).
 20. The project at Kliptown was developed in conjunction with an impressive set of consultative protocols, and a commitment to local economic empowerment. The consultative process (managed by Nomi Muthialu Associates), however, did not, and could not have altered the privilege status of rental-type space at the WSSD and, as such, the architects original design and the JDA’s programmatic intentions for the square were the ‘given’ parameter around which more particular, contentious ‘bread and butter’ issues were debated.
 21. This report highlights many important aspects, for instance the predominance of youth (65% within the age of 15-30 years), most of whom lack adequate education (84% of respondents were not engaged in any form of education), as well as problems of unemployment (70%), poor self-esteem (57%), high levels of violence against women (rated as the highest risk by 73% of female respondents), high levels of drug and alcohol abuse (rated as the main challenge facing men by 73% of the male respondents), and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS (57%).
 22. Nomi Muthialu Associates (NMA) were appointed by the JDA to look at social development. Tamara Parker (NMA) explained that 56 projects were originally identified by the needs assessment, attention to which would have required a budget of some 32 million Rand. However, of the total 280 million Rand budget for Kliptown, only two million rand was allocated by the JDA for social programmes, and therefore social development had to be restricted to five short, and six long-term projects. Yet, none of these projects are included in the WSSD. Interview, Johannesburg, (November 2004).

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