



# CHAPTER 1

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## INTRODUCTION

*This chapter introduces the dynamic socio-spatial relationships of the community of Joubert Park. It explores its various issues and looks at possible design intentions for the precinct*

- 1.1 THE NARRATIVE
- 1.2 THE PROBLEM STATEMENT
- 1.3 THE ISSUE
- 1.4 THE GAP
- 1.5 THE INTENT

FIGURE 1.1 THE JOUBERT PARK PRECINCT  
A historical image of Joubert Park and the Johannesburg Art  
Gallery pre-extension



## 1.1 THE NARRATIVE

Joubert Park, like the city of Johannesburg, is a space of many contradictions.

It is a space of everyday ritual...

...and a space of extraordinary heritage.

Located in the heart of Hillbrow's high-rise residential towers we find the green lung of the inner city of Johannesburg. What was originally intended as a recreational park for the British gold miners (Malan et al. 1986:30), has over had to adapt to its new role as a place of refuge and new beginning for the rest of Africa. However, while the community expands, the buildings do not.

As bus loads of new hopefuls arrive monthly, and the buildings start to reach their maximum capacities. The community of Joubert Park continue with their daily rituals, waiting for the city to catch up to them.

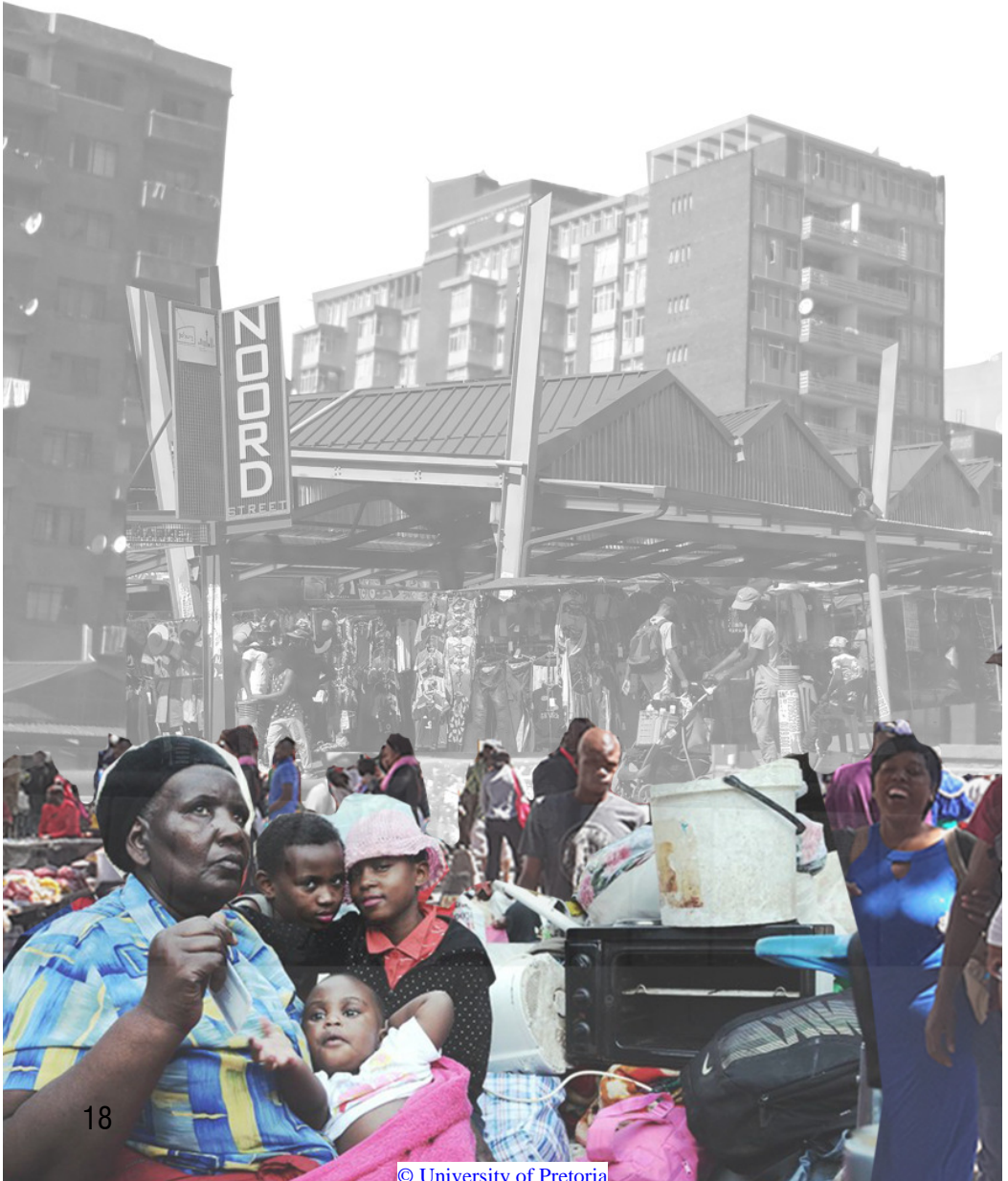
To locals and foreigners alike, the Joubert Park precinct is still seen as a place of new beginnings and a land plentiful opportunities. Young hopefuls travel long hours with little cash and big dreams of a new life in the big city, only to find out that what was supposed to be their stepping stone has instead ended up being the rock that holds them down.

And while some of the put their hopes and aspirations to bed, others still dream silently of it during cold winter nights, and mumble about it to strangers in the market. It is because of these daydreams of hope that the park continues to live and it is in these small moments of ambition that the parks keep fighting back.



## FIGURE 1.2 THE PEOPLE OF THE STREET

Collage indicating the character of the streets and surrounds of the park.







## 1.2 THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the period between 1970 and 1990, South Africa went through a major political shift. In this period we experienced the fall of Apartheid and the rise of democracy. The inner city precinct of Joubert Park went through its own shift in identity during this period of change. The previous white-only community that once inhabited the beautiful art-deco towers surrounding the park, started relocating to the northern suburbs. This in turn brought about an influx of new people of all races into the inner city. It is because of this major shift in the landscape of the park, that we experience the problems that are evident in the area today.

The high-rise residential towers, which once catered to a stable and constant all- white community, has now been forced to cater to unimaginable volumes of people. This new community is one that is incredibly dynamic and ever-changing. Many of the new residents have the intention of staying only for a few years before moving on to bigger and better things due to the over-crowded living environment and the lack of space available for development and growth.

Over and above the physical restraints of the urban fabric, we are also faced with an emotional disconnect between the history and heritage of these structures, and its current occupying community. While the new dwellers of Joubert Park do have an understanding of the historical value of the Victorian layout of the park, or the Lutyens designed art gallery; they are still emotionally disconnected from its history and memories, as it is not their memories and it is not a history that belongs to them. And so a void has formed between the park, the people, and the past memories of Joubert Park.

The dynamic community stuck in a static urban fabric, and the void between the past and present communities are both social and spatial in nature. Therefore, in order to use architecture as a tool to solve social issues within the Joubert Park community, the project needs to have an understanding of the relationship between space and social being.

Henry Lefebvre (1991) and Edward Soja (2010) look at the ideas of *social space* and *spatial justice*. These theories look at the direct relationship between social occurrences and physical space. According to Lefebvre (1991:41-52) if space is subjective, socially produced, contested and in constant flux, then conversely social conditions within the city can be positively or negatively impacted by the quality and condition of space.

Furthermore, according to Edward Soja (2010:2):

*“Spatial justice in the broadest sense, refers to an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice. As a starting point, this involves the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them.”*

Within this context the project looks to investigate the injustices that the community of Joubert Park face, trying to understand its social tensions, political motives, and personal hurdles that members of the community face. By making use of the ideas of spatial justice, the dissertation has the ability to analyse the social injustices occurring in the park and extract the spatial implications of these injustices to refer to when looking at the redevelopment of the precinct.



## 1.3 THE ISSUE

The general issue (figure 1.3) stems from the shifts the park has gone through over its lifespan, and how it has had to adapt at a rapid rate to accommodate an incredibly dynamic community. This has resulted in the void being formed between the existing community and the heritage and meaning of the place, which in turn has led to the lack of ownership of the fabric of the park which has given rise to its slow degradation.

The urban issue (figure 1.4) continues with this theme of disconnect that we see being translated into the urban environment. Issues regarding differences in social, cultural, and historical values have had a negative influence on the structures in the park. The social issues within the urban fabric have led to the spatial implication of the buildings turning their back onto the public realm.

The architectural issue (figure 1.5) uncovers the relationship between building and people and investigates the role of architecture in the current disconnect in the urban fabric. The current urban condition has resulted in spaces of oppression being formed in and around the built fabric which leads to social injustices in the community.

FIGURE 1.3 THE GENERAL ISSUE

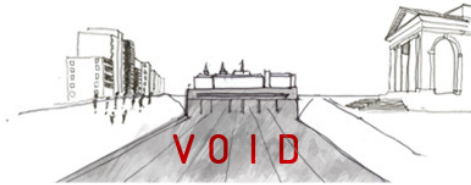
FIGURE 1.4 THE URBAN ISSUE

FIGURE 1.5 THE ARCHITECTURAL ISSUE



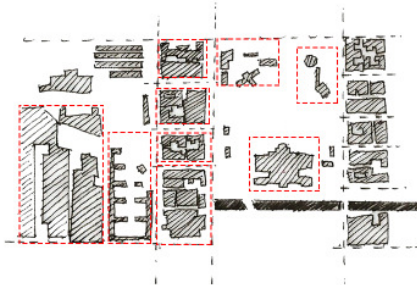
EVERYDAY  
[FORGOTTEN]

EXTRAORDINARY  
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## GENERAL ISSUE

A void created between the everyday community and the extraordinary heritage



## URBAN ISSUE

Social injustices influencing spatial disconnect



## ARCHITECTURAL ISSUE

Spaces of oppression in the city fabric

## 1.4 THE GAP

Many studies have been conducted within the Joubert Park precinct, as well as studies revolving around the ideas of spatial justice from an architectural perspective. Sarah Mina Basset, as part of her dissertation in Regional and Urban Studies at the University of Illinois (2013), investigated the role of spatial justice in the regeneration of urban space. In her dissertation she considers the theory of spatial justice and utilizes it as a tool to analyze urban space. She was able to successfully adjust the theory into a methodology (figure 1.6) to give structure to an urban investigation. In her investigation she samples two test cities and explores them on a macro scale. However she does not then further investigate in detail the implications of these findings nor does she discuss possible interventions to help correct these conditions that she has categorized spatially unjust.

Brad Evan Krom in his architectural dissertation at the University of Witwatersrand (2010) investigates the idea of spatial justice as a means of bridging the political divide in our country. The idea of spatial justice is interpreted quite literally as he explores a court house typology. His investigation also looks at the idea of the everyday and the extraordinary. However in his case the people of South Africa are the everyday and the South African government and justice system is seen as the extraordinary. He attempts to make the extraordinary more accessible to the everyday (figure 1.7). Krom used the theory of Spatial Justice as an initial guiding principle, but did not use it as a method of analyzing and understanding site, space and community.

The dissertation project will make use of the methodology developed by Basset as a tool to analyse and understand the relationship between social circumstance and spatial restraints in the urban fabric. It will then use this research to develop a possible strategy through architecture to resolve the social and spatial issues in the park and test whether this methodology is indeed successful.

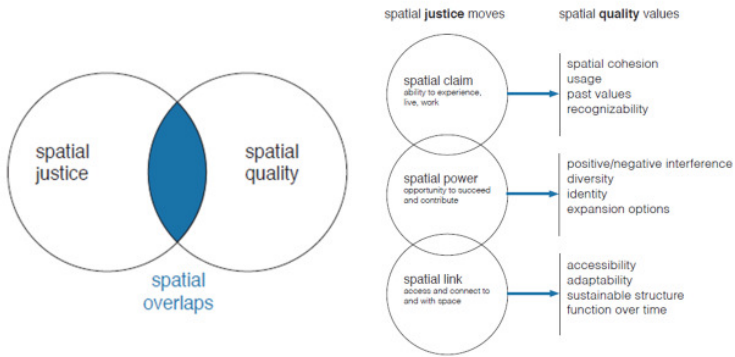


FIGURE 1.6 SPATIAL JUSTICE METHODOLOGY DIAGRAMS

These diagrams indicate the relationship between spatial justice and actual spatial qualities that can be used as a means of comparison and determination.

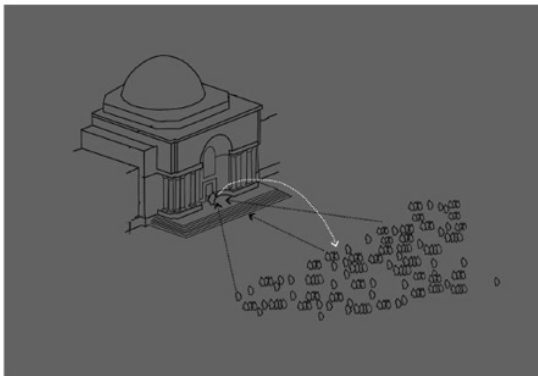


FIGURE 1.7 A SPATIAL JUSTICE APPROACH

This diagram that was included in Krom's dissertation illustrates his position in terms of the lack of accessibility between the people of South Africa and the South African judicial system.

## 1.5 THE INTENT

The underlying general intent focuses on bridging the gap between the everyday community of Joubert park and the extraordinary heritage and memory of the site (figure 1.8). Looking specifically at a grass roots approach of empowering the everyday community to become extraordinary.

On an urban scale the project intends investigate the role that spatial justice would play in the re-integration and re-development of the urban fabric (figure 1.9). Through an understanding of the social networks in the precinct and the spatial factors that influence these networks, we look to create a holistic socio-spatial urban system.

Architecturally the project looks to use an understanding of space as well as analytical methodologies of spatial justice as a tool to understand and analyse the spatial implications of social injustices within the precinct, and conversely explore how it could then be used to counteract these injustices in order to create a spatially just environment.

Additionally exploring how to establish an effective model for the development of the existing fabric of the inner city that looks at exposing the spaces of oppression and integrating the disconnected structures, therefore looking to find an architecture that empowers rather than oppresses (figure 1.10). Fostering a relationship between building, edge, and street that looks at not just the physical upliftment of the fabric, but the well-being of the existing community as well that addresses the needs, goals and aspirations of the new city dweller.

FIGURE 1.8 THE GENERAL INTENT

FIGURE 1.9 THE URBAN INTENT

FIGURE 1.10 THE ARCHITECTURAL INTENT



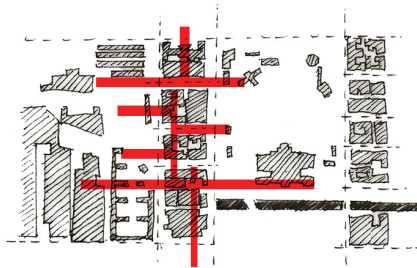
EVERYDAY  
[EMPOWERED]

EXTRAORDINARY  
[ACCESSIBLE]



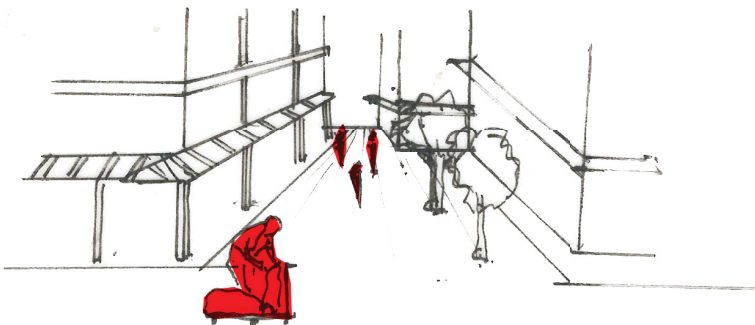
### GENERAL INTENT

Bridging the gap between the everyday and the extraordinary



### URBAN INTENT

Re-integrating urban forms



### ARCHITECTURAL INTENT

Creating an architecture that empowers