MARABASTAD:
FOOTHOLD TO THE CITY
FOR THE URBAN POOR

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WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO

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My parents and Eduan Smit
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ABSTRACT

Cities attract large numbers of people because of economic opportunity. Inner city housing demands increases and the lack of affordable housing leaves the urban poor to live in slums on the periphery of the city, contributing to urban sprawl. Settlement patterns often indicate that the poorest inhabitants have to travel the longest distances. According to the Tshwane Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework (2012), the aim is to achieve compaction through infill development that promotes high residential density and mixed land uses.

Marabastad, situated to the North West of Pretoria, is a vibrant place with a diversity of people joining the daily commute to and from the city and surrounding areas. A once close-knit community was crushed due to forced removals in 1940-1970 and Marabastad lost its residential component. Despite this devastating past, the daily flux of feet in and out of Marabastad has resulted in a vibrant place that is dominated by retail and transport networks. However a number of damaged structures, vacant lots and abandoned areas throughout Marabastad threatens the safety of the precinct and has left the urban fabric of Marabastad in a state of decay.

The project investigates the potential the strong heritage character of Marabastad holds for an architectural intervention that demonstrates a truly integrated and sensitive urban infill¬. This dissertation proposes a mixed-use residential development to increase density and re-establish a permanent community in Marabastad. The project will consist of a variety of housing models to accommodate the diversity of people identified in Marabastad. The existing activities on site are integrated in the design proposal to maintain the vibrancy and sense of place. The theory of *Open Builidng* is explored in search for an alternative approach to the current state provided housing model.

The dissertation's aim is to revitalise the dilapidated area of Marabastad. The architectural language explores the expression of the new that exists harmoniously within the heritage context of Marabastad.

00 | CONTENTS

07

08

09

10

11

CHAPTER 01
INTRODUCTION

Marabastad's sounds, colours, scents and activities are an onslaught on the senses. This unique area, identified by the Pretoria Inner City Partnership as a priority precinct, is not a place, but rather an experience…and Pretoria cannot afford to let it die.

- Alderman Bob Zylstra (Van der Waal 1998:2) -

INTRODUCTION | 01

FIRST MEETING WITH MARABASTAD

The first thing one encounters in Marabastad is the vibrancy of the place. This was the urban group's conclusion from the first site visit. Marabastad's streets are filled with people going about their day. Hawkers and shopkeepers congest the pavements and street corners as people move through Marabastad to the surrounding areas A truly integrated society has made way for intensive trading, hawking and transportation activities (Van der Waal 1998:3-5).

Figure 1.1 The busy streets of Marabastad, 2015. *(unknown)*

Figure 1.2 *Informal vendors occupying the sidewalk,*
Marabastad (Unknown 2015)

THE CITY OF MARABASTAD

This dissertation explores how Marabastad can be supported and developed into a rich social and economic hub through the proposal of a mixed-use residential project. The project acknowledges the strong heritage character of the place and the existing social and economic networks. The architecture and programme proposal responds to the social and cultural heritage context of Marabastad and intends to preserve it.

An urban group was formed with two fellow students working in Marabastad and together an understanding of place was formed. An urban mapping exercise was done on several aspects of Marabastad including the history, tangible and intangible networks. From this group analysis an urban framework was put together which situated our projects in its context and ensured a contextual response to the current state of Marabastad. Therefore the projects are not just about making buildings, but projects that are concerned about place.

The once close-knit, racially, religiously and culturally diverse community was shattered by forced removals and demolitions under the apartheid regime (Van der Waal 1998:5). It lost its residential component during the rezoning from 1940 to 1970 and the population numbers dropped significantly (Pelser 2012:15-16). The Belle Ombre train station was implemented and completed in 1981 to assure access to the city for the relocated settlements on the outskirts of the City of Pretoria (Van der Waal 1998:5). The daily movement of people into and out of Marabastad has given the community the opportunity to adapt to circumstances through formal and informal trade responses and has resulted in a vibrant and diverse community. However, it is dominated by two networks: transport and trade (Friedman 1994).

According to the studies of Jacobs (1961) and Gehl (1987), the vibrancy of a place relies on a variety of primary uses and must preferably serve more than two uses. In our research as an urban group, which is discussed in Chapter 3, we concluded from certain unstructured interviews and observations that, despite high energy levels in Marabastad, many people only inhabit Marabastad on a temporary basis. The area has not been able to recover, strengthen and re-establish its permanent community. Marabastad's transient nature, characterised by pedestrians, and economic and transportation activity during the day, which dies out at night, hints at the absence of a residential component. The two dominant networks (transport and the economy) are dependent on one another: if the transportation network fails, there will be less pedestrian movement and little opportunity for trade, which will lead to a further decrease in pedestrian movement, thus less transport interest and eventually the life of Marabastad will die. According to the International Council on Monuments and Sites Heritage at Risk Report (2002), the greatest threats to heritage areas are the following:

- The lack of recognition for heritage and thus lack of legal protection

- Change in ownership that leads to a loss of function, leading to the adaptation of a building or lack of maintenance

-Redundancy, neglect, abandonment or imposed modernisation

A number of damaged structures, vacant lots and abandoned areas throughout Marabastad threaten the safety of the precinct and have left Marabastad's physical aspect in a state of decay. This dissertation acknowledges that Marabastad is located in an area of political, cultural, architectural and historical heritage significance, which will be discussed in Chapter 7, where the site's heritage is analysed.

The Tshwane Spatial Development Strategy (2010 and beyond) has demarcated the area of Marabastad as part of the Tshwane Inner City Development and Regeneration Strategy (City of Tshwane 2005). Metropolitan planning supports the redevelopment of properties and land use in the area. The report envisions the revitalisation of the area through capital investment by upgrading the structures, maintaining them and allowing ownership of properties.

With the help of precedent studies, the current approach to housing in South Africa will be critically investigated to understand where opportunities lie in alternative housing, which will serve as the supportive background for this investigation.

Figure 1.3 *Informal vendor selling food, Marabastad (Unknown 2015)*

BACKGROUND

The need to densify cities has been an issue for architects and city planners. As a result, they have endeavoured to create greener, more efficient cities (Gehl 1994; Jacobs 1961; Lynch 1981). Since the early twentieth century, it was recognised that cities had to become denser and apartment blocks became the housing model that responded to the urban environment. The housing movement slowly developed from one family home on a plot to the collective living scenario. Since the Modern Movement, housing was conceptualised to minimise costs and provide higher densities. The minimalist approach resulted in high, large and straight buildings. Mass housing became a priority in the post-war period and the focus was placed on quantity and rather than quality (French 2008:13-20).

As Slavoj Zizek pointed out in United Nations (UN) Habitat (2012), one of the crucial events of our time is perhaps the influx of people who have migrated from rural areas in search of economic opportunities. The lack of adequate and affordable housing often leaves the urban poor with only one option: that of living in informal settlements on the periphery of the city. This contributes to urban sprawl and the burden of government service and infrastructure delivery (City of Tshwane 2005:8). Housing is one of the key issues in the discussion of sustainable cities (UN Habitat 2012).

It is recognised that the housing issue goes far beyond the field of architecture. It is also related to sociology, anthropology, urbanism, economy and legislation (Setien 2012:7). In addition to these issues, there is the pressing concern of sustainability and environmental impact. Designs have to accommodate different patterns of occupation and change over time (French 2008:13-20).

Figure 1.4 *Informal restaurants selling cooked food, Marbastad (Unknown 2015)*

Habraken (1998) states that the built environment is not an artefact, but rather an organism that is gradually transformed and altered by continuous change and the replacement of individual cells that we cannot predict or control (Habraken 1998:6-7). We should not try to forecast what will happen, we should try to make provisions for the unforeseen (Habraken 1972).

The development of South African cities has largely been directed by the apartheid regime that was aimed at racial segregation. This regime was responsible for many of the problems that exist today. After the abolishment of apartheid, racial integration has taken place on some levels, but the inherited city structures remain unchanged and fragmented, and continue to be characterised by access and environmental degradation issues (Osman 2008:2-3).

South Africa, like many other countries, has been active in confronting the issue of housing, and has seen the delivery of 3.6 million housing units to nearly 12.5 million people in the last decade (Republic of South Africa 2014:4). In 1994, a national housing programme that emphasised the development of subsidised housing for low-income households was introduced. Delivery of these houses, commonly known as Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses, has been successful, but not sufficient (Tissington 2011:8).

Osman (2000) believes that South Africa needs to learn from the vernacular and informality when it comes to finding alternatives for housing schemes in relation to what exists and how it relates to international knowledge. Housing delivery must provide a wide choice of housing and tenure options to create and promote diverse and sustainable communities (Republic of South Africa 2014). Alternative housing delivery and approaches are investigated in the country. The Social Housing Foundation (SHF) and Social Housing Focus Trust (SHIFT) are changing the way people think about housing (SHIFT Competition Document 2002). SHIFT defines social housing as being affordable, high-standard subsidised housing that promotes the integration of communities and

improves the quality of life of the residents. Its approach also aims to regenerate the immediate urban environment by encouraging the participation of residents in managing their own communities (SHIFT 2002:1).

This dissertation acknowledges the complexity of the housing issues in terms of policies, delivery, political and social conditions. It also acknowledges current attempts to find alternative solutions globally and locally. The dissertation does not seek to provide the answer or solution to housing problems, but rather to explore an alternative approach to housing from an architectural point of view.

Figure 1.5 *The daily commute to and from the city, Marabastad (Unknown 2015)*

PROBLEM STATEMENT

With the absence of the residential component in Marabastad due to forced removals between 1940 and 1970, it is left with a community moving in and out of the city on a daily basis. Marabastad has been able to withstand historical events of violence and has proven to be resilient, remaining significant to the people currently inhabiting the place. The diurnal activities in Marabastad have ensured an economically vibrant place, but these activities depend on the continued functioning of the transport nodes.

This dissertation proposes the re-establishment of a residential component in Marabastad. The aim is to create choice and opportunity for a diverse community that will define and give access to public space. The proposed project will strive to reinstate a cultural presence and preserve the historic significance of the site.

One of the main investigations will therefore determine what type of housing approach will appropriately respond to Marabastad's social, political, economic and heritage context.

Figure 1.6 White Mosque in Boom Street an irreplaceable landmark of Marabastad (Unknown 2015)

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE FIELD RESEARCH

The analysis of current and historical conditions in Marabastad will be researched to understand the context in which the proposed project is situated. The following four main research sources will guide the analysis process:

- Marabastad: Van der Waal, GM (ed). 1998. Marabastad: a diversity of cultures creating new opportunities. Pretoria: Pretoria Inner City Partnership.
- Friedman, M. 1994. A history of Africans in Pretoria with special reference to Marabastad. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Nkoane, O, & Smit, D. 2009. Implementing the Tshwane Comprehensive Sustainable Human Settlements Strategy. South Africa: [sn].
- City of Tshwane. 2005. Tshwane Inner City Development and Regeneration Strategy. Available: http://www. inteltect.com/transfer/InnerCityStrategy12082005.pdf Accessed 29 July 2015.

To situate the project in the housing debate, the following sources will be used to investigate and understand the state of current policies and legislation in South Africa.

- Tissington, K. 2011. A resource guide to housing in South Africa 1994-2010: legislation, policy, programmes and practice. South Africa: SERI.
- South Africa. 2014. A social contract for the development of sustainable human settlements. Available: http://www. dhs.gov.za/sites/default/files/documents/SOCIAL_CONTRACT_17-10-2014_low.pdf Accessed 4 August 2015.
- National Association of Social Housing Organisations (NASHO). 2013. Reviving our inner cities: social housing and urban regeneration in South Africa. South Africa: The Housing Development Agency.
- Republic of South Africa. 2009. The National Housing Code. South Africa: Department of human settlements.
- Tonkin, A. 2008. Sustainable medium-density housing: a resource book. South Africa: Development Action Group

LITERATURE STUDY

The following literature studies will be used in the theoretical investigation to support the argument of an alternative housing approach.

- Jacobs (1961), Gehl (2010) and Newman (1996) were active in successful city planning theories and in creating safe, diverse and active urban spaces.
- The theories of Osman (2000) and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) will be used to analyse the local housing situation and alternative housing approaches.
- The theory of *Open Building* of Habraken (1972), Kendall and Teicher (2000) and Setien (2012) will be researched and used as a relevant alternative housing approach in Marabastad.

PRECEDENT STUDIES

An example of a housing development will be used to illustrate how communities can manage on their own without relying on government services.

Two precedent studies, one international and one local, will illustrate the application of *Open Building* as an alternative housing approach and will be analysed to understand its success and failure.

The last precedent will be investigated to illustrate and acknowledge that alternative housing projects, when approached sensitively with community and independent bodies for support, can be successful and gain government support.
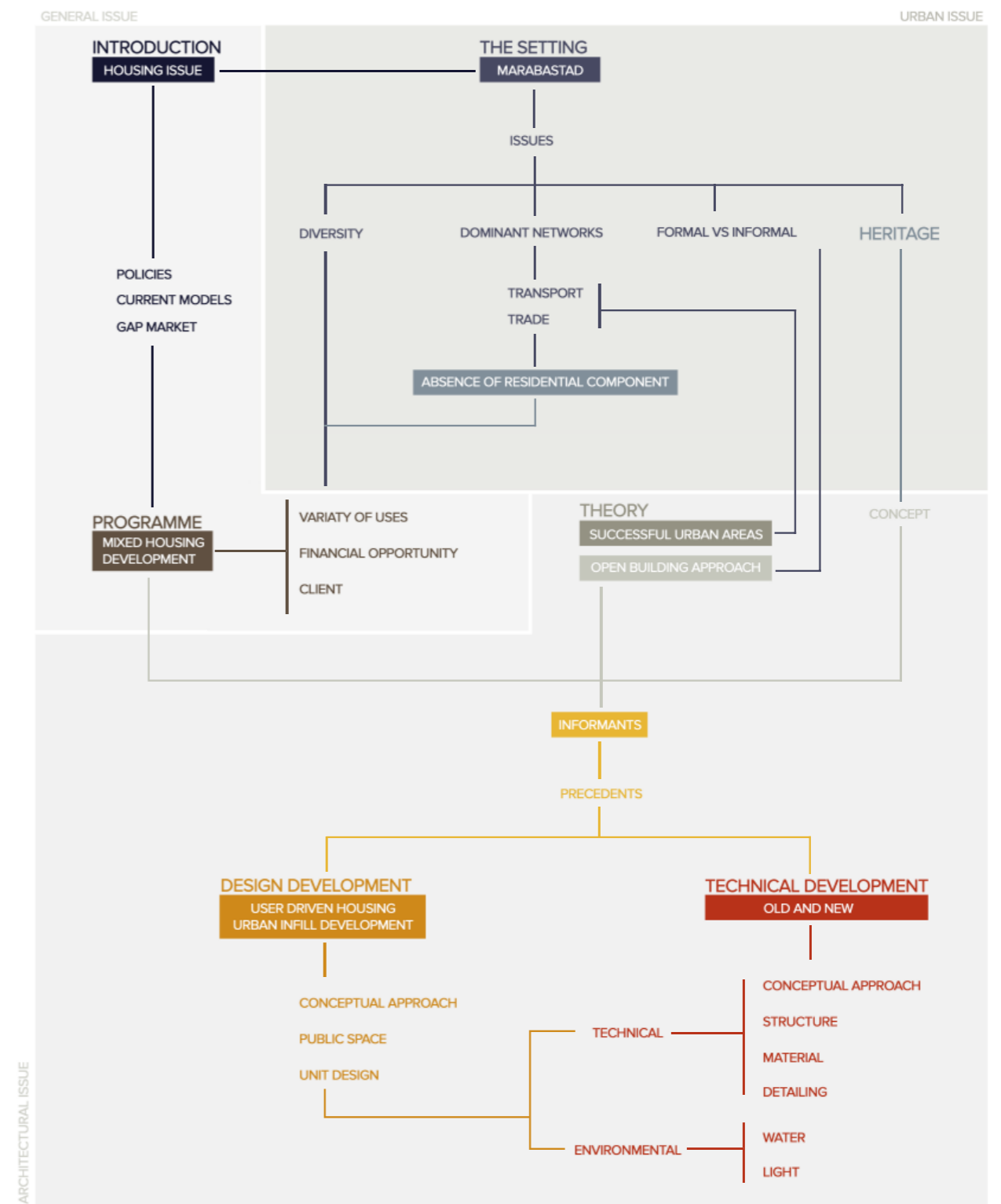

Figure 1.7 *Recearch Methodology diagramme (by Author)*

Figure 1.8 *Informal shops selling goods on the bridge from Belle Ombre train station, Marabastad (Unknown 2015)*

PROJECT APPROACH

The proposed project aims to be contextually sensitive in its approach. Architecturally and programmatically, it will draw on the history of Marabastad and its current economic and social context. It strives to build on existing activity networks to develop Marabastad into an inhabitable, residential place, with a much choice and many opportunities for a diverse community to inhabit the city on a permanent basis. The approach will strive to enable the inhabiting community to reclaim public spaces and create safer urban environments.