

# introduction

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**introduction and overview of the study**

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# introduction

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**We are all potentially handicapped.  
Whether or not this develops into actuality  
is partially determined by our environment.**

Kenneth Bayes & Sandra Francklin (1971: 9)

## 1.1 Introduction

Pretoria's central business district (CBD) is filled with unlimited potential (Wiggin, 2009: 7). Pretoria CBD is a place where the people own the sidewalks. However, the changes due to crime and overcrowding has taken this ownership away from the public sector and given it to the private sector. Security gates, palisades and metal detectors have taken away access to foyer spaces and the space in front of buildings that used to belong to the public. Add to that the uneven pavements, grand staircases and lack of texture and colour guidance; the city is no longer available to all residents.

Accessible architecture in Pretoria, the lack of community facilities in the Burger's Park precinct and the potential of vacant and underutilised sites are the reasons for this study. The proposed site, on the corner of Andries and Visagie Street, is in the ideal position to help address the issues mentioned. (Illustration 1.1)

Inclusive design in architecture will be investigated and an exclusively inclusive approach will be taken to allow for complete accessibility to the **Opportunity Platform**.

An **Opportunity Platform** is a building that provides and facilitates the necessary resources for a community to prosper. It facilitates much needed community programmes and facilities such as literacy and skills training and access to books, the Internet and other media; it is a combination of a library and community centre.

## 1.2 Opportunity Platform

### 1.2.1 What is an Opportunity Platform?

The proposed programme is that of an Opportunity Platform. An Opportunity Platform is a building that addresses the needs of the community by providing space and resources. The Opportunity Platform is a complex programme incorporating a library and community centre.

The proposed Opportunity Platform consists of 3 pillars that together aim to provide a platform of opportunities to the community of Burger's Park.

The Opportunity Platform is based on the following three pillars:

- Gather
- Learn
- Play

### 1.2.2 The three pillars of the Opportunity Platform

#### a) Gather

Providing spaces for gatherings. These spaces could be dedicated spaces and/or multi-functional space that promotes and facilitates the congregation of either large or small groups of people.

#### b) Learn

Providing spaces for learning. These spaces are dedicated spaces and/or multi-functional space that promotes and facilitates education and skills development such as reading and writing, and other basic skills development with the aid of resources provided in the spaces or elsewhere in the building.

### c) Play

Providing spaces for playing. These spaces could be dedicated spaces and/or multi-functional spaces that promote and facilitate recreational activities, of either large or small groups of people. These recreational activities can be of an educational nature.

The Gather, Learn and Play principles are derived from the core needs of the development. The Burger's Park Precinct is rich in community programmes and committees, which are in need of permanent or temporary facilities and resources to help facilitate these programmes.

## 1.3 Problem statement

When designing, accessibility should be an integral component of the process and should continuously be used in decision making. Accessibility of the built environment is as important as climatic responses in the current time. However, the inclusivity of buildings in Pretoria is questionable. An access audit and exploration of possible ways to make inclusive environments an intrinsic part of architecture should be explored and implemented to promote change.

Current design trends do not reflect the necessary inclusivity that is required to make public places and spaces accessible. Imrie and Hall (2001:4) compiled a study of architects' impressions of the future users of their architecture and they state the result as: "...architects' images of their users are generalised, imprecise and stereotyped." To understand the user as a diverse group of people, and then to respond accordingly to create a building that can be "...used to the greatest extent possible, ...by everyone." (Preiser & Ostroff, 2001: 15).

Accessibility of public places is a South African Constitutional Right. Equality is the basis of what democracy stands for; including equality for disabled persons (South Africa, 1996: [5]). Current legislation (SANS 10400-S) makes provision for compulsory application of accessible features for the disabled members of society. However, this alone is insufficient to render the built environment inclusive.

By setting up design guidelines and creating awareness the inclusivity of Pretoria can be remarkably improved. By designing an inclusive public building, a precedent for future developments will be set.

## 1.4 Dissertation topic

The point of departure for this dissertation is neither a site nor programme, but a specific theoretical approach to design with the built environment serving as the inception.

This dissertation's topic deals with an understanding of inclusivity in the built environment and the need for it in our current context. As well as, how to incorporate and use the accompanying principles as design informants and generators in the design of public architecture such as the proposed Opportunity Platform.

## 1.5 Research questions

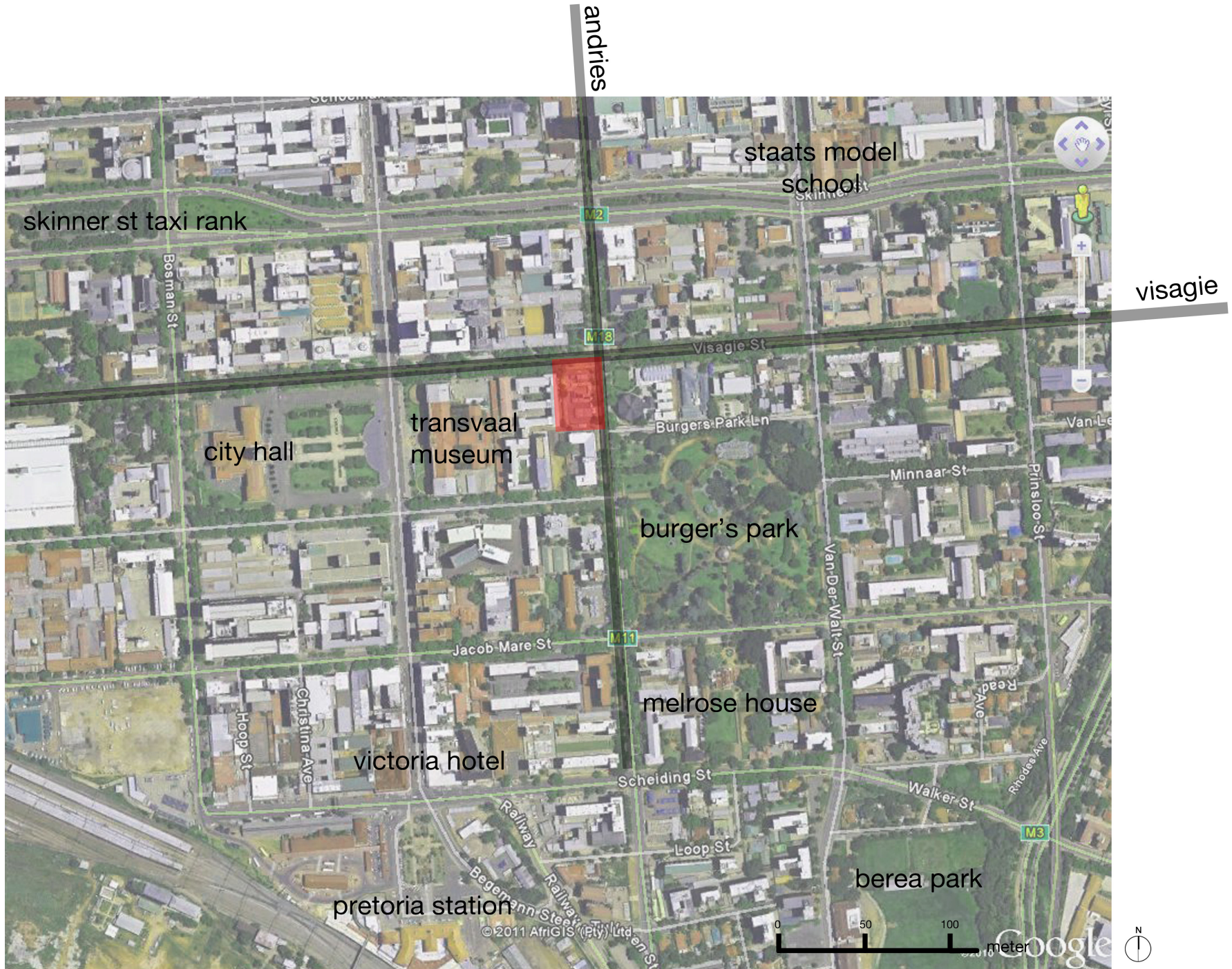
1. What is inclusive design (based upon existing literature)?
2. What is the status quo of public buildings in terms of inclusive design?
3. How can inclusive design be used as an informant in architecture?
4. How does inclusive architecture and the typology of a library / community centre manifest as an Opportunity Platform?

## 1.6 Aim

The aim of this dissertation is to illustrate the relevance of access within the built environment. It is argued that the attitudinal and environmental barriers that disabled people experience in society could be diminished by an appropriate design response.

The objective is to demonstrate that certain accessibility factors could be used as the foundation and design driver; especially in public architecture.

The difficulty in designing for the wide spectrum of disability is that each disability has its own needs. The intent is to design, to the greatest extent possible, to assist all persons (able-bodied included) in navigating around the building and using it as independently as possible. Should disabilities or impairments not be directly designed for, the environment will be easily adaptable.



illus. 1.1. Location of proposed site highlighted in red, with main landmarks indicated

## 1.7 Assumptions

- The current owner of the proposed site is willing to sell it and it is acquired by the prospective client through a deed of sale.
- That the existing programmes on site, the hairdresser and car wash, will have relocated by the time this project commences.
- The Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality will approve any zoning applications due to discrepancies of the current zoning.
- All funding mechanisms of the client are presumed sufficient for the proposed development.
- That all Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality Development strategies and the proposed framework mentioned within this document are and will be implemented as planned.

## 1.8 Site

### 1.8.1 Choice of site

455 Andries Street (Illustration 1.1) is located within walking distance of Pretoria Station and is well serviced by vehicular routes, busses and taxis. Many people (pedestrians mainly) frequent Burger's Park, opposite the site as a place of rest or to enjoy their lunch. The area is known for its residential character, but many offices and institutional and museum buildings do exist. Also certain buildings of historical and cultural value are located in the precinct. Burger's Park is the main green space in the precinct south of Skinner Street.

The precinct has a mixed use programme, with residential, office, cultural/heritage and commercial buildings mixed throughout the city blocks. Some vacant and underdeveloped stands do exist, and these detract from the character and safety of the precinct. The proposed site is currently occupied by a car wash and hairdresser, which is not ideal as the site now has an undefined urban edge. This contributes to the suitability of the site for redevelopment.

### 1.8.2 Location of site

The site is located on the corner of Andries and Visagie Streets, Pretoria CBD, Burger's Park Precinct. The address is 455 Andries Street, Pretoria. Refer to Illustration 1.1 for location drawing, site highlighted in red.

## 1.9 The client

The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) is the primary client, and the operations of the library and community centre will be in conjunction with the National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS). The main objective of the NCLIS is to "provide optimal access to relevant information to every person in a cost effective manner" (Department of Arts and Culture, 2010). The vision of the NCLIS is to place South Africa as one of the most educated populations as well as to promote literacy. The funding for the development will be taken from the Community Library Services Fund as established in 1997, Trevor Manuel (Department of Arts and Culture, 2010). Management will be by the NCLIS.

## 1.10 The design brief

The Opportunity Platform must address all programmatic requirements as stated in 1.2 above. The Design must be contextual and must address the urban problems identified while at the same time addressing the accessibility of public architecture in Pretoria. The building must allow for social interaction and community participation.

## 1.11 Research methodology

- Literature review of inclusive design theory
- Critical analysis of the existing practice based upon knowledge gained from the literature review.
- Contextual analysis by mapping and visits
- Study of precedents that are examples of both inclusive design and library and community centres.

## 1.12 Definitions

### Impairment

The result of a range of conditions such as age and trauma. Impairments can become a disability due to environmental and social barriers the persons may encounter in the built environment and products they use (Design Council, 2010; Holmes-Siedle, 1996: 4).

## **Disability**

Persons who are not able to partake in normal community life as an equal to other members of society, due to environmental and social (attitudinal) barriers. Disabled people have a range of impairments; some are even temporary (Lefebvre, 1991:196; Priestley, 2006:21).

## **Universal design**

“A social movement primarily concerned with making products, environments and communication systems usable to the greatest extent possible by the widest spectrum of users” (Imrie & Hall, 2001:14). It aims to include the needs of most disabilities, to make access for all possible without assistance (Imrie & Hall 2001:15; Adaptive Environments, 2010).

## **Inclusive design**

The focus lies on the inclusion of disabled people’s design needs to allow them access to environments and usable products, regardless of their “...age, physique and range of ability” (Imrie & Hall 2001:2). The main focus is on independently usable products and objects; free and independent navigation.

## **Inclusion / inclusivity**

Refers to the inclusive design paradigm shift where society has to adapt to facilitate people that have impairments or disabilities; the emphasis moves away from the differentness of the impaired person (Adaptive Environments, 2010).

## **Environmental accessibility**

Accessibility to the built environment and communication. It is the adaption of cities, buildings, roads and paths to allow a many persons to use them, as well as the use of technological advances to assist them (Adaptive Environments, 2010).

## **Social / Attitudinal Barrier**

Many people in society avoid contact or act in a pejorative manner towards people with impairments. These acts are the social barriers that disabled people experience (Design Council, 2010). These barriers often exist due to emphasis on their impairments.

## **1.13 Outline of study**

The structure of this document is based on the process of investigation that has been followed. The theoretical investigation is positioned in the beginning and is accompanied by the empirical investigation to serve as the foundation of the study. It is followed by the site and context and precedent studies combined with the theoretical investigation form the design generators. Finally, this is followed by the technical resolution.

### **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **Chapter 2 Theoretical investigation**

### **Chapter 3 Access Audit (Empirical investigation)**

### **Chapter 4 Context (Framework and Site)**

### **Chapter 5 Precedent studies**

### **Chapter 6 Design approach (Conceptual approach)**

### **Chapter 7 Design**

### **Chapter 8 Technical investigation**

### **Chapter 9 Conclusion**