Urban interventions: approach to urban regeneration in South Africa since 1994

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Abstract: The discussion on our urban challenges are in part more reflections based on a body of work concluded in Johannesburg and Pretoria over the last 15 years. The paper will attempt to provide a partial representation of the spatial realities evident in our cities, of urban development and also some of its implementation. We have come to understand that our South African urban environments are fraught with tensions and disjunctions; places that require a broader in-depth understanding of its inner working, integrating on varied levels and scales with its urban form and also involving its citizens to result a clearer way forward. Questionable is if current thinking on urban planning and development has over the past fifteen years not expanded design principles applied prior to 1994, and that our cities have still not recognised that they are places of hope for millions of urban migrants.

Keywords: urban regeneration; street trader markets; informal urban users; public space; civic architecture; taxi ranks; Gauteng; Johannesburg; Pretoria.

URBAN DIVERSITY

Clean!
Clean of what?
When a blind beggar sits at a street corner
and strums his battered guitar
and sings
"Though I'm blind
My soul I can see."
    Oswald Mtshali (Swilling, Simone & Khan 2003:220)

Swilling, Simone & Khan (2003:220) use this poem by Oswald Mtshali – written about Eloff Street during the apartheid era – in their article 'The Limits of Governing African Cities in a Context of Globalisation and Complexity' to illustrate the illusions of order created by that system.

The poem suggests that the blind are better able to see the soul of the city, better equipped to see through the veil of deception created by segregated planning. The poem not only questions the illusion of seemingly considered agreement, but brings into sharp relief the principles and aims that have shaped modern, orthodox planning.

In my view our cities are still helpless to stem decay, or transform themselves, primarily due to our persistent attachment to forms of urban modernity that originated in a European and American context. These cannot be compared to the cultural, political and economic realities shaping African cities today. The problem with the imported prescriptions for achieving urban modernity is that they imply a simplistic, linear conception of urban development that must suppress the inherent tensions in our cities.

One understands that, as is the case with most African cities, South African urban environments are fraught with tensions and disjunctions; places that require a broader in-depth understanding of their inner working, integrating on varied levels and scales with their urban form and also involving their citizens to result in a clearer way forward.

I do not profess to understand all the complexities of our cities, nor do I possess a clear sense of direction forward when addressing a considered African perspective. Over the past 15 years I have come to hold the perspective that the 'city' can be defined as a man made ecosystem that requires much diversity to sustain itself. The diversity inherent to cities has developed organically over time, and the varied components are interdependent in complex ways.

The more niches for diversity of life and livelihoods, the greater the city's carrying capacity for life. Many

small and obscure components – easily overlooked by superficial observation or one-dimensional consideration – can be vital to the whole, far out of proportion to their own tininess of scale or aggregate quantities. In urban ecosystems, the level of inter-dependencies of components is vulnerable and fragile, easily disrupted or destroyed. This principal of complexity has been ignored and controlled by apartheid planning, destroying the natural development of our cities, curtailing diversity and a sense of interdependence.

It is questionable if current thinking on urban planning and development is not still expanding, delivering and regenerating via singular means, linear in approach, rationalised to achieve maximum numbers of success. Have we truly recognised that our cities are places of hope for millions of urban migrants who view the city as the greatest opportunity to exchange with others? That they are places that enable exchange of information, friendship, material goods, culture, knowledge, insight, skills, and also exchange of emotional, psychological and spiritual support?

FIGURE 1: View of the Johannesburg city centre from Diepkloof, Soweto. Photograph by George Steinmetz, first published in National Geographic, September 2005.

NON-URBAN, NON-RURAL ENVIRONMENTS

Johannesburg and Pretoria (in Greater Tshwane), not unlike other cities in South Africa and other major cities in the developing world, have become fields of violent contest between extreme wealth and extreme poverty, between luxury and subsistence, excess and need. The image used as cover for Clive Chipkin's book 'Johannesburg Transition: Architecture and Society from 1950', (2008) taken from Diepkloof, Soweto overlooking the three main slime dumps edging Nasrec and the World Cup Final Stadium, also looks towards the Johannesburg inner city skyline (Figure 1). The image captures the near sinister uncomfortableness that many call their urban home. The city on the hill is a near unreachable distance away, buffered from Soweto by a belt of mining land.

It is ironic that our search for gold has shaped both positive and negative faces of that city. It enabled its establishment and was used to create an insurmountable division between its citizens.

South Africa's highly polarized cities display extraordinary contrasts in wealth and poverty, continuously controlling movement, conspicuously performed on the basis of exclusivity. A frightening sign is to see heavily gated and armed luxury apartment blocks or country-club type developments being erected next to shacks. All too often, there are reports of escalating crime and violence. Extreme pressures due to urban migration expand into violent conflicts for meagre spoils. The poor, desperate to find somewhere to live, often contribute to environmental disasters by building their homes on unstable sites next to rivers or occupy buildings not suited for housing, often with tragic results.

Even when they and their homes survive, the poor are often located far from job opportunities, with insufficient or non-existent public transport services, compounded by traffic congestion. In brief, Johannesburg and Tshwane, as typical South African cities, can be described as an urban area of approximately 2 to 3,5 million residents living in a sprawling, low density environment that is motor dependent, with separation between areas. Over the last forty years both cities have grown to such an extent that a greater part of Gauteng Province has become built up. Boundaries between what is urban and what is rural have been ignored, thereby creating a non-urban, non-rural realm of nothingness.

If we compare our current conditions to other cities of the south, for example Buenos Aires, the extent of our wasteful urban sprawl becomes apparent. The Greater Buenos Aires covers an area comparable to that of Tshwane, but houses 6-7 times more people. The population of Buenos Aires is 14 million, whereas in Pretoria the estimates are at approximately 2 million (see Figure 2).
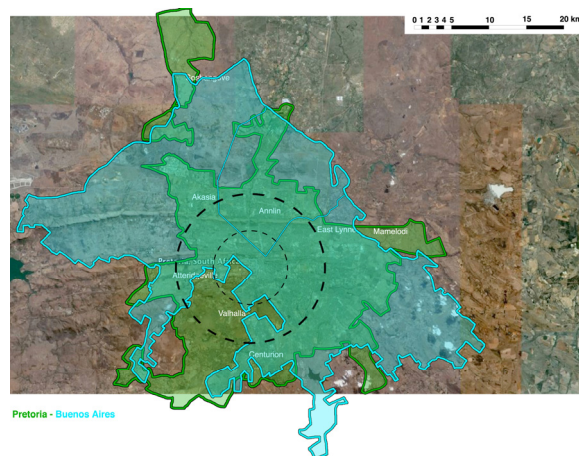

FIGURE 2: Comparing boundaries and scale of Pretoria and Buenos Aires, Argentina. Author's diagram.

The growth of Tshwane, as is the case in most of South Africa's cities, has been phenomenal, primarily driven by mass migration from rural areas and foreign countries. Even though the United Nations closely links urban migration to modernisation, industrialisation and rationalisation, the challenges over and above those left by apartheid planning have been difficult to overcome over the last 15 years.

FIRST YEARS OF DEMOCRACY

With the election of the first democratic government in 1994, the attitude towards urban areas was then typified by broad urban studies, investigations, surveys and analyses of the urban condition. Most of these were driven by people trained in and guided by European principles, people who for the most part received their training in European institutions, and trying once again to import foreign principals to different conditions. Here I am also including myself, in that New Urbanist theories and City Beautiful concepts were too easily imported and applied.

The enormity and demand for change in the living conditions of so many of our urban citizens created the impression of not knowing were to start. The realities facing these segregated areas were, and still are, hard to overcome. These areas were faced with urban form as a tool of control and management; poor links and connections to the neighbours and the city; a deliberate design in architecture that speaks of conformity and the lack of identity, variety and mixture.

In 1994 the challenges were immediately apparent. The first steps focused on the establishment of forums to engage with communities, integrate people never before empowered to share or provide input in the shaping of their own living environments. As a process, meetings with a series of community structures for the various sections of segregated areas were established. Dealing with and involving the broader community in urban design proposals and, eventually newly proposed architectural projects, formed the basis of many design processes, and contributed greatly to their success and acceptance in the community.

These ideas were born from the belief that we grow to learn who we are, chiefly through contact with others. Members of the community contain the collective personality of the whole. With sustained connections and continued conversations, participants in communities, regardless of degree of inclusion, develop emotional bonds, intellectual pathways and better abilities for problem solving. Successive and sustained exchange with the community helped to remove tensions and stresses of isolation, enabling creative avenues that otherwise

would have stayed impassable.

An example of this kind of study for intervention was the 1996 proposal for the Baralink Redevelopment Project, a strategic parcel of land at the eastern entrance to Soweto, which aimed to better connect it to Johannesburg (see Figure 3). The plan, showing the eastern portions of Soweto, is typical of so many former townships. It shows large tracts of vacant land used for industrial or mining purposes that acted as buffer zones to the surrounding 'white' neighbourhoods. It also shows a lack of access and connection to maximise control, so important in ensuring the enforcement of apartheid planning. The urban layout of Diepkloof and Orlando is not dissimilar from that of the prison complex shown on the bottom right of Figure 3.

FIGURE 3: Baralink Study Area. Baragwanath Hospital in the centre of image, Orland and Diepkloof to the north. Large tracts of vacant land used as buffer strips between residential areas. Urban Solutions 1998.

FIGURE 4: Baralink Urban Design and Development Framework Vision Plan. Urban Solutions 1998.

In essence apartheid was a spatial policy or doctrine, keeping people apart physically. From an architectural and planning perspective, the doctrine was not simply a plan or configuration for a building or a neighbourhood. It rather was part of a broader web to control the social and geographic mobility of black South Africans.

Figure 4 shows the first steps towards normalisation, which focused on the creation of links, re-establishing broken connections, removing (or at least bridging) buffer strips by utilising the vacant land portions to serve housing and public amenity needs; re-linking roads to neighbouring areas; providing a larger variety of amenities for people to access with ease without having to commute to the city centre, 10 to 15 kilometres away. The new vision also attempted to provide alternative modes of transport and for a spatial intervention offering a greater sense of orientation and identity.

The same process of investigation and attempts at re-linking was followed in all urban centres of South Africa. When looking back at proposals for Baralink, Galeshewe or Mamelodi and a variety of other similar areas suffering under the same conditions, the initiatives were idealistic, to say the least. The spatial intentions attempted to resonate more broadly for diverse portions of the community and reflect the wants and need of people in a more meaningful manner. Many of these studies and proposals were just that, recommendations and proposals, seldom applied and followed through, primarily due to the high demand for immediate housing and basic services.

The first democratically elected government very quickly fell into the trap of focusing on the sheer number of housing units to be delivered, rather than focusing on the enabling effect that housing is supposed to give. This resulted in the same planning principles applied by the former Nationalist Government being replicated in areas ever further away from job opportunities and public amenities. To date, the mission statement of many municipalities still relate the numbers to be delivered or already achieved, rather than to focus on the empowering effect housing should achieve.

Although very few of these mentioned intentions were implemented in any substantial way, the process of involving the greater community started a process of communication that strengthened the principles of place as space for exchange and the acknowledgment of the other or different, which in turn acted as a catalyst towards building a stronger sense of community.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

This process of reconnecting urban areas is an on-going one and probably the most important and defining aspect of current city redevelopment initiatives. Knitting the city together also requires the change from a predominantly private vehicle transport system to a predominantly public transport

system, as embodied in the Gautrain Rapid Rail and the Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) planning initiatives. Hereby, proposals for dedicated public transport routes have the very real prospect of not only greatly improving greater connectivity and access, but also the much needed densification around nodal centres and along public transport corridors. The BRT and Gautrain public transport initiatives will have a positive impact on broader accessibility and will also positively impact on the broader functioning of our cities, currently so wholly dependent on private vehicular transport.

The emphasis on issues of transport and accessibility highlights the current and historic drivers of spatial planning. The massive expansion of road infrastructure is indicative thereof. Our cities have, for the most part, been directed, planned and expanded by the rationalised requirements of vehicular access and bulk services. The fact that our cities have citizens with broader needs than purely vehicular ones has not always been understood.

A further concern is that ever increasing spending on bulk infrastructure drastically increases maintenance cost, which in many cases is poorly considered and not properly calculated. This focus on large scale urban infrastructure also exposes the real driver of urban development and planning and what is shaping our urban environments. This is further amplified by the fact that urban planning projects are still tendered for and facilitated by engineering firms, of which urban planning and design then forms but a subsidiary part.

ESTABLISHING CIVIC SPACES

So what should be considered to ensure a greater sense of civicness? What then is deemed important, if not the provision of services? The question I have been confronted with more often than most (when dealing with larger civic issues and urban design) is: what is the fuss? Why bother with the regeneration of civic space? Surely the salient issues should be housing, water, electricity, roads. Why bother with urbanity? Why the constant bickering to create quality public space?

In answer to this, I state the opinion that the public realm in cities has two roles. Firstly it is the dwelling place of civic life; secondly it is the physical manifestation of the common good. When we degrade the public realm we will automatically degrade the quality of civic life and what society stands for.

The quality of the public environment and the ability to create spaces that are worth caring about come from a culture of civic design, a body of knowledge,

method and skill utilised over centuries, which we as architects and planners have, over the last fifty years, thrown into the garbage because we thought that we do not need these principles anymore.

Consequently, the result is visible all around us. We have created an environment were the emphasis has moved from the civic to the private. We have ensured that a greater part of our cities are not worth caring about. We have created streets, squares and public spaces not worth looking after. Why care for a public space or street when it is not designed to care for you? Streets, for example, have become vehicular conduits only, engineers and planners have completely forgotten that the greater portion of our society has no private means of transport to begin with. This is indicative, and also typical, of how we value our public environment, and more importantly the people who use them.

If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you will get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you will get people and places. The emphasis and principle highlighted is that architects and planners have a responsibility to create common spaces worth caring for.

So what makes good civic or public space, what ensures a sense of place? To quote James Kunstler "it primarily depends on our ability to define space by employing the vocabulary, syntaxes, rhythms and patterns of architecture" (1993:246). As architects and planners this is our responsibility – one we cannot remove ourselves from.

For too long our architecture and developments have consciously removed themselves from the public edge. If the long-term sustainability of our cities is to be assured, our spatial principles have to change drastically. The narcissist position taken by architects and planners has to shift towards the shared and common, towards a greater sensory awareness of our built environment.

This aim to create proud public space, a sense of place, a place worth caring for, is so important because it not only informs us where we are geographically, but also where we are culturally, where we come from, what kind of people we are. It affords us a glimpse of where we are going, and most importantly, it allows us to dwell in a hopeful present.

If we look at the civic spaces we have around us, we have to ask if they reflect what we are about or want to become; and how the architecture we create informs or distracts from this discourse.

INFORMAL URBAN USERS

During the 1980's and well in to the early 1990's, the previous Nationalist Government and the first democratically elected government hardly did govern or manage our urban environment. For nearly 15 years, between 1980 and 1995, our cities were left to expand, grow, invade and develop with very little aim or vision. During the latter part of the 1980's, the cities and their authorities withdrew from governing, expecting the inevitable change of society and politics, whilst, during its formative years, the new democratically elected authority struggled to understand the enormous problems left behind by the apartheid ideology.

A variety of informal, unplanned elements developed in our cities due to the non-ability and or non-willingness by local councils to govern, and thereby filling needs and requirements. This has had a lasting effect on our urban environment. Mini-bus taxis and informal street traders appeared in our cities, growing over time into sizeable industries increasingly impacting on the city. Due to their informal beginnings and operations (functioning independently of a government framework) they were for long regarded as illegal citizens of the city, exposed to abuse, extortion and forceful removal. While not provided with any status within the city, they occupied whatever available space there was, including underutilised land, city pavements and vacant land.

In Johannesburg, the city council very quickly realised that they had to address the needs and requirements of both. Through the Inner City Street Trader Management Strategy, proposals were made to integrate their poorest citizens to join the mainstream urban economy and society, without which no meaningful change could occur.

Lacking legal status, the City of Johannesburg initiated a variety of trader markets to reintegrate them into the urban fabric. Hereby street traders were controversially moved off the street and into centralised markets, the first example being the Rockey Street Market in Yeoville that housed approximately 300 informal street traders. This new building typology, although heavily criticised during its inception, has grown to become very successful (see Figure 5).

With the Rockey Street Market, the council realised that street traders could not sustain themselves independently from other city functions and activities. Projects were initiated which followed a more integrative approach, incorporating them with taxis, busses and formal retail. The Metro Mall Transport Facility and Market, completed in 2002, applied the same principles, learned in Yeoville, to formalise the

FIGURE 6: Metro Mall Transport Facility and Trader Market, Newtown, Johannesburg. Project initiated to integrate street traders, with taxi and bus operators and formal retailers. Urban Solutions 2001.

FIGURE 5: Rockey Street Trader Market, Yeoville Johannesburg. First of the informal street trader markets to be established in Johannesburg. Urban Solutions 1999.

minibus-taxi industry – only on a far larger scale and with far greater impact on the public environment.

Metro Mall indicates a significant shift in approach to dealing with public buildings and the provision for a sector of our society marginalised in the past. It presents itself with pride and a sense of arrival, avoiding the stereotypical taxi ranks we have seen dotted around our urban centres. If anything, it displays a sense of permanence, moving away from the temporary status taxis and traders enjoyed in the past (see Figure 6).

The same principle of formalising the taxi industry while incorporating the street trader, was followed in a variety of projects in and around the city, for example the Faraday Station (by Albonico Sack) and the Baragwanath Transport Facility and Market in Diepkloof, Soweto (see Figure 7).

One of the characteristics of these projects is that they all required long and arduous facilitation. With the Metro Mall project, for example, over 140 public participation meetings were held with taxi associations, trader groups and other stakeholders. In effect, the greater part of the buildings was

FIGURE 7: Baragwanth Transport Interchange and Trader Market at the entrance to Soweto on Old Potch Road. The same concept and lessons learnt in Metro Mall were applied in this project. Urban Solutions 2002-2008.

planned by the users, becoming a process of design-by-committee in the extreme. Ways and means were also researched to integrate and benefit the end-users, who are mostly unemployed, into the construction process. A variety of schemes, for example an artwork programme, were established to get artists from the immediate community to decorate the buildings.

The design of these new civic structures were heavily dependent on input by the users, integrating them

into the decision making process. Integrating people – previously never involved or having a say in how a building should evolve or respond to their requirements – was the overriding principle in the design process, thus ensuring that the architecture would become a palette that expresses the people it serves.

The process of architecture, and even more so city-building, has become so institutionalised that people seldom have an outlet to put their intuition to use anymore. Place-making and the process to establish place-bound architecture require that planners and designers move beyond the habit of looking at and shaping architecture through the lens of single goals or professional disciplines.

CITY CENTRE FLIGHT

Since the 1970's, the pressures of congestion in the inner city of Johannesburg brought about a change of city policy to allow new business and commercial centres to be established outside the inner city boundaries. Hereby, the town planning schemes were amended and new office centres established and constructed in former residential areas – a prime example is the historically important neighbourhood of Parktown, Johannesburg, which was demolished to make way for this type of expansion. From here on, the demand for commercial facilities pushed the centre of gravity increasingly towards the north in Johannesburg and the east in Pretoria. Apart from placing enormous strain on the city to provide infrastructure for an urban area the size of a small European country within a brief period of time, the flight of business to the outlying areas created city centres that increasingly started to suffer from the lack of investment, from crime, grime and poor perception.

INNER CITY REGENERATION

The cities and their governors have, since 1994, focused a great deal of energy and large portions of their budgets on regenerating the inner city, to stop the steady decline of the buildings and reverse the high vacancy rate, the illegal occupation and use of buildings and the slow degrading of its infrastructure. Not being able to address the total inner city, specific urban areas where selected for infrastructural spend. The initial focus was on the construction of bridges and off-ramps to reconnect part of the inner city. In Johannesburg, the Newtown Cultural Precinct was one of those areas chosen within the city as a catalytic precinct, earmarked for substantial infrastructural upliftment and investment. The hope was that large infrastructural improvements would positively stimulate surrounding precincts and attract

investors back to the city.

In Pretoria, the core of greater Tshwane, the Nelson Mandela Corridor, a stretch of land dividing the inner city from its high density residential neighbourhoods (Arcadia and Sunnyside), was earmarked to fulfil the same catalytic function (see Figure 8). Within this area of focussed development, specific projects were highlighted to ensure that the process of regeneration was kick started. The Department of Trade and Industry's Travenna Campus, at the heart of the Nelson Mandela Corridor, is an example of one of these initiatives. The hope was that such massive investment would kick start regeneration processes in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

FIGURE 8: The Nelson Mandela Development Corridor aimed at regenerating and connecting the inner city of Pretoria and the residential suburbs of Arcadia and Sunnyside. Urban Solutions 2004.

The urban design framework and architectural proposal for the development of the New South African Constitutional Court and the surrounding Constitution Hill in Braamfontein is a similar example in Johannesburg (see Figure 9). Here the aim was not only to house our new Constitutional Court, but also to use the project as a bridge, linking the high density residential areas of Hillbrow and Berea with the corporate and civic functions in Braamfontein.

FIGURE 9: The New Constitutional Court of South Africa as catalyst and bridge between Hillbrow and Braamfontein. OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions 2004.

A large variety of such physical interventions and projects were introduced by government and its development agencies with varying success, changing negative perceptions and improving the investment context for land owners. The question remains if the private sector has followed with the same level of enthusiasm.

COMMON SPACES AND PARKS

Not only buildings and infrastructure received attention, but also the improvement of open spaces. These initiatives come from a slow acknowledgement that communities share an environment and interact in a variety of ways, beliefs, resources, preferences and needs, far beyond the obvious service requirements.

The Thami Mnyele Memorial Park is an attempt to counter historically constrained perceptions and uses of parks and public spaces in South Africa (see Figure 10). Apart from disallowing large portions of people from enjoying communal areas, the types of activities within them were restricted. By constraining the use of parks and public spaces, the very people who would benefit the most from these communal spaces and ensure their continued preservation were alienated. Establishing a landscape of improved possibilities and variety is being discussed more broadly. Our cities are at last considering and understanding the importance of providing their citizens with more than just greater roads and

infrastructure. It is the simplicity of common spaces and their requirements which makes their omission from the front page of planning so astounding.

FIGURE 10: The Thami Mnyele Memorial Park, Tembisa. A left-over vacant plot of land has been changed into a communal park with a variety of amenities and facilities, including a gallery in memory of Thami Mnyele. Urban Solutions 2006.

People come to shared spaces with simple needs: rest, relaxation, recreation and respite from the city and day-to-day routines. Good civic spaces not only address and meet these community needs, but also enable deeper longings, stimulating ideas, gives hope and a sense of possibilities. It is more than just a pretty thing to look at, but also to inspire, create appreciation of what is good among us, broaden the community's capacity to imagine and create a better future.

CITY AND NATURE

Planting trees and softening the harsh environment no doubt have unbelievably positive effects on the environment. In a variety of projects initiated over the last decade, the value of trees within the urban environment has been heavily promoted. Trees are the cheapest and also the most effective intervention when wanting to uplift a public environment. Having said that, we live under the strange illusion that the remedy for mutilated urbanism is nature, when in fact the remedy for wounded city fabric is good urbanism, good buildings and good spatial definition

and identity. Not just flowerbeds, not just impressions of the Bella-Bella Waterberg ecosystem in the central medians of our streets…

Street trees have a very specific function. They spatially denote the pedestrian realm, protect the pedestrian from the vehicles in the roadway, filter the light and soften the hardscape of the buildings edging the street. That is it. They are not supposed to be an impression of the Limpopo Province woodland and forests. Good urbanity is not achieved by landscaping over unplanned left-over spaces.

One of the fiascos of suburbia and sub-urban sprawl is that it has destroyed our understanding of the distinction between the countryside and the town, between the rural and the urban. They are not the same thing. We are not going to cure urban problems by dragging the countryside into the city. But still our municipalities are approving expansion far beyond normative urban boundaries. Much of this comes from planning and providing for an exclusive sector of society, citizens who have access to private motor vehicular transport.

These planning directives are slow to change. Even today, while studying and advising the Tshwane Council on peripheral nodal developments, providing development principals and spatial concepts based on equality of opportunities, the City Councils traffic planners still hold sway, implementing strategies and norms to the detriment of most people. The mission, aims and vision of the council, on one level, is completely ignored by the same institution lower down. These sub-departments are still able to enforce regulations aimed at excluding and preventing equity in spatial planning and access, in essence applying rules dating back to apartheid planning.

URBAN REGENERATION POLICIES

Latter initiatives, or more current attempts at regeneration, focus less on physical intervention and more on the legislative tier. The Urban Development Zone (UDZ), for example, is a tax incentive scheme aimed at encouraging inner city renewal. Any taxpaying, property owning individual or entity may claim the tax benefits of the UDZ incentive. The incentive takes the form of a tax allowance based on an accelerated depreciation of investment over a period of years. This, as a policy change or piece of legislation, has more positively affected the inner cities in terms of investment than a great number of physical interventions.

As a policy it altered private institutions' perception of inner cities and changed the negative views many people had of these areas. A large number of

investors have reacted to these legislative initiatives by acquiring disused buildings and converting them into loft apartments, offices, studios, galleries and restaurants. In Johannesburg, the dynamic of the inner city is slowly turning into a confident and positive, vibrant place with variety unthinkable 5 to 10 years ago. Compared to 15 years ago, it has changed beyond recognition.

DENSIFICATION

The new public transport initiatives are, in part, also forcing councils to re-direct their strategies towards urban densification around transport routes and stops. It has generated huge interest in the private sector that sees the great benefit and commercial gain of high-density development. The Melrose Arch urban design concept, proposed in association with Osmond Lange and Paul Murrain, attempted to create a high density development along the same guidelines that the city currently promotes. This development advanced ideas of mixture of uses, density and variety long before city councils shifted policy on densification. Although a develop-ment targeting the well-to-do, it does act as a good example of urban densification.

A re-looking at urban wasteland, turning brown-field sites to regenerated urban centres and creating greater integration, has been initiated in a variety of cities. Even parastatal companies see the commercial gain to be had from densification, by redeveloping under-utilised properties within the urban boundaries (see Figure 11).
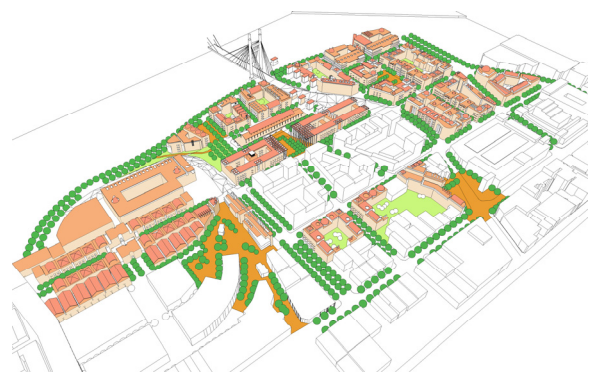

FIGURE 11: The Newtown North Development and Design Framework re-looked Spoornet land and investigated its development opportunities. Urban Solutions 2004.

The focus on redevelopment and re-use is becoming more and more current, and architects and planners need to be trained to refocus their attention on buildings in far more compromised positions. The old adage of an ever-expanding development area is coming to a close. The notion that South Africa has endless land for development has passed.

CENTRAL ISSUE

Over the last couple of years, projects displaying our growing confidence and displaying our cities as world class centres are coming more to the fore. The danger is that we become obsessed with large-scale international interventions and that the broader perspective and foundations laid in the 1990's are forgotten. Further to this, a large number of these important projects are of such a scale, and stand under such programme pressure, that government and the private sector are forced to work with experienced, large practices to ensure timeous completions. These pressures leave little room for spreading skills to smaller, local companies, or offering them opportunities to participate in these projects. The impression, and danger, is that the same companies from 20 years ago are the same ones doing the prestigious projects today.

Our ability to transform our cities from the persistent Western urban models is still hampered and limited. Our inability to address place-bound challenges without being dependent on imported prescriptions of urban modernity is increasing tension in our cities. The central issue is: what principals and concerns should drive urban planning, urban regeneration and development pressures? I would like to think that our constitution, which provides the highest order of direction, and the normative spatial aims of our cities, should be complementary and synergistic.

Direction thus should be derived from the following sources:

> Firstly, interrogating and revisiting the aims of our constitution in order to explore the real spatial implications it demands;

> Secondly, identify the desirable performance qualities (for example dignity, integration, equity, sustainability, safety and security) that our cities should be seeking to achieve. Again, these have spatial implications.

These in turn would ensure that a singular aspect does not receive priority, but all conditions of planning are focused on achieving the South African mission as codified in our constitution.

Over the last 15 years our cities have slowly grown in confidence – confident in their ability to deal with the large issues confronting them. Whereas the initial projects focused on the basic needs and wants of the city and its people, the latter development requirements speak more and more of assertive interventions, iconic architecture and planning to display a new sense of pride and self consciousness. We have, more and more, become part of a global community, directed and guided by a variety of influences. Our search for our own urban and architectural identity, in a flood of internationalism, is bringing the most interesting points of discussion to the fore.

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Refereed poster presentations

The Conference includes poster contributions on urban interventions or topics that have a bearing on the main themes of the **African Perspectives 2009** debate.

The refereed posters were presented at the Conference during a scheduled Poster Session. The posters are available in PDF format on the Conference website.

Gantner, G (MASS Group, Kigali, Rwanda):
Garden city settlements: The lingering effects of urban design policy in Lusaka.

Martusewicz, C & Cumberbatch, T (The Cooper Union, New York, NY, USA):
Learning from earth: An exploration and reinterpretation of vernacular building.

Moreira, P (Department of Architecture & Spatial Design, London Metropolitan University):
Modernism vs Capitalism in the city of red sand and black gold: Contemporary paradoxes in Luanda, Angola.

Sirron-Kakpor, I (for the 'Working on Cities studio' – a joint project by the Academy of Architecture Rotterdam (AvBR), the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS) and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana. (Team members are documented on the Posters):
Working on cities: An experience from Kumasi, Ghana.

Vio, G (Faculty of Architecture, IUAV University of Venice):
Between land and water: Elements for a city centre.

Introduction to the locale of the Conference

INVITED SPEAKER: Ludwig C Hansen was invited to contextualise the **African Perspectives 2009** debate through an introduction to post-apartheid planning interventions in the two urban centres that are closely connected to the physical location of the Conference, namely Johannesburg and the Metropolitan Municipality of Tshwane (Note: Pretoria is still the name of the capital of South Africa, but it is one of the urban components of the greater city of Tshwane – the University of Pretoria, host of the **African Perspectives 2009** Conference, is located in the historic core of Tshwane). Mr Hansen is a well known urban designer in South Africa and has made a large contribution to this field. At the time of the Conference he was a director of Urban Solutions.

The Paper was accompanied by a visual presentation – both are available on the Conference website.