

Chapter 1: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

1.1 Statement of the problem for research

The study proposes to investigate the relation between spatial definition and place-making within architectural and urban interiors. This is made possible by identifying a theoretical terminology, derived from interior elements and variables (principles), as the collective vocabulary that serves as criteria or guidelines to define space and create place. The focus is on the static physical model of creating space and place for human habitation.

The research evaluates the existing situation of the Donkin Reserve in Central Hill, Port Elizabeth, as urban interior. The study investigates the possibility of applying the collective set of criteria as guidelines to make recommendations for improving the Donkin Reserve as place.

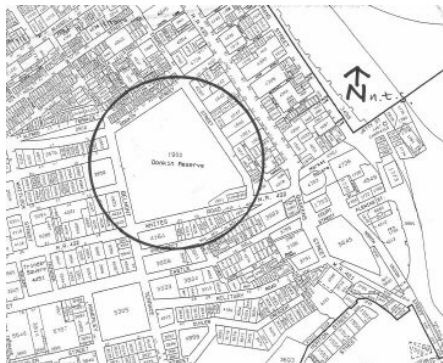


Figure 1-1: Donkin Reserve location
(Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality 2000)

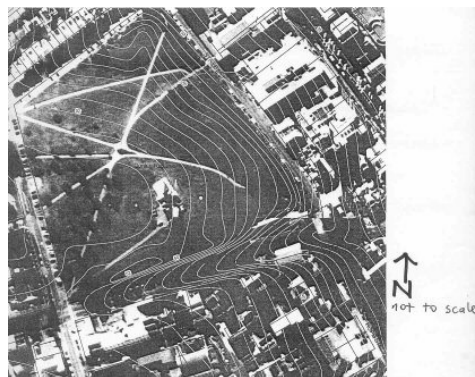


Figure 1-2: Donkin Reserve aerial view
(Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality 2000)

1.2 The importance of the study

If one looks at the city as becoming an extension of the human living environment, does the urban interior provide the necessary elements for a positive spatial experience? The question can be asked if these spaces add value to the experience of the users. The importance of the study is to investigate whether spaces are sufficiently defined. In addition, the quality of a space has the potential to add meaning to the space experience. Urban interiors, as communal rooms in the urban environment, need to

reflect the identity of the surroundings and the community to be embraced and for people to be proud of. The use of a space is directly linked to the physical condition, but also to the social and history of a setting. When these are in balance and well composed, improved use and community participation can be expected.

Undefined open spaces have the potential to become the heart of urban environments. The Donkin Reserve is an example of an urban interior that can benefit from a spatial definition and place-making strategy. It is one of four public open spaces in Central Hill, Port Elizabeth, that has the inherent capacity to form an active network of public interiors. The redevelopment of these areas can add to the rejuvenation and upliftment of Central Hill as one of the significant destinations in Port Elizabeth.

The study aims to develop criteria that can serve as guidelines to ensure positive spatial definition and a sense of place. This can contribute to the work underway by the Mandela Bay Development Agency and local planners in conjunction with GAPP Architects and Urban Designers in Johannesburg, developing a vision for the redevelopment of the city. The Donkin Reserve is one of nine precinct areas that have been identified and form part of the redevelopment plan. This study aims to contribute to the vision and rejuvenation of public open spaces for this proposal, in establishing criteria for spatial frameworks to define meaningful space.



Figure 1-3: Donkin Reserve: view west to east
(Grobler 2004)

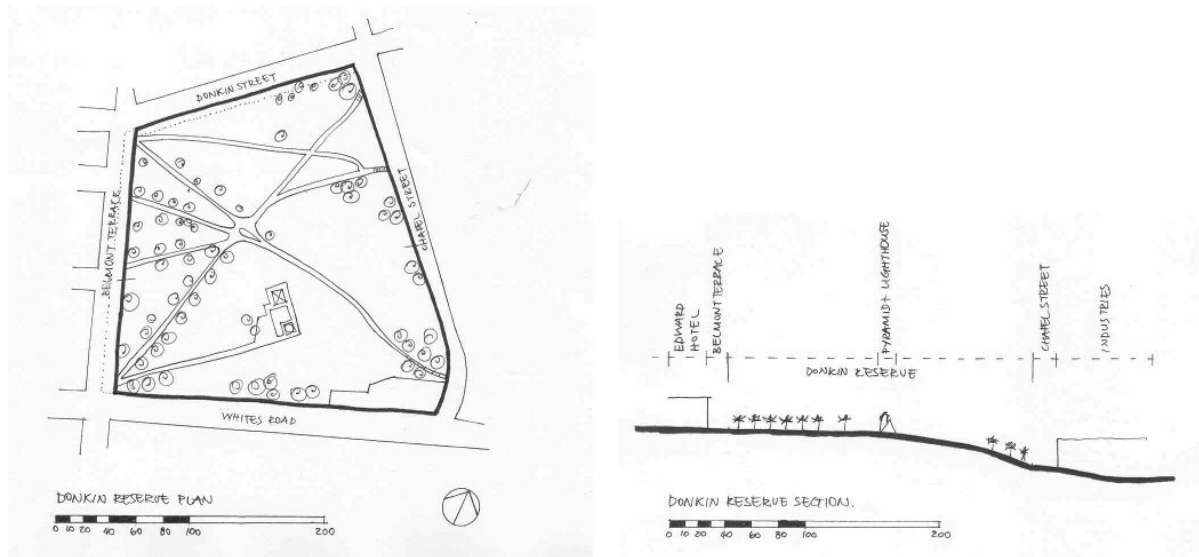


Figure 1-4: Donkin Reserve Plan and Section
(Grobler 2005)

1.3 Sub-problems

1.3.1 Sub-problem 1

The first sub-problem is to identify and to establish criteria for spatial definition for interiors.

1.3.2 Sub-problem 2

The second sub-problem is to establish the variables used to modulate meaningful interior place.

1.3.3 Sub-problem 3

The third sub-problem makes use of the first and second sub-problems, establishing the relation between spatial definition and modulation of interiors and establishing guidelines to create a sense of place.

1.4 Hypotheses

1.4.1 Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis is that criteria for interior spatial definition within architectural and urban space indicate similarities in the use of a descriptive vocabulary.

1.4.2 Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis states that the combination of variables in architectural and urban spatial modulation will add to the meaning of enriching a place.

1.4.3 Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis states that a sense of place is created with the sum total of the criteria for spatial definition and variables for spatial modulation, applied and integrated within a whole.

1.5 Delimitations

The study is limited to the selection of a collective theoretical vocabulary to describe spatial definition and place-making.

The study focuses on the identification of concrete elements and principles to produce space and place.

The static physical environment that can be observed through the senses is central to the investigation.

The study is limited to the analysis of contemporary places in gaining data for interpretation.

The study is limited to theoretical and observational explorations in spatial definition and quality.

The study acknowledges, but excludes historical investigations of space and place.

The study excludes external factors that influence spatial definition and space use, such as climate, gradient and vegetation.

The study excludes a vernacular interpretation of spatial definition and place -making.

Aspects related to politics and power are excluded from the study (Foucault).

The study excludes a philosophical approach to the investigation that includes the meaning of words in the use of language (Lefebvre).

The study excludes the influence of social, economic and cultural aspects in the production of space and place.

Aspects related to space use through the application of tactics and strategy are excluded from the study (De Certeau).

The process of producing space, socially or mentally is excluded.

Space syntax and the dynamic model of space are excluded from the study (Hillier).

1.6 Definition of terms

Appropriate: The shaping of a place by a group or individual to add meaning to an environment, using the elements and variables (principles) to define space and create place.

Dynamic model: A spatial model that deals with the changeable aspects within a space, movement and circulation.

Furnishing: The combination of elements and aspects within interiors that add to the overall perception and use.

Habitation: Time spent and activities performed in a person's daily environment.

Historicality: The content of a place that has been developed over time within a specific context and culture.

Interior: A spatial enclosure that is defined on horizontal and / or vertical plane that articulates or implies a volume which is suitable for human habitation according to specific influences. Interior can be interchangeable with "room", "space", "container"

and “enclosure”, but for this investigation the term is selected due to the implicit reference that is traditionally known as shelter.

Differences in terminology that indicates the flow between architectural and urban interiors:

Architectural	Urban
interior	space
positive	negative
solid volume	open volume
solid (building)	void (in-between space)
overhead plane	base plane
flexible	non-flexible

Modulation: The shaping of an enclosure or interior that adds physical enrichment.

Non-place: A space that has poor spatial definition and lacks spatial quality (negative space).

Place: A space that is well defined and has distinct characteristics that add value to a person’s life and experience (positive space).

Public open space: Open space with limited structures that are available for all to use.

Relation The association between elements, spaces and people.

Room: A spatial enclosure for human habitation (synonym: interior).

Significant meaning: The value-adding qualities in an environment that address function, form, definition and context.

Sociality: The daily social interaction and processes that occur between people within environments for human habitation.

Space: An enclosure created by means of planes and lines in various orientations (spatial definition).

Spatiality: The static, physical spatial frameworks in which daily activities take place.

Static model: The concrete aspects that create the physical enclosure or containment.

Terminology: The collection of words used to describe a specific subject.

Variables: Elements and principles that influence and enrich the quality of spaces, i.e. texture, colour, shape, scale, etc.

Vocabulary: The collection of terms related to a specific discipline.

1.7 Assumptions

1.7.1 Assumption 1

The first assumption is that the criteria (elements and principles) in the definition of architectural interiors are largely similar to those of urban interiors.

1.7.2 Assumption 2

The second assumption is that spatial definition is enriched with the application of variables that modulate meaningful interior space.

1.7.3 Assumption 3

The third assumption states that the sum total of the aspects combined allows for place-making.

1.7.4 Assumption 4

The fourth assumption states that the Donkin Reserve could be the heart of Central Hill through redeveloping the quality of it as public place.

1.8 Research methodology

The qualitative methodology of the descriptive survey reference method (normative survey method) is utilized as the research methodology and provides an operational framework for the gathering and interpretation of data (Leedy 1993:140-141 & 186). Data are gathered through direct observations, interviews and questionnaires of the selected population using the public open spaces identified in Central Hill.

The historical reference method provides an overview and understanding of the past of the spaces and the subsequent changes that have taken place over time (Leedy 1993:223). The research looks at the reasons for the possible changes that have had an influence on the spatial definition and use.

By using the descriptive survey and historical methods combined, a comprehensive understanding of the spaces involved can be developed. This will aid in the appropriate and meaningful interpretation of the data to develop guidelines for the creation of well-defined public open place. By understanding the transformation of a place by means of the spatial articulation and use, an appropriate sense of place can be created to add value to the surrounding environment and the users.

1.9 Document structure

Chapter 1 orientates the reader as to the direction and approach of the research investigations. The focus of the study is indicated, as well as the exclusions that form part of recommendations for further study to supplement this search into the static, physical model of space and place.

Chapter 2 reveals the Review of Related Literature as sources that are considered for the investigation as set out in Chapter 1. The importance of each source is related to the sub-problems respectively. The chapter is concluded with a summary of the major sources for the investigation in this study.

Chapter 3 deals with the analysis of the elements that can be used to define static physical space. Elements are taken from the interior spatial definition strategy and are used as the structure for this chapter.

Chapter 4 investigates the variables (principles) that are ever-changing in combination and effect and that enrich spatial enclosures. The focus remains on the aspects that enhance the static physical model of space and place.

Chapter 5 sets out the guidelines that have been derived from the criteria that have been investigated in Chapters 3 and 4 that can be applied to define space and create place.

Chapter 6 analyses and evaluates the Donkin Reserve as a case study according to the criteria that have been developed. Recommendations are made to improve the sense of place.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by summarising the findings and making recommendations for further study.