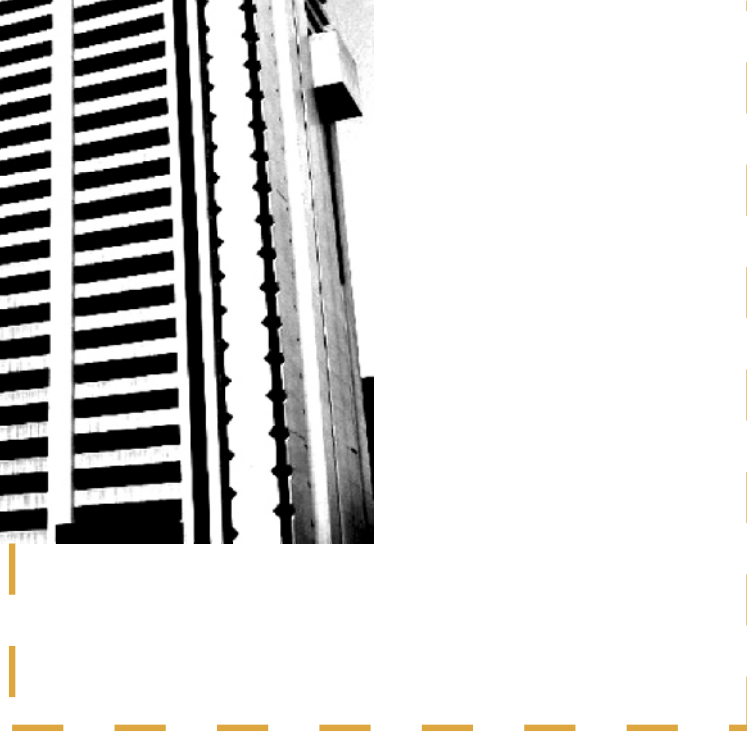


1.1

> > i n t r o d u c t i o n



The urban city environment, just by looking at it, can provide a special pleasure. The city, like a piece of architecture, is a construction in space but on a vast scale (LYNCH 1960: 1). The city provides the people who use it with basic needs such as shelter, a place of social interaction and a place of economic income.

Some spaces in the city, over time become un-used or fail to fulfill their intended purpose. This is evident in the Pretoria inner city. The aim of this dissertation is to examine the aspects of the inner city and identify the spaces in the city that are not functioning as intended and look at ways of regenerating those spaces. Like most cities, Pretoria inner city has a dense urban fabric. It is difficult to interfere in the urban fabric without altering the visual or social quality of a space, or without having to resort to demolishing a particular area in order to re-build a new structure. The unfortunate aspect of demolishing and re-building is that it leads to the same problems that were originally encountered. Therefore altering the built fabric in the Pretoria CBD would be problematic. Instead of looking at ways of altering the city's built fabric, the open public spaces were analyzed. The most important elements in the city, according to Kevin Lynch, are the movable parts and the spaces in which they move (through which they move, are open spaces between the buildings.

The spaces between the buildings are the spaces where the activity and character of any city is formed. These spaces are the places where the focus of social interaction takes place in the Pretoria inner city. The built fabric is very dense in the Pretoria inner city, so the spaces between the buildings are limited to the streets and public open spaces or urban parks. There are limited urban public spaces in Pretoria's inner city, thus most social interaction between the users of the city occurs on the side-walks.



1.2

Fig 1.1 north-west corner of ABSA building

Fig. 1.2 side-walk activity in Pretoria inner city

The side-walk activity attracts a multitude of people. Wherever there is activity it is generally true that people will gather and new activity will develop in the vicinity of the existing activity (GEHL 1987: 25-27). This has been proven true in the Pretoria inner city context as most side-walks that generate pedestrian activity are filled with informal traders enjoying the exposure of the people walking by. This in turn has attracted more activity to the side-walks. The only problem associated with this form of activity is that the Pretoria inner city side-walks were not designed to accommodate the masses of people on them.

This is also true for the roads that run adjacent to the side-walks. The roads tend to have fast moving traffic which is not ideal for the close proximity of public activity. The side-walks form a great deal of the city's character due to this activity. Side-walk activity also has another aspect to it. It is movement orientated, so it does not allow for stopping, resting or any form of paused activity such as sitting, eating or drinking. The continual movement and energy of the inner city is reflected in the character of the streets and side-walks.

The public spaces within the city are the last spaces left where people can pause in the city's continuous movement. They are needed in the city to provide places of rest. Jan Gehl, an urban designer from Denmark, believes that people need to have contact with other people within a city environment. This contact can be even on the most basic and superficial level of what he calls 'passive socialization'. Just being in a space where you can see and hear the people around you. Throughout history, streets and squares have formed the focal points of gathering spaces. But with the advent of functionalism, streets and squares were literally declared unwanted. Instead they were replaced by roads, paths and endless grass lawns (GEHL 1987: 47).

The aim of this dissertation is to examine how, through the re-design of a public square, inner city regeneration can take place. Public spaces are areas where, if designed properly, an increase in usage and gathering can take place. It cannot be denied that human beings are creatures that enjoy being around other human beings. If this feeling of social integration can be enhanced, the character of the inner city can be enhanced too.