urban activator

a contextually generated mixed-use building
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Set in the historic centre of the Pretoria CBD, this study draws extensively on its context to formulate an appropriate response to bringing about urban regeneration in this section of the city.

The study was initiated with the selection of a small site set in the perceived northern portion of the inner city. By challenging both the alleged threshold between the ‘north’ and the ‘inner city’ and the city council’s proposals for the surrounding sites, the proposed building attempts to create meaningful space while enriching the visitor’s experience of his immediate surroundings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proposed Group Framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proposed Building Programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Client /User</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>The Macro Scale</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Architectural Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>The Meso Scale</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Threshold</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban Decay in the north of the Inner City</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Re-Kgabisa Tshwane Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criticism of the Proposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formulating an Approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>The Micro Scale</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretoria’s first Synagogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The ‘special’ Supreme Court</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Four High Profile Trials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Irony of the Conversion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Assessment of the Building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determining a contextual Response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preserving Place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban Regeneration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changing Perception with Public Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Design Influences</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Precedents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International Precedents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Design Development</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial Block-Model Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design Generators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concept Model Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Technical Investigation</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design Considerations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Investigation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determining Required Net Glazing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Window Design Parameters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tectonic Resolution</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Schedule of Accommodation</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix A - Backpacker Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix B - Drainage Plan of Minister’s House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix C - Proposed Garage for the Hebrew Congregation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix D - Proposals for the Old Synagogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix E - Sun Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix F - Baseline Document</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

All figures by author unless listed otherwise

04 Introduction
Figure 4.01 Map of proposed Group Framework and proposed projects

05 The Macro Scale
Figure 5.01 Plan of Pretoria dating from approximately 1870s
(‘Plan of Pretoria’ in the Van der Waal Collection: c1880)
Figure 5.02 Example of proposed road junction. By Holford
(Barbir, City Council of Pretoria: 2007)
Figure 5.03 Hallmark and Koopkrag Buildings. Pretoria 2007
Figure 5.04 Poynton’s Building. Pretoria 2007
Figure 5.05 NHG Building. Pretoria 2007
Figure 5.06 Sammy Marks Centre. Pretoria 2007
Figure 5.07 Wachthuis. Pretoria 2007
Figure 5.08 Nederlands Bank, Pretoria. Pretoria 2007
Figure 5.09 Woltemadegebou. Pretoria 2007
Figure 5.10 Meat Board Building. Pretoria 2007

06 The Meso Scale
Figure 6.01 Panoramic view of site and surrounding context
Figure 6.02 Panagos Building dating from the 1940s
(‘Panagos Building’ in the Van der Waal Collection: c1940)
Figure 6.03 Aerial photograph of site and historical context
Figure 6.04 Site analysis showing movement and views in and around the site. March 2007
Figure 6.05 Analysis of public spaces and relevant movement patterns. March 2007
Figure 6.06 Panoramic collage of building's surrounding site
Figure 6.07 Figure ground study
Figure 6.08 View north of threshold
Figure 6.09 View south of threshold
Figure 6.10 Proposals for the Paul Kruger Street North Precinct
(The Re-Kgabisa Tshwane Project 2007: Gallery Precincts)
Figure 6.11 Proposals for the Paul Kruger Street South Precinct
(The Re-Kgabisa Tshwane Project 2007: Gallery Precincts)
Figure 6.12 Synagogue Square
(The Re-Kgabisa Tshwane Project 2007: Gallery Precincts)
Figure 6.13 Struben Street
(The Re-Kgabisa Tshwane Project 2007: Gallery Precincts)
Figure 6.14 Department of Education
(The Re-Kgabisa Tshwane Project 2007: Gallery Precincts)
Figure 6.15 Carnival Court Backpackers, Cape Town, May 2007
Figure 6.16 Cat and Moose Backpackers, Cape Town, May 2007
Figure 6.17 Long Street Backpackers, Cape Town, May 2007
Figure 6.18 Daddy Longlegs Boutique Hotel, Cape Town, May 2007
Figure 6.19 View of Long Street, Cape Town, May 2007
Figure 6.20 Old and new complementing the urban character
Figure 6.21 Graphic representation of the relationship between the quality of the outdoor spaces and the rate of occurrence of outdoor activities (Gehl 1987:17)
Figure 6.23 Activating space: Shop window Band, Greenwich 2005

07 The Micro Scale
Figure 7.01 The minister’s house (‘Minister’s House next door to the Old Synagogue’ Panagos, 2007)
Figure 7.02 Oranjienburgerstrasse Synagogue, Berlin
(Wigoder 1986:166)
List of Figures

08 Literature Review
Figure 8.01 Goldman Salatsch House (centre), Vienna, by Adolf Loos 1911 (Brolin 1980:79)
Figure 8.02 Initial concept of sequence of events to take place on site
Figure 8.03 Flashpoint development Phasing Strategy for District Six (Le Grange 2007:61)
Figure 8.04 Panoramic view of District Six and remaining church
Figure 8.05 Children gathered around central map in the District Six Museum, Cape Town, May 2007
Figure 8.06 Public commentary on crime in South Africa by Jacques Coetzer 2007 (Neustetter 2007: Email to L.R.Wilson)
Figure 8.07 Public commentary on crime in South Africa by Jacques Coetzer 2007 (Neustetter 2007: Email to L.R.Wilson)
Figure 8.08 Concrete Eiland by Clive van der Berg, Johannesburg, September 2007
Figure 8.09 Johannesburg's latest piece of Public Art, cnr Jan Smuts & Amershofff Roads, Johannesburg, September 2007
Figure 8.10 Children fascinated by opening in the floor, The Drill Hall, March 2007
Figure 8.11 Camping in the city during the event, The Drill Hall, March 2007
Figure 8.12 Late afternoon performance, The Drill Hall, March 2007
Figure 8.13 Sketch of the Drill Hall (Decker 2006:27)
Figure 8.14 The Drill Hall today, The Drill Hall, March 2007
Figure 8.15 The Sans Souci Ruin, Kliptown, January 2007
Figure 8.16 Film night on the site, Kliptown, January 2007
Figure 8.17 The outdoor cinema, Kliptown, January 2007

09 Design Influences
Figure 9.01 Southern Entrance to the Faculty of Law. Pretoria 2007
Figure 9.02 Vertical Circulation. Pretoria 2007
Figure 9.03 East-west orientated circulation routes. Pretoria 2007
Figure 9.04 Main Library and atrium. Pretoria 2007
Figure 9.05 Strategic window. Soweto 2007
Figure 9.06 Exterior view of Museum. Soweto 2007
Figure 9.07 Entrance to Museum. Soweto 2007
Figure 9.08 Openings as part of the exhibition. Soweto 2007
Figure 9.09 Elements in the urban landscape. Soweto 2007
Figure 9.10 Analysis of placement
(Analysis of placement of the structure within the Square in relation to the Cathedral and circulation routes’ in Academy Edition 1990:148)
Figure 9.11 ‘Perspective View of Cathedral Square’
(Academy Editions 1990:145)
Figure 9.12 Main exhibition space (The Stadthaus at Ulm and the Cathedral 1995:17)

10 Design Development
Figure 10.01-10.04 Initial Block Model. March 2007
Figure 10.05-10.07 Early concept sketches. March/April 2007
Figure 10.08 Determining a height for the proposed building. March 2007
Figure 10.09 Initial Section and elevation of the site and building. May 2007
Figure 10.10 Initial concept sketch indicating access point and orientation. March 2007
Figure 10.11 Initial concept sketch showing primary and secondary link to the urban context. March 2007
Figure 10.12 3D Sketch of primary link to the historical context. March 2007
Figure 10.13-10.17 Photographs of concept model ONE
Figure 10.18-10.22 Concept Sketches. March/April 2007
Figure 10.23 Initial office layout plans. May 2007
Figure 10.24 Initial unit layout plans. May 2007
Figure 10.25 Interior view of office and reception area. May 2007
Figure 10.26-10.29 Photographs of concept model TWO
Figure 10.30-10.32 Concept Sketches. April/May 2007
Figure 10.33 Sketch of Atrium. May 2007
Figure 10.34 Concept Sketches. April/May 2007
Figure 10.35-10.39 Sketches of roofing options. July 2007
Figure 10.40-10.43 Photographs of concept model THREE
Figure 10.44-10.47 Concept Sketches. July/August 2007
Figure 10.48-10.52 Concept Sketches. August 2007
Figure 10.53-10.56 Photographs of concept model FOUR
Figure 10.57-10.58 Sketch of main staircase options. August 2007
Figure 10.59 Sketch plan of entrance ‘box’. September 2007
Figure 10.60 Sketch. September 2007
Figure 10.61 Sketch of entrance ‘box’. September 2007
Figure 10.62-10.63 Sketches of main staircase options. September 2007
Figure 10.64 Sketches of threshold between outdoor and indoor space. September 2007

11 Technical Investigation
Figure 11.01 Floor plan of Nederlands Bank, Pretoria (Harrop Allen 1975: 52)
Figure 11.02 Window and chimney detail of the Nicolson House, Pretoria (Harrop Allen 1975: 28)
Figure 11.03 De Loor House, Pretoria (Harrop Allen 1975: 31)
Figure 11.04 Modifying the model. September 2007
Figure 11.05 Mosaic Detail of Column at the Constitutional Court in Braamfontein
Figure 11.06 Winding Mosaic Bench, Park Guell, Barcelona, 2005
Figure 11.07 Mosaic Fountain, Park Guell, Barcelona, 2005
Figure 11.08 Dustbin Poetry by Jacques Coetzee (Neustetter 2005:Email to L.R. Wilson)
Figure 11.09 Sun study and documentation. September 2007
Figure 11.10 Problem identification. September 2007
Figure 11.11 Sun investigation. September 2007
Figure 11.12 Lumination levels with increasing depth of unit September 2007
Figure 11.13 Impact of light shelf on illuminance distribution September 2007

12 Tectonic Resolution
Figure 12.01 Concrete ‘Entrance Box’. October 2007
Figure 12.02 Sketch of Main Staircase and Viewing balcony. September 2007
Figure 12.03-12.04 Detail sketches of treads. October 2007
Figure 12.05 Sample of terrazzo floor finish.
Figure 12.06 Concept development of balustrade detail with tactile display panel. October 2007
Figure 12.07 Sketch of ‘Position of Pause’. October 2007
Figure 12.08 Balustrade detail. October 2007
Figure 12.09 Colour usage on pre-cast concrete balustrade. October 2007
Figure 12.10 Detail of viewing balcony of main staircase. November 2007
Figure 12.11 Main staircase detail. November 2007
Figure 12.12-12.13 Section through void. October 2007
Figure 12.14-12.16 Balustrade and Circulation detail sketches. October 2007
Figure 12.17 Detail sketch of base of balustrade. October 2007
Figure 12.18 Detail of circulation bridges. November 2007
Figure 12.19-12.20 Sketches of roof. October 2007
Figure 12.21 Sketch of shading fins. October 2007
Figure 12.22-12.24 Sketches of roof details. October 2007
Figure 12.25 Gutter detail sketch. October 2007
Figure 12.26 Detail of main roof structure. November 2007
Figure 12.27 Detail of main roof structure. November 2007
Figure 12.28 Sketch of structural support of protruding glazed sliding screen facade. October 2007
Figure 12.29 Sketch of sliding screen detail. October 2007
Figure 12.30 Sketch of sliding screen detail. October 2007
Figure 12.31 Detail of circulation bridges and sliding screen facade. November 2007
Figure 12.32 Sketch of glazed ‘threshold’ roof. October 2007
Figure 12.33 Sketch of glazed ‘threshold’ roof. October 2007
Figure 12.34 Detail exploration. October 2007
Figure 12.35 Detail exploration. October 2007
Figure 12.36 Detail of threshold roof. November 2007
Figure 12.37 Detail of threshold roof. November 2007
Figure 12.38 Textured off-shutter concrete of the Millowners Association Building, 1955, Le Corbusier (Tucker 2007: http://www.travelblog.org/Photos/801306.html)
Figure 12.39 Textured off-shutter concrete finish of the Satellite Towers, 1957, New Mexico (Seidler 2004:566)
Figure 12.40 Elevation options for main staircase wall. October 2007
Figure 12.41 Section through main staircase wall
Figure 12.42 Detail of main staircase wall. November 2007
List of Figures

- Figure 12.43-12.44 Northern facade options. October 2007
- Figure 12.45 Play on open and closed elements of the northern facade. November 2007
- Figure 12.46 Existing site plan. November 2007
- Figure 12.47 Proposed site plan. November 2007
- Figure 12.48 Northern elevation of site. November 2007
- Figure 12.49 Southern elevation of site. November 2007
- Figure 12.50 Basement plan. November 2007
- Figure 12.51 Ground floor plan. November 2007
- Figure 12.52 First floor plan. November 2007
- Figure 12.53 Third floor plan. November 2007
- Figure 12.54 Fourth floor plan. November 2007
- Figure 12.55 Roof plan. November 2007
- Figure 12.56 Northern Elevation. November 2007
- Figure 12.57 Southern elevation. November 2007
- Figure 12.58 Western Elevation. November 2007
- Figure 12.59 Section. November 2007

3.01 'The evolution of urban regeneration' (Roberts 2005:14)
The city of Pretoria is the historic capital of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) and today shares the title with the city of Cape Town. Over the last decade, Pretoria has experienced an economic shift that has led to a lack of interest in portions of the inner city. This disinterest is most notable in the northern portion of the inner city, which is no longer perceived as integral to the CBD. In spite of its wealth in history and its dramatic setting, Pretoria does not feature strongly in the itinerary of either local or international tourists. While government departments attempt to boost investment interest, the area calls for a catalytic intervention to prevent further decay and bring about the required change.
Project Background

Due to the changing dynamics of the inner city, it is no longer the preferred residential location for the more affluent. The city has seen a consistent decentralisation, with low-density residential and commercial growth shifting towards the eastern regions. The changing location of employment opportunities has caused a lack of investment interest in the city. Factors such as crime, the decay of the urban environment and the absence of adequate social facilities have contributed to the momentum of the economic shift. Roberts refers to this trend as “in-situ” decay. The city lacks a variety of activities that contribute to it functioning as a vibrant 24 hour city.

Selected Site
The selected site is located on the south-eastern corner of the intersection of Paul Kruger Street and Struben Street, and falls within the boundaries of the perceived inner city. The intersection with Struben Street acts as the threshold and forms an unplanned gateway into the city when entering from the north. The surrounding context is rich in historical value and architectural heritage, and it is this context that generates the design approach for the proposed building.

Delimitations
A large portion of this dissertation deals with the history and significance of the Old Synagogue, located adjacent to the selected site. It is important to note, that this project does not address the synagogue itself, but focuses on an approach that allows for the successful integration of the neglected building into the current and future context. The project goes as far as to propose a function for the synagogue in relation to the proposed spaces that surround it. It does not address any restorative measures that may be required. The proposed building is directed towards the Old Synagogue in an attempt to celebrate its history and value, rather than competing with it in the urban context.

Assumptions
Due to the theoretical nature of this dissertation and its obvious limitations, it is impossible for this proposal to address the issue of urban regeneration in its entirety. According to Roberts, regeneration goes “beyond the aims, aspirations and achievements of urban renewal”. Only by addressing broader economic and social issues is the sustainability of the intervention ensured. By nature, the process of urban regeneration is truly a process that must be seen as a long-term cycle of activity which inevitably requires flexibility due to the numerous parties involved. This dissertation focuses on the issue of renewal, but suggests a broader, more encompassing approach. Therefore, it is only the physical and environmental regeneration – often referred to as urban renewal – that is dealt with in this dissertation.

The study examines and responds to the current challenges and the present context, but is in line with the study group’s envisioned proposal for the northern portion of the Paul Kruger Street spine. The objective is to establish an optimum solution for the site, rather than being driven by the realities of economic and political trends.

1. Roberts (2005:27)
2. Roberts (2005:18)
3. Roberts (2005:6)
4. Students working along the northern section of the Paul Kruger Street spine jointly established a visionary framework.
The objective of establishing an urban framework is to formulate a vision for the northern section of the Paul Kruger Street spine which can act as a guideline for decision-making. The proposal addresses the following:

- A network of public space that maintains the finer urban character of the northern portion of the city
- The network of public spaces mirrors the southern portion of the spine, namely Pretorius Square
- The activities contribute to the life on street, thereby playing a role in the surveillance and safety thereof (dependant on activities and participants/occupants)
- The introduction of a residential component west of Paul Kruger Street, in line with the city council’s current proposal
- The encouragement of local small businesses and the promotion of South African products
- The discouragement of private vehicular transport in the inner city, in line with the long-term vision of the partial ‘pedestrianisation’ of Paul Kruger Street and the future operation of a tram line along this route

Figure 4.01: Map of proposed group framework and proposed projects
Approach

The City of Tshwane council maintains, “The Inner City Development and Regeneration Strategy is based on a ‘catalytic intervention-approach’ whereby specific strategic interventions are proposed to address the challenges in order to achieve the critical success factors.” The mixed-use programme for the proposed building begins to activate the space over an extended period of time, while providing some of the basic amenities currently lacking in the urban environment, allowing it to function as the anticipated catalyst. As Gehl points out, “the integration of various activities and functions in and around public spaces allows the people involved to function together and stimulate and inspire one another”. In addition, the dynamics of various activities begin to address the issues of safety and security, and help to awaken the general public’s interest in their capital city.

Proposed Building Programme

Primarily, the building addresses the lack of temporary accommodation in the inner city, by targeting tourists, interns and researchers that may want a budget accommodation option while experiencing the city of Pretoria. The mixed-use building accommodates retail facilities which target businesses and office space for small businesses, in addition to a small percentage of luxury accommodation, which is virtually non-existent in the area, to ensure a degree of continuity.

Due to the nature of such a catalytic intervention, the building itself allows for a degree of adaptability in order to accommodate unforeseen spatial requirements alongside changing city dynamics. It also ensures a smoother transition for residential developments that have been identified for the area west of Paul Kruger Street.

Client/User

Due to its location and the city council’s current drive to encourage government departments to relocate to the area, the office space is required to house the Provincial Heritage Resources Agency of Gauteng (PHRAG), which currently operates from a private residence in the east of Pretoria. Other non-government and heritage organisations would be encouraged to occupy the available office space.

On an urban level, the increased density introduced to the site contributes to the goal of limiting urban sprawl by maximising land-use values as set out in the City of Tshwane Spatial Development Strategy: 2010 and Beyond.

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7. Tshwane Inner City Development and Regeneration Strategy (2005:9)