

## 04 \_ THEORETICAL APPROACH

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Maputo is the capital city of a developing country. The theoretical investigation is thus carried out with an awareness that the African urban context is one of contrast. African space is strongly defined by urban processes. The challenge for the proposed intervention in a city such as Maputo is to cater for both the local phenomenon and the global norm, the marrying of the formal with the massive influence of the informal and the changeable with the fixed. It is important to focus on not what the intervention is, but what it does.

## 4.2 AIM OF THE CHAPTER

The aim of the chapter is to establish relevant theories as design informants to guide the design process.

*“Places... can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself. This in turn allows for a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local.”*

*\_ Massey (1994:7)*

### 4.3 ORDER

“Human societies are spatial phenomena: they occupy regions of the earth’s surface, and within and between these regions material resources move, people encounter each other and information is transmitted... But a society does more than simply exist in space. It also takes on a definite spatial form and it does so in two senses. First, it arranges people in space in that it locates them in relation to each other, with a greater or lesser degree of aggregation and separation, engendering patterns of movement and encounter that may be dense or sparse within or between different groupings. Second, it arranges space itself by means of buildings, boundaries, paths,

markers, zones and so on, so that the physical milieu of that society also takes on a definite pattern. In both senses a society acquires a definite and recognisable spatial order.” (Hillier & Hanson, 1984:28)

This statement holds significance at both an urban design level, and the level of the particular design intervention. Within the context of this design proposal, spatial order is an important factor to consider, being a public transport facilitator. The program administers the movement and orientation of large numbers of people.

### 4.4 PLACE

Wolf Prix, founder of Coop Himmelb(l)au writes that “the gradual privatisation of urban public space... is having profound effects on contemporary architecture as a whole. Faced with a lack of public funds, cities and local authorities are increasingly unable to play an active role in urban planning and instead acquiesce to private investors who help themselves to the biggest and best pieces of the city” (2003:18).

In a similar vein, urban geographer Doreen Massey writes in her book, *For Space*: “There is widespread concern about the ‘decline of public space’ in

the... city: the commercial privatisation of space, the advent of new enclosures such as, iconically, the shopping mall, and so forth” (2005:152).

The risk here is that the potential quality public places in cities are lost to the citizens. In Maputo, this loss of public space was seen at the waterfront, where history reveals that industrial requirements triumphed over human needs regarding access to the water. Architect and educator Robert Stern supports what he calls an architecture of healing, whereby ‘left-over’ space is used within cities. The Baixa exhibits such spaces.

Massey however goes on to comment that all spaces are socially regulated in some way, if not by explicit rules, then by the population fundamentally working it out for itself. Perhaps the regulation of public space is not the definitive problem in urban areas, but rather the intensity at which this regulation is formalised and monitored. Any public space that is provided in urban areas will have some underlying order based upon the users of that place. This is particularly evident in developing countries where informal elements seem incongruent, but are nevertheless arranged to an underlying ordering system.

Massey preceded her opinions in *For Space*, with the book *Space, Place and Gender*, wherein she gives her opinion of place: “Places...can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself. This in turn allows for a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local” (1994:7).

fig. 4.1\_ Figure ground sketch of area around the ferry stop at Catembe. Sketch illustrates public space populated by bars and restaurants, accessible to both vehicles and pedestrians.

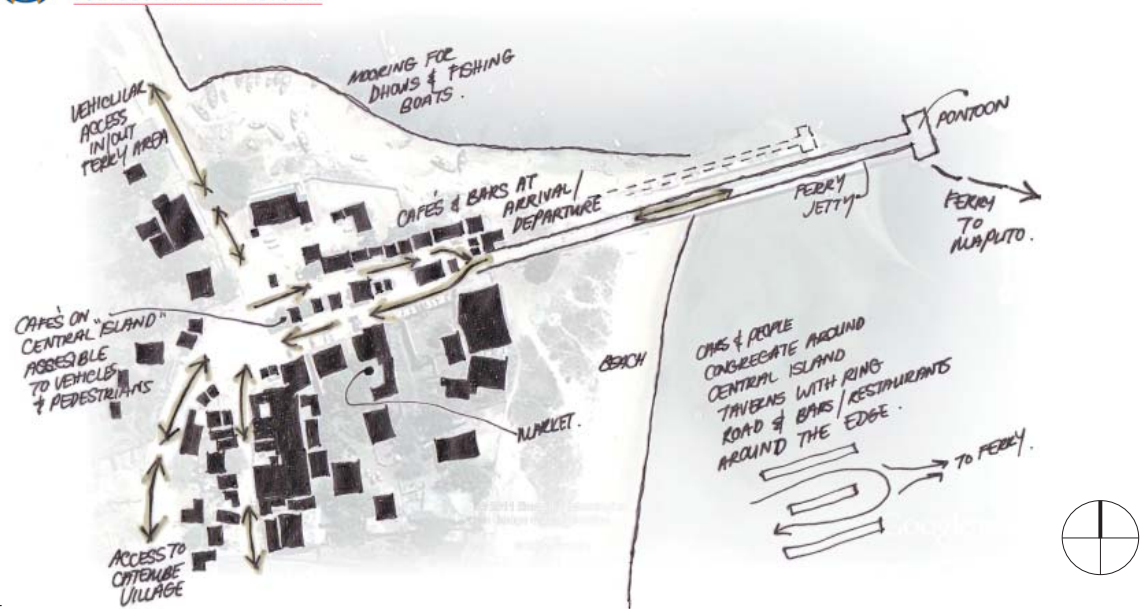


fig. 4.1\_

Thus place is not static or fixed, and particularly in an African context, is often characterised by informal appropriation. Jane Jacobs, an urban writer, stated that “the site of people attracts still other people.” (1961:33) If public social interaction can be seen as the main attraction of any city, then a transport node is an important place for integrating a critical mass of people with a quality public space within the city, allowing for social interactions to unfold.

Thus it is an important theoretical objective within the dissertation to consider placemaking in the design development. A sense of place is a quality lacking in the current facility. Place in this instance is not seen as monotonous, but rather as a complex multifaceted social construct.

#### 4.4.1 Precedent informing the theoretical approach \_ Catembe

An interesting local precedent that formed the intrigue behind my investigation into successful public place is the development around the ferry stop in Catembe across the bay from the Baixa, and it’s contrast with the situation in Maputo. The ferry stop at Catembe is a pier stretching out from the headland, essential to reach the deeper water for boat access away from the beach.

At Catembe, passengers disembarking the ferry are greeted by a public space in interaction with the transport node. The headland extends out to welcome the traveler, and as one crosses from water to land cafes and taverns start to occur. The gathering space for boarding and disembarking the

ferry culminates in an intimate cluster of shops, restaurants, bars and trading space, both formal and informal, catering to the pedestrian and the vehicle traffic in successful combination. Vehicles share the road space with overflow customers from the local taverns. The area is lively throughout the day and well into the evening, with many locals simply enjoying the atmosphere and amenities with no specific intention of using the associated transport. The public space around the ferry becomes the place to be.

The same is not true of the ferry stop in Maputo. Although on a different urban scale to Catembe, it lacks ‘place’. Perhaps the greatest reason for that is the lack of physical space around the site, meaning expansion possibilities are stifled. Undoubtedly, latent potential exists at this transit point.



fig. 4.2  
Image depicting  
public space  
around ferry  
transport node  
at Catembe.  
The vehicular  
access roads  
to the ferry  
are shared by  
pedestrians.

*“If one can establish a track through space which becomes the actual path of movement of large numbers of people, or participators, and can design the area adjacent to it to produce a continuous flow of harmonic experience as one moves over the track in space, successful designs in cities will be created”*

\_ Bacon (1968:34)

## 4.5 ORIENTATION

The built environment is about creating spaces for people founded on a fundamental need. In his writings regarding *Genus Loci*, Norberg-Schulz (1980:5) states that rather than seeing architecture as having different types, rather different solutions to different situations are required, in order to provide for a need. Contextual design means learning from the surroundings to inform what the building needs to be.

The identity and sense of place of a particular environment aids the recollection of a particular urban landscape (Lynch, 1981:131). Architecture can be used as a means of orientation within a greater context. The proposed intervention is on a significant landmark site within Maputo, bordering on the culmination of an important arterial road

with the water. It's program involves the movement of large numbers of people in the most efficient manner. Thus the built result could be a tool in orientating oneself within the newly prescribed urban landscape.

On a smaller scale, within the building, orientation and transition is important as you make the change from water to land. The process of entering the transitional spaces affects the way you feel about the city unfolding before you. “If the transition is too abrupt there is no feeling of arrival” (Alexander et al, 1977:549). Arrival and orientation within the space is very important. Thus threshold is another important theoretical departure point for the design.

## 4.6 THEORIES AS DESIGN INFORMANTS

Spatial order is an important informant in the design as the movement of large numbers of people quickly and effectively through a transport facility requires ordered planning. Thus movement routes, paths, places of congregation and requirements for different users were considered during design development.

The idea of placemaking was another important theoretical informant to the design. Of importance was the right of citizens to non-commercialised quality public places in the city. A transport node provides the opportunity for a critical mass of people integrating with a public place. Ample unprogrammed public space is provided in and around the building. The urban square is adaptable for different events and celebrations.

## 4.7 CONCLUSION

Within the building a spatial order was employed based on the investigations into movement and user requirements. This allows for a new underlying order to develop through the informal appropriation of space throughout the building, resulting in a dynamic, layered and changeable place.

Placemaking guided the design to ensure that decisions were made while considering the place as part of a larger system within the city. Again, the theme of connection arises.

The building sits on a landmark site, thus orientation further informed the design. The building's main entrance occurred on a prominent corner, thus the design needed to respond to that. Equally important was orientating the traveller or commuter by giving attention to the threshold between land and water.

American architect Steven Holl writes extensively on the perception of architecture through experience and movement. He is of the opinion that "Architecture holds the power to inspire and transform our everyday existence. To see, to feel these physicalities is to become the subject of the senses" (Holl, 2006:40).

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze maintained that nomads orientate themselves in space by means of physical metaphors and journey rather than formalised settlement patterns. His theory is valuable within the informal context of the Baixa.

Architectural space becomes the materialisation of human activities, influenced by physical, natural and socio-economic events. The spatiality is not permanent but rather defined through instants

and events. Architectural space becomes an action space.

The formal elements of the building become the backdrop from which the informal dynamic of the city can be expressed and accommodated.

The architecture strived for in this dissertation is not one to be comprehended as an object, but rather is intended to be unfolded and interpreted as one navigates the spaces. The focus becomes less about what it is (an object), and more about what it does (for the user).