

PART FIVE

ANALYSIS – THE SITE

Soja⁷⁶, in describing critical social theory over the ages, argues for a combination of different theories of spatial investigation when trying to understand or conceptualise space. He proposes for the conflicting points of view from the past that deal with issues of historical, cultural, economical and political nature, to be treated as compatible in contrast to competitive. His argument proves to be incredibly relevant when trying to understand the urban spaces of Marabastad. It is a place that is richly influenced and moulded over time by political neglect, cultural reactions and economical difficulties – a place where “*material poverty [was and still is] overcome by a wealth in spirit, hardship conquered by cheeky humour, [and] a marginalised existence enriched through creation of a very own Marabastad culture*”⁷⁷.

It is thus necessary to insure a broad perspective on life in Marabastad and include relevant issues from a wide scope of reference in order to better understand the influences as well as the reactions to urban life in Marabastad. For this reason, together with the history, culture, politics and economics of the area, brief attention will be given to aspects that may at first seem ad-hoc but that played and still play a very important role in defining Marabastad: the Marabi culture of jazz and vaudeville from the early 1900’s; the history of cinema; religious activities and buildings; and ‘underground’ activities that always shape a major part of marginalised communities.

⁷⁶ Soja. 1989. p.74.

⁷⁷ Malan. *et al.* 1999. p.4.



Fig. 13: Marabastad - selling watches

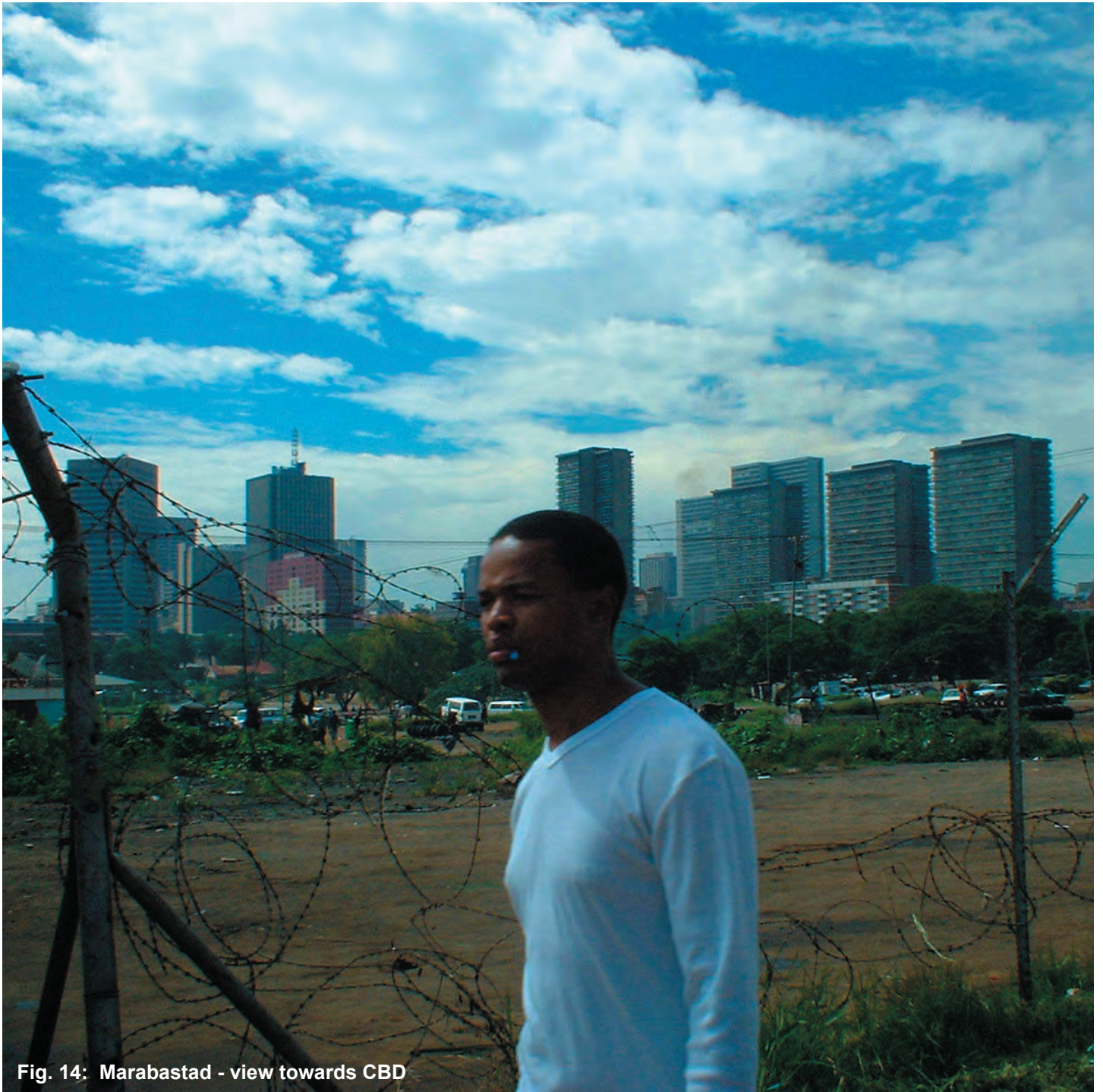


Fig. 14: Marabastad - view towards CBD

ANALYSIS APPROACH

HISTORICAL

- > understanding the time layers of the site
- > knowing how the non-physical environment affected the development of the site
- > considering political, social, economical, religious and cultural influences over time

FRAMEWORK

- > in order to work within the ongoing process of urban renewal
- > stepping out of isolation and being part of a larger effort to improve conditions in marabastad
- > being sensitive to the frail situation - the framework has taken all parties into consideration
- > respecting the area, its sensitivity and functioning - areas of historical conservation, proposed land for restitution, proposed zoning, proposed specific land use

CONTEXTUAL

- > knowing how the area plugs into the larger city structure
- > understanding reasons for movement through and the existence of the marabastad area
- > understanding how movement and use influence the current character of the area
- > understanding the internal functioning of marabastad
- > choosing the space most suitable as public open space - the site

LOCAL

- > focussing on the human activity and usage of the specific site
- > understanding how the site (does not) provides for the needs of its users
- > representing and understanding the site from eye level - getting down to human scale
- > analysing circulation patterns and reasons for movement on an intimate local scale

PHYSICAL

- > knowing the physical surroundings and climatic conditions that influence the use and experience of the space
- > investigating the effects of the physical surroundings on the climate and micro-climate of the site

Fig. 15: Analysis approach

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Under the government of the Boer Republic which proclaimed Pretoria its capital in 1860, the movement and settlement of Blacks were controlled with the establishment of 'locations' as Black residential areas and the imposition of 'head taxes' and 'hut taxes' on labourers. In enforcement of this law, the first Black 'location' of Pretoria, Schoolplaats, was established north-west of the city in 1867. Informal expansion of this 'location' soon grew to surround the kraal of a local Ndebele chief, Maraba, and a new 'location' called Marabastad was declared in 1888. Just a few years later, around the time that Ghandi visited Pretoria, the 'Coolie Location' was established just south of Marabastad, as a residential area for Indian and other Asian groupings. The land between Marabastad and this new 'Coolie Location' gradually filled up and was named New Marabastad. However, the whole area soon needed to be re-surveyed with three townships as the result: 'Marabastad' for Blacks, the 'Asiatic Bazaar' for Indian and other Asian groupings and the 'Cape Boys Location' for Coloured groupings. Although they were three separate areas, these densely populated townships evolved into a single community inhabiting an area now simply referred to as Marabastad.⁷⁸

Character, conflict and politics

"Marabastad evolved with inadequate infrastructure, and suffered from over-crowding, large measures of poverty and general neglect. But the small footprint of the individual stands, coupled with a rich variety of land uses, where residential, business and cultural activities were tightly integrated, gave rise to a particularly charming urban character. Buildings were huddled densely together and defined lively streetscapes, with verandas over public pavements, colourful signage on buildings and, above all, a life that spilled out into the public domain."⁷⁹

This character of Marabastad, however lively and resistant it seemed, was always in a fragile condition with eviction threatening to strike any day as land ownership was prohibited in the area. The *"lack of more secure tenure rendered the people of Marabastad highly vulnerable, and throughout [the 20th] century there is hardly a generation of its inhabitants that did not witness forced evictions and demolitions of parts of the area"*⁸⁰ (Fig. 16). The first of these evictions already took place between 1912 and 1918 under the Land Act of the Transvaal when the residents of Old Marabastad were evicted to make way for the Daspoort sewage works. The Schoolplaats 'location' was next to be struck after being declared a slum and deproclaimed in 1934 under the Slums Clearance Act of the same year. The fear of eviction was again realised in 1958, when the Group Areas Act of 1950 determined that all residents of Marabastad had to be relocated to newly established townships on the periphery of the city. In addition Marabastad was declared an Indian business district and a shopping centre, the Asiatic Bazaar, was built on the now open pieces of land. This caused major conflict between the previous land owners and the new shop keepers and as a result places were left abandoned with only Indian traders left behind. The close-knit community

⁷⁸ Malan. *op.cit.* p.4.

⁷⁹ *ibid.* p.4.

⁸⁰ *ibid.* p.5.



Aerial photograph of Marabastad (1934)

(source: Janse van Rensburg 1994)



Aerial photograph of Marabastad (1965)

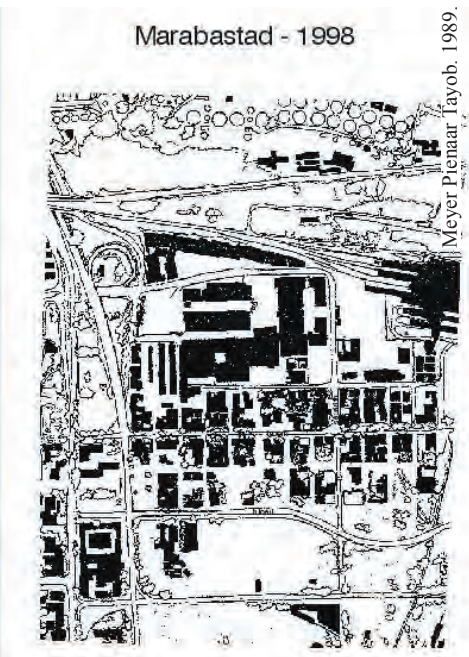
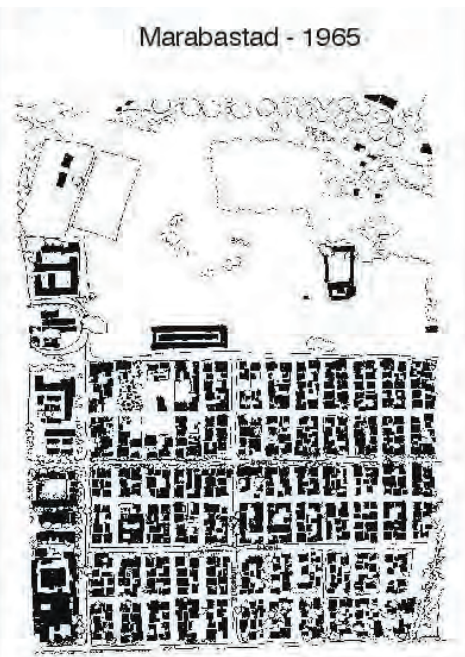
(source: Janse van Rensburg 1994)



Aerial photograph of Marabastad (1998)

Meyer Pienaar layob. 1989.

Fig. 16: Comparative densities of Marabastad



Meyer Pienaar layob. 1989.

of Marabastad was a thing of the past. In the year of 1967 a proposal was made for a large freeway interchange that would result in the demolition of almost all that was left over of Marabastad. Although the scheme was never implemented in full, it resulted in the clearance of all areas to the south of Bloed street. Then, in 1981, as a last blow, a railway line was laid over the leftover pieces of land of the former Marabastad 'location'. The line and station, Belle Ombre, was to connect labourers from out of town with the inner-city and turned Marabastad into one of the busiest commuter nodes of Pretoria.⁸¹

Today there is no obvious conflict between the different racial groups occupying this part of the city, but Marabastad has transformed into a commercial business district where over 40 000 Black commuters come and go between the many transportation termini every day. The shops are mainly owned by the Indian population from Laudium and the shop keepers are mainly Black workers from Soshanguve and Mabopane. It is a fast moving place with as much pedestrian as vehicular activity and one almost gets the feeling that people are only moving through the area out of necessity. *"Where once a stable, well-integrated community had made its home, the Blacks have now become passers-through, with only squatters and large numbers of informal traders constituting what could be termed the Black population of Marabastad today."*⁸²

Culture and religion

Before the implementation of the Group Areas act of 1950, when it was mainly the Black community that was affected by the evictions and demolitions, the residents of the Indian and Coloured areas continued to build on a strong and integrated community – *"Diverse religious groupings erected fine edifices as places of worship, the local cinemas and community halls became cultural landmarks, jazz troupes performed on horse-drawn carts in the streets, and all along there was an undercurrent of political resistance, at times clandestinely, at times openly defiant..."*⁸³. The two respective areas, the Cape Boys Location and the Asiatic Bazaar, included five schools, two mosques, various churches, a Tamil temple and community hall, sports facilities, three cinema's and many small business enterprises.⁸⁴

Today the Mariammen temple (Fig. 17) and abandoned Tamil temple and Ismaili mosque (Fig. 18) stand as reminders of the past in an otherwise dilapidated Marabastad – they are portraying the legacy of the soulful community that once filled the streets around them⁸⁵. Although the Indian community that is drawn to Marabastad by the new mosque along Mogul street have Marabastad as a specific destination, their in-and-out movement is no different to that of the commuters that simply pass through every day.

⁸¹ Malan. *op.cit.* p.5-7.

⁸² *ibid.* p.5.

⁸³ *ibid.* p.4.

⁸⁴ *ibid.* p.7.

⁸⁵ Meyer Pienaar Tayob. 1989. chap. 3.5.3.

As in all townships of the era, cinema shaped a significant part of the everyday life of the Marabastad community. American films used to inspire the marginalised and repressed community with stories of success and hope – in fact, “*black South Africans were watching films long before the invention of the sound movie in the late 1920’s ... By the 1930’s, there were a number of commercial cinemas for blacks ... and in most of the townships free films were shown out of doors, even on cold winter nights. Despite the controls of strict censorship, the movies had an impact difficult to overestimate.*”⁸⁶ This role of the cinema as contributor to the spirit and aspirations of the community was lost when the people of Marabastad were drawn apart physically and emotionally by the demolitions of the 1900’s. Over the years the empty structures of the abandoned cinemas – Orient (Fig. 19) and Empire – have lost their status as cultural landmarks and have been filled by the many small business enterprises that are now dominating the area.

In the past, however, “*for jazz and vaudeville artists, films were an apparently infinite source of things to be emulated or developed: ideas, melodies, songs, routines, dance steps, styles of presentation, ways of dressing, ways of playing; and of course they also provided ways of estimating local achievement.*”⁸⁷ As can be expected, the same fate of the cinemas also awaited these local jazz and vaudeville groups of the early 1900’s – the marabi culture. Like the cinemas, marabi music was highly focussed on the American example that gave inspiration to the people of Marabastad. Marabi was “*a style [of music] forged principally by unschooled keyboard players who were notoriously part of the culture and economy of the illegal slumyard liquor dens. A rhythmically propulsive dance music, marabi drew its melodic inspiration eclectically from a wide variety of sources, while harmonically it rested – as did the blues – upon an endlessly repeating chord sequence. The comparison is apt: though not directly related to the blues, marabi was as seminal to South African popular music as the blues was to American. (The cyclical nature of each, incidentally, betrays roots deep in indigenous African musics.)*”⁸⁸ It is said that Marabi can only be understood within the social context that gave it birth – it is no wonder then, that the segregation of the Marabastad community during the mid 1900’s hugely impacted on the existence of this locally produced culture – “*Most serious for the future of urban black music was the Group Areas Act of 1950, in consequence of which all remaining racially-mixed neighbourhoods were separated through the forced removal of entire black communities – often uprooted from the centres of cities and relocated on the peripheries. The destruction of these vibrant communities was a major factor in bringing the era of the large dance orchestras to an end, by the late 1950’s.*”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ballantine. 1993. p.20.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* p.20.

⁸⁸ *ibid.* p.5.

⁸⁹ *ibid.* p.7.



Fig. 17: Marabastad - Miriammen temple



Fig. 18: Marabastad - Ismaili mosque



Fig. 19: Marabastad - Orient cinema

Economics and the ‘underground’

The declaration of Marabastad as an Indian business district in the late 1950's, quickly transformed it from vibrant residential community with mixed land use into an almost solely commercial node, catering for the daily commuters that are forced to move through the area every day. At first glance the local economy of Marabastad seems to be made up of the many small formal business enterprises that occupy the old buildings together with the abundance of informal traders (Fig. 20) that can be found in every nook and cranny – “*The informal traders of Marabastad today form an integral part of life on the streets. As economically active individuals, they are an asset to the community...*”⁹⁰ In a study done on the informal traders of Marabastad, “*it was found that only a small number of hawker activities could be classified as growth enterprises and that the majority of street vendors are struggling to survive.*”⁹¹ However, Horn⁹² warns against the invisible system of illegal activity that thrives under the mask of informal trade in less regulated parts of the city. He describes this ‘underground’ element to be against all forms of control from any type of authority, but in control of many of the social-economic networks within the area.

The problem of this ‘illegal element’ has long been a part of Marabastad and was already apparent in the local community of the early 1900's. In the days of marabi music and jazz parades many members of the community kicked against the illegal sale of alcohol in the stokvels (“*an informal savings society whose members held parties and contributed sums of money to each other in rotation*”⁹³), the weekend long slumyard parties and the pornography and prostitution that went along with the late night movie screenings. The marabi culture and its venues were commonly associated “*with illegality, police raids, sex and a desperately impoverished working class ... stigmatised as evil and degrading...*”⁹⁴. “*Marabi showed the bad side of the black community and for the part of the community that was moving up in social and political stature, it was something that held them back and gave the wrong impression.*”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Malan. *op.cit.* p.13.

⁹¹ Brandt. 2001. p.1.

⁹² Horn. 2006.

⁹³ Ballantine. *op.cit.* p.63.

⁹⁴ *ibid.* p.29.

⁹⁵ *ibid.* p.75.



Fig. 20: Marabastad - informal trade

FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

In 1998 the Integrated Urban Design Framework for Marabastad⁹⁶ was compiled by Aziz Tayob Architects Inc. & Meyer Pienaar Tayob Architects & Urban Designers. *“The brief for compilation of [the framework] stemmed from identification in the 1998 IDP for Pretoria of the area as a ‘Strategic Development Area’ within the inner city ... What guided the team was a desire to truly integrate all the diverse strands that make up the Marabastad fabric, not only in physical form, but also in the formative energies which lie in its people.”*⁹⁷ Among the objectives for the framework were development guidelines for vacant land on the periphery of Marabastad and the enhancement of Marabastad as a tourist and unique shopping destination.

After reading the framework it was clear that *“the urban environment is here seen not as a designed stage set, but as the physical manifestation of social interaction, and the urban design exercise as an enabling mechanism which will help steer the reciprocal relationship between a community and its built environment into a spiral of growth on all fronts”*⁹⁸.

This study supports the vision of the framework in its philosophy and urban design approach and although it mostly agrees with the suggestions (Fig. 21-25), it is of the opinion that the open spaces of Marabastad (existing and suggested) fail to capture the essence of the place and bring out the energy and vibrancy that can already be felt when one moves through the area. In addition it is thought that the area suggested within the framework as open space will fail to create a successful place of arrival and slowing down within an otherwise fast moving Marabastad. It is thought to be too small in size to accommodate for the amount of people and activities it is likely to draw, and the placement is thought not to be optimum – although it finds itself within some of the pedestrian circulation routes, it will fail to catch the daily activity generated by the Belle Ombre station and adjacent informal taxi rank as well as the movement from these transport termini into the inner city.

It is the intention of this study to investigate the potential of open spaces in relation to the existing movement and activity within Marabastad. The outcome of this will be the selection of a space that will better serve the purpose of public open space – a space that will act as catalyst to socially activate the public areas of Marabastad, enhance the networks and, with this, better integrate the whole community and all its activities.

⁹⁶ Meyer Pienaar Tayob. *op.cit.*

⁹⁷ Malan. *op.cit.* p.10.

⁹⁸ *ibid.* p.10.

Fig. 21: Framework analysis - proposed areas of historical conservation

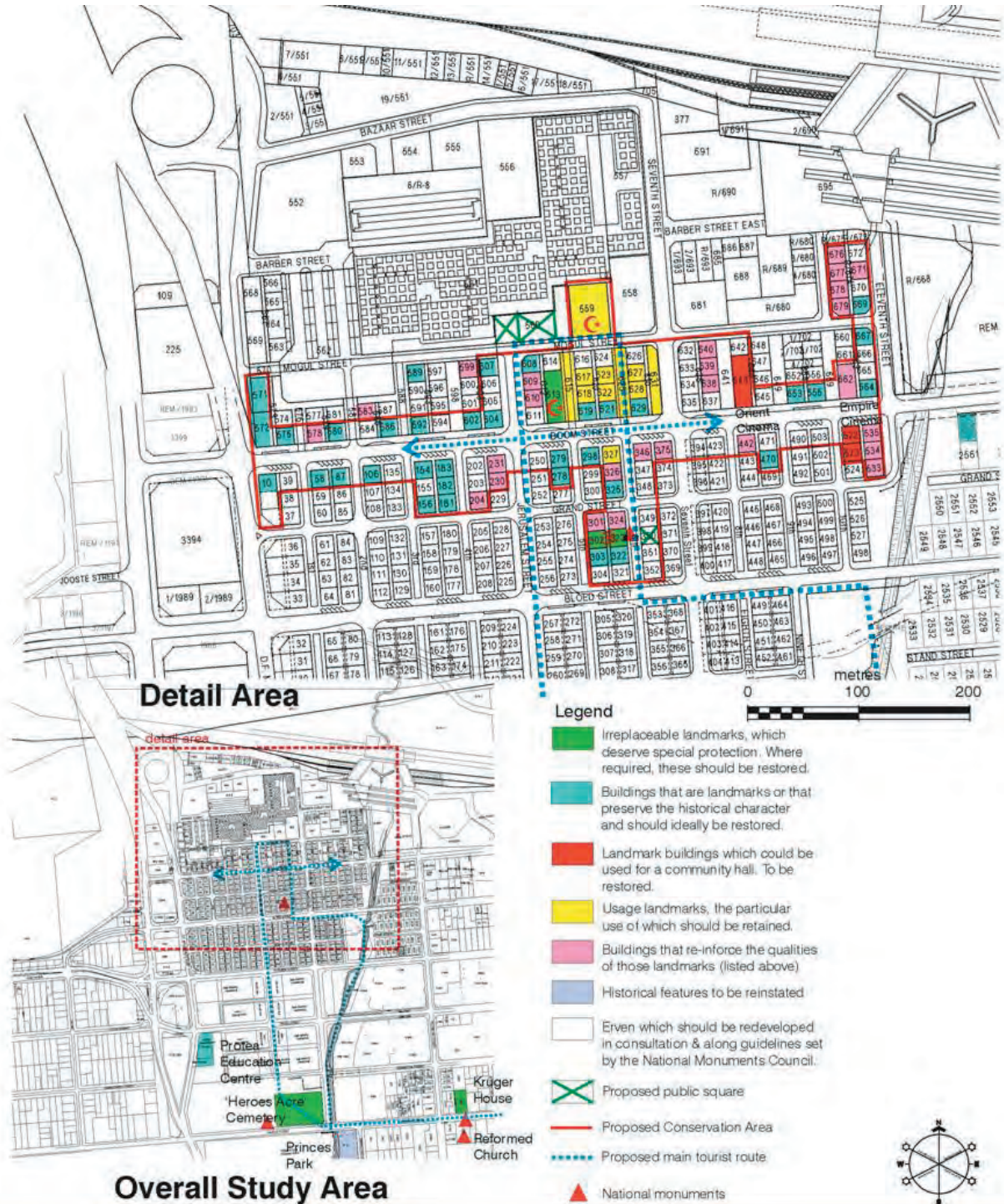


Fig. 22: Framework analysis - proposed land for restitution

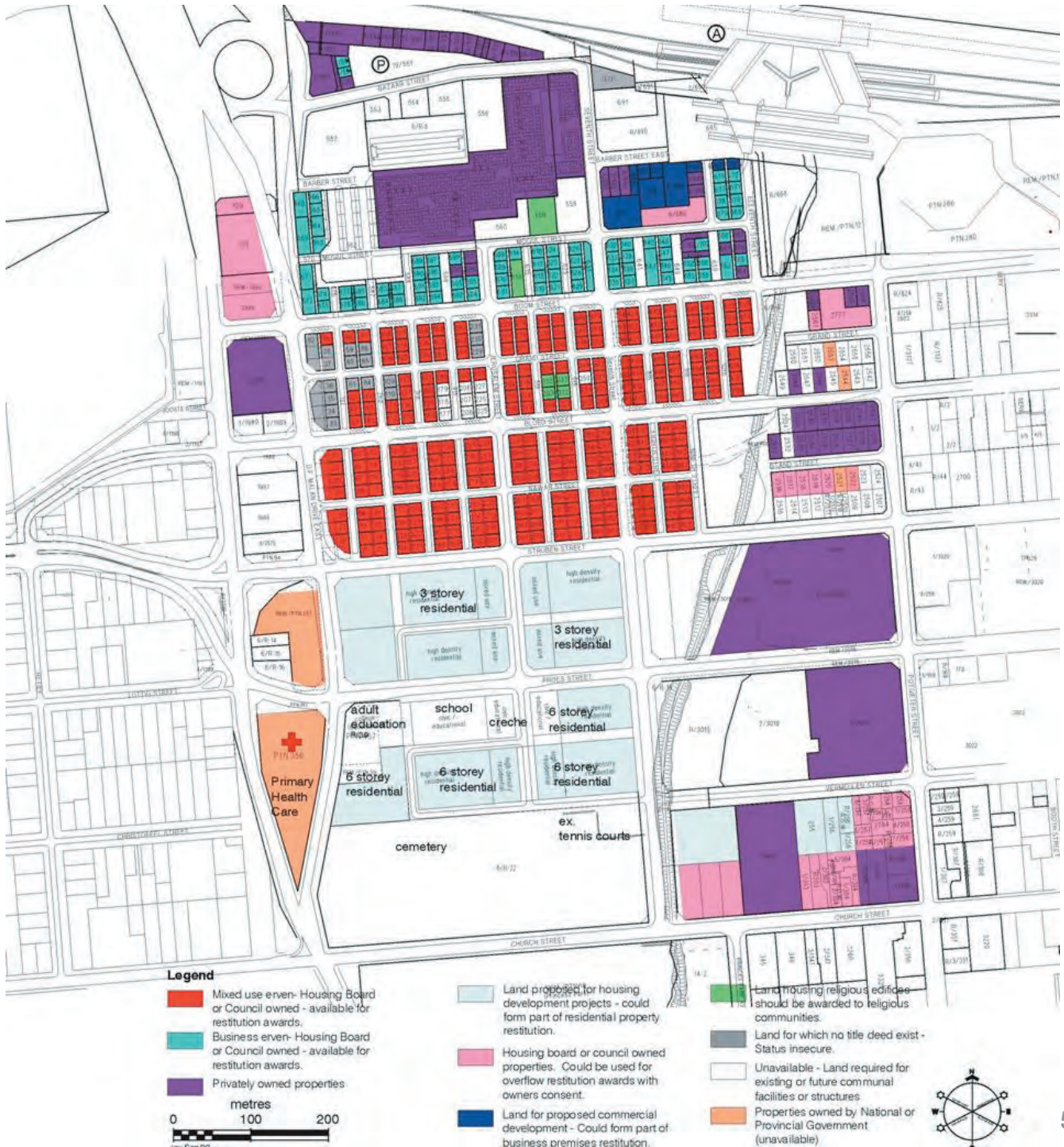
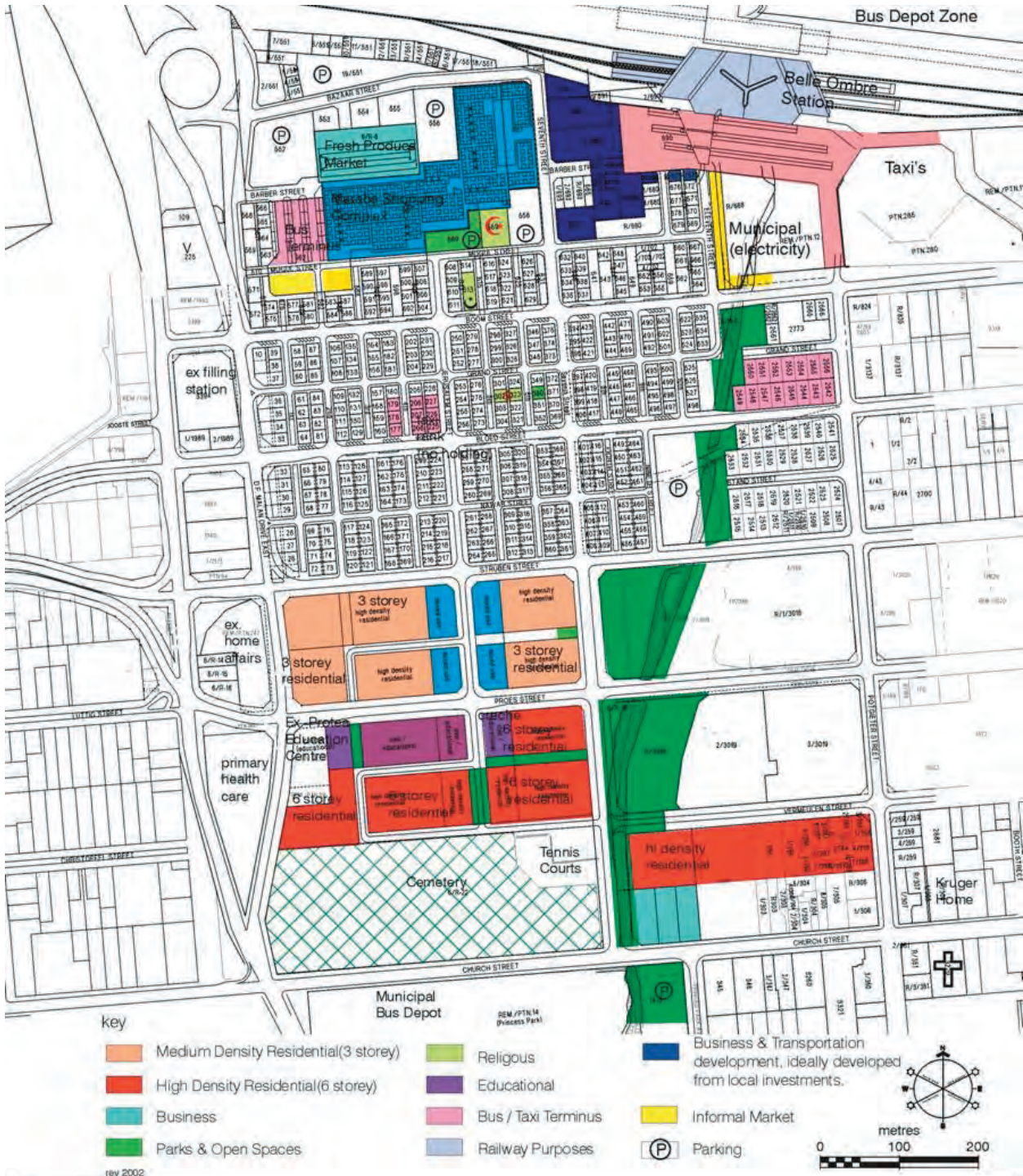


Fig. 23: Framework analysis - proposed specific land use



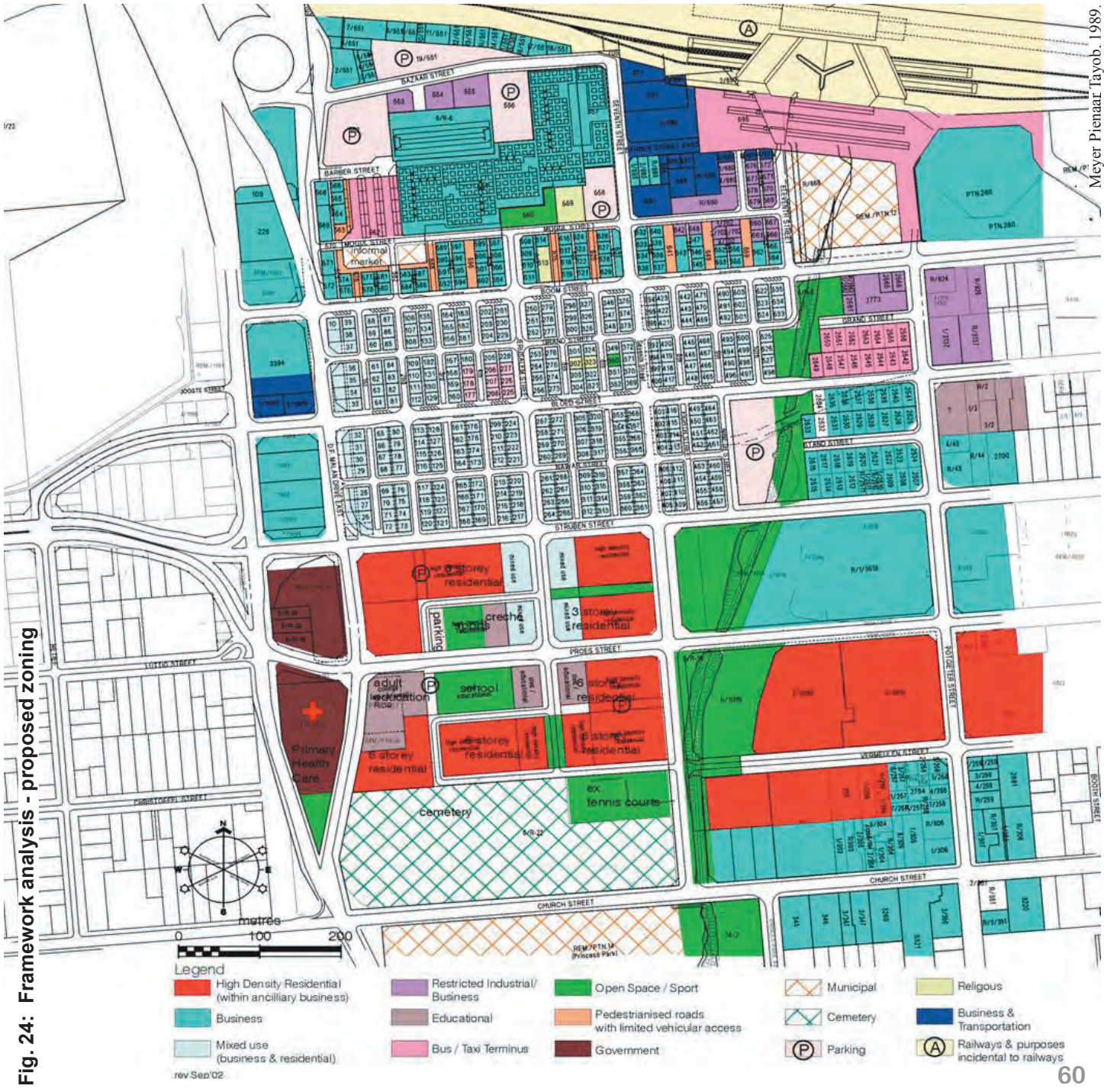


Fig. 24: Framework analysis - proposed zoning

