UniverCity-Centre: the university as an anchor and its capacity for democratizing urban space

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Abstract: The capitalistic growth of the City of Cape Town, more specifically its expansion to the north, foreshadows the absorption of Bellville and its surroundings, including the Campus of the University of the Western Cape, consequently putting the University in the centre of the new Cape Town metropole. Despite of apartheid's fierce oppression, cultural and social life flourished in this previously peripheral areas and the University was one of the leaders in the historical changes the nation went through. They actively engaged themselves in working together with, as well as within, the local communities, thus building an accessible and more just higher education centre. The aim of this contribution is to explore theoretical concepts that are of importance if the university wants to uphold his role as an urban anchor, an active linchpin able to guide the ambitious redevelopment the area will undergo. As such not only preserving the important historical meaning of the University but also safeguarding the identities of the historically deprived communities which surround it.

Keywords: Theory; urban anchors; shifting centre.

INTRODUCTION

> ...the reorganisation of space is always a reorganization of the framework through which social power is expressed (Harvey, 1990: 255).

The capitalistic growth of the City of Cape Town, more specifically its expansion to the north, foreshadows the absorption of Bellville and its surroundings, including the campus of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), consequently putting the University in the centre of the new Cape Town metropole. These changes will have effect on numerous factors, from strict economical to ecological and cultural aspects. The one of interest for this contribution is the possible remodeling of the surrounding areas to more liveable and dignified city spaces, taking into account the safeguarding of the local communities' identities, and the role of architecture and urban design herein. Despite apartheid's fierce oppression, cultural and social life flourished in this area and the University was one of the leaders in the historical changes the nation went through. They actively engaged themselves in working together with, as well as within, the local communities, thus building an accessible and more just higher education centre. David Harvey reminds us that every now and then "individual resistance can coalesce into social movements with the aim of liberating space and time from their current materializations" (Harvey 1990:238). The aim of this contribution is to explore theoretical concepts that are of importance if the university wants to uphold its role as an urban anchor, an active linchpin able to guide the ambitious redevelopment the area will undergo – as such not only preserving the important historical meaning of the University, but also safeguarding the identities of the historically deprived communities which surround it.

A UNIVERSITY AND ITS SURROUNDINGS, PUTTING A RELATION INTO CONTEXT

In 2006 a themed issue of 'Planning, Practice and Research' was dedicated to the role of universities as stakeholders in local development and neighbourhood revitalisation (Allinson 2006:231; Bromley 2006; Bromley & Kent 2006; Bunnell & Lawson 2006; Evans-Cowley 2006; Hart & Wolff 2006; Reardon 2006). Especially in the USA, attention has been given to what is described as 'outreach programmes' or 'scholarships of engagement' – from the 80's both the universities and the students engaged in community development programmes (Reardon

2006). In 1999 an evaluation report was drafted based on 59 cases. Cooperation between the universities and the surrounding communities ranged from job training sessions to assistance in acquiring affordable housing (e.g. at UCLA) or revitalising commercial activities in the surrounding neighbourhoods. From their research Schramm & Nye (1999:11-12) defined three types of partnerships. The first type is what they call 'a paternalistic/ theory testing relationship' whereby the university 'uses' the surrounding communities as a testing ground or lab. Students are sent in to check theories in real life situations, without real benefits for the 'participating' areas. The second sort of relationship is where both the university and the community can pose questions, for which answers are sought by the university. In this 'professional/expertise model' the hierarchical student-teacher relationship is still clearly present. The third and best model for establishing long-term cooperation, according to Schramm and Nye, is what they call the 'empowerment or capacity building model'. The community and university work closely together and the emphasis is on empowerment of the local community's members, whereby they formulate their own planning, research and so forth. A mutual learning process is being established and the community retains control of the whole process (Reardon 1998; Schramm & Nye 1999).

Historically, university campuses have been developed as little islands of academic freedom and enlightenment, secluded places where the classical, 19th century idea of a *free* university could fully develop, both in spatial and in philosophical terms. Or using the words of Newman:

> And such, for the third or fourth time, is a University; I hope I do not weary out the reader by repeating it. It is the place to which a thousand schools make contributions; in which the intellect may safely range and speculate, sure to find its equal in some antagonist activity, and its judge in the tribunal of truth. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. […] It is a seat of wisdom, a light of the world, a minister of the faith, an Alma Mater of the rising generation. It is this and a great deal more, and demands a somewhat better head and hand than mine to describe it well. (Newman 2009 [1854])

Furedi (2006:66-68) brings to our attention that this idea of a 'free university' was seldom realised in practise, as universities needed to balance between several, conflicting interests and every day practicalities. He critically states that today, there is some sort of unspoken informal compromise that the development of knowledge is acceptable for so far as it also serves practical necessities. One of the man-at-arms for intellectual and academic autonomy was Pierre Bourdieu, who acknowledges that wanting institutional autonomy also implicates a privileged status, while at the same time argues that 'producers of culture' are entitled to this, because while defending their proper autonomy, they are also (and more importantly) defending the 'universal' (Bourdieu 1989; Furedi 2006).

To summarise this contextualisation we can state that, although universities are often[1] islands/campuses with distinct features, both from an intellectual, social as well as from a morphological perspective. Currently a trend for more involvement with the surrounding communities is becoming more pronounced, and academics are clearly taking up the social engagements, as mentioned by Blommaert and Furedi, who suggest that intellectuals should be able to see the linkages between diverse elements, to hold a broader view and to translate the voice of marginalised groups through analysing and questioning existing power relations, societal habits and individual's actions. Furedi also emphasised that 'being an intellectual requires social engagement' (Blommaert 2007; Furedi 2006).

And this brings us to the case of UWC and the engagements taken on by their academics.

THE CASE OF UWC

The Cape Town area is one of South Africa's oldest and fastest growing regions. The development of the city began with the fort erected by the Dutch in the mid seventeenth century. As a result of their decision to establish a resting point on the trade routes to Asia, fruit and vegetable gardens were set up, which are today known as 'the gardens' in the city centre. Today, the city houses approximately 3 million people. Almost 50% of them are coloured (mixed), 32% are black and 19% are white. This is comparable to the situation in the Western Cape Province, but is very different to the situation nationally.

Historically, the black population was generally found in both the northern and eastern parts of the country, and in more rural areas. The white population tended to be concentrated in the urban areas, and their presence in the Cape Town region is a consequence of history, since here was the port into which European migrants

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1   Please note that some historically grown universities are seriously interwoven with the, often smaller, cities in which they are located, such as the University of Leuven in Belgium.

entered the country. There is a strong presence of white people of English descent. Many of the first Dutch migrants, the 'Boers', tended to trek up to the north but a large Afrikaner presence remains. The huge numbers of coloured people in the area resulted from the Western Cape's influx policy in the 1980's, which favoured coloured labourers over black workers. However, as soon as the apartheid regime was abolished, people started to migrate, and by 2001 the black population in the Western Cape had risen to 32% from a mere 8% in 1995.

The city is characterized, as most South African cities, by a strong spatial segregation of the different population groups, since the Cape Flats is home to most of Cape Town's black and coloured populations. The greatest concentration of informal settlements is situated along the N2 highway, in the black townships of Langa, Nyanga and Gugulethu. The redevelopment of the area, known as the N2 gateway project, is dealing with some of these squatter settlements. Other large informal settlements, such as Freedom Park, are found in Khayelitsha and Mitchell's Plain. In 2006, a study was conducted which highlighted the unequal spatial distribution of socio-economic status and living standards. The most vulnerable populations live in the Cape Flats and are coloured or black. The spatial relationships between population groups, living standards and deprivation are prominent (Romanovsky & Gie 2006).

The UWC campus is situated precisely in this area, where despite of apartheid's fierce oppression, cultural and social life flourished. The university was one of the leaders in the historical changes the nation went through. They actively engaged themselves in working together with, as well as within, the local communities, thus building an accessible and more just higher education centre. In 2003 the Department of Library and Information Science, together with the Iilwimi Sentrum, started a library project in the deprived community of Wesbank, which not only meant that children could access information for their school work, but training sessions for librarians were organised and the facility was used for ABET (Adult Basic Education) courses. Also, in Wesbank the Iilwimi Sentrum conducted literacy research amongst women and additionally offered job training and job opportunities to the participating women. These small examples serve to illustrate that the UWC community is trying to establish an 'empowerment or capacity building relationship' (see Schramm & Nye 1999), with their surrounding communities.

Regarding the affects of the growth of the city towards the UWC's campus, the one of interest for this contribution regards the possibilities the university has to actively influence or structure the remodeling of the surrounding areas. We have to ask ourselves, with Furedi's critical concerns (mentioned above) in our minds, to which forces one will have to campaign in order to take the opportunity of redevelopment to create more liveable and dignified city spaces, taking into account the safeguarding of the local communities' identities.

UWC is momentarily situated at an important junction. The growth of the city, the growth of the university and prospective partnerships are all influencing UWC's battle strength as a linchpin for the deprived communities it has historically served. To try and understand the forces encountered here, a basic theoretical understanding of power mechanisms and space is needed. Consequently we will, in the following section, look into theoretical concepts and models that might help planners and academics to critically examine the issues they will be confronted with in the whole process of urban restructuring.

URBAN ANCHORS, AN EXPLORATION OF THEORETICAL FRAMES

When speaking about power and its relationship to space, we have to understand that the spatial organisation of a city, a neighbourhood or even a country can be used as a means of maintaining, or even enhancing, the power of the established order.

Architects creating society
In this first part I will illustrate how deeply the roots of the idea of a constructable society are entrenched in Western thought. Furthermore, it is clear that colonisation brought Western planning and architectural ideas to the African continent, which goes some way towards explaining the approach of South African planners.

During the classical period, it had already become clear that Western thought emphasized rational and mathematical principles. For the planning of cities, an orthogonal pattern was preferred. This rational order in physical space is a reflection of an ideal society. Plato organized society, as well as physical space, into different groups and sectors, with the Acropolis being centrally located in space as well as in society. In the Renaissance period, the mathematical order even became a pre-condition of aesthetics. Zones, set up according to profession or descendents, were the structuring principles, with the centre of the city reserved for

the central authority. The spatial organization was a reflection of the societal one: "There is no space in a hierarchized society that is not itself hierarchized and that does not express hierarchies and social distances, [...]" (Bourdieu 1999:124). The hierarchy can easily be ascertained from the spatial structure, and the power of the ruler is enforced through architecture and urban structure.

Deleuze explicitly stresses that "The human being is a segmentary animal" (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 [1988]:230-255). This craving for segmentation goes from the micro scale, thus the everyday life, to that of the macro scale, whereby the segmentation of the South African territory during apartheid is an obvious example. But what if we look at the post-1994 situation, were a democratically elected government introduces the concept of a 'rainbow-nation', a unifying whole where are all considered equal and alike? Deleuze brings to our attention that "the modern political system is a global whole, unified an unifying, but it is so because it implies a constellation of juxtaposed, imbricated, ordered subsystems, ..." (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 [1988]). In modern states centralisation does not imply a decrease in segmentarisation, but rather making the segmentarisation increasingly rigid. I want to argue that the same holds for the current socio-spatial situation in Cape Town.

The 'heart' of the city is Table Mountain and the CBD that contains the government's buildings and the institutions of state authority. The most luxurious houses are located in the neighbourhoods on the slopes of the mountain, and are inhabited by the most influential people. The further away from the mountain one strays, the smaller the houses become. On the fringes, one finds the deprived areas, where the poor are left with small houses or are living in informal settlements. Job opportunities are mostly located in the CBD or the affluent areas, meaning that the poor need transport to participate. Thus, mobility becomes a means of measuring ones social capital:

> In this way, reified social space (that is, physically realised or objectified) appears as the distribution in physical space of different types of goods and services and also of individual agents and of physically situated groups (as units linked to a permanent site) that are endowed with greater or lesser possibilities for appropriating these goods and services (as a function of both their capital and the physical distance from these goods, which also depends on their capital). (Bourdieu 1999:124)

While Cape Town was segregated across racial lines during apartheid, the segmentarisation of the city now runs across economical ones, which are reinforcing the older ruptures.

Accordingly, the physical layout of a neighbourhood, a city or even a country (e.g. South Africa under apartheid) influences people in two ways. Firstly, a neighbourhood's strict layout enables the use of control mechanisms. This is evidenced by South Africa during apartheid, where, for example, labourers were brought to live together in barrack-like neighbourhoods with a clear and strict layout, which enabled intervention by the police to be as efficient as possible. Moreover, when the poor were working in the mines, excavating diamonds, they were grouped together in closed compounds, ensuring that the valuable 'salt' did not leave the premises. Thus, control was an important factor, and can be related to Foucault's Panopticon. The second type of influence is more symbolic, and is related to Bourdieu's notions about space. From the physical position that a neighbourhood, or a dwelling, has within a city, its inhabitants' place in the social hierarchy can also be deduced. Mobility and proximity thus become important factors for establishing success. Given the fact that the city centre of Cape Town is shifting towards the north, we can ask ourselves whether this might, or should I say, **should** also have implications with regard to this symbolic meaning of spatial organisation?

Bourdieuan notions of Space
In La Distinction, Bourdieu elaborates on the role of cultural capital, status and taste in the preservation of social stratification. He shows how the elite use lifestyle and status to distinguish themselves from other groups in society, and how lifestyle is also useful as a way of keeping other social classes at a distance. Thus, cultural capital plays an important role in establishing and safeguarding the dominant position of the elite in a society. People from dominant groups can easily navigate through life, as their habitus is the one that is legitimised through dominant public discourse. On the other hand, people from dominated groups will encounter greater difficulty in reaching better positions in society. They have no choice but to adapt to the dominant discourse, if they want to attain the lifestyle and tastes of the elite.

Space is also an influential factor, as indicated by a citation from Bourdieu:

> Because social space is inscribed at once in spatial structures and in the mental structures that are partly produced by the incorporation of these structures, space is one of the sites where power is asserted and exercised, and, no doubt in its subtlest form, as symbolic violence that goes unperceived as violence. Architectural spaces address mute

injections directly to the body and, just as surely as court etiquette, obtain from it the reverence and respect born of distance, or better yet, from being far away, at a respectful distance. (Bourdieu, 1999:126)

For Bourdieu it is clear that space is being manipulated by a small elite, who have enough power (thanks to the accumulation of the different forms of capital) to do so, and in a way that only serves to reinforce their position in society. They use distance and accessibility, elements which are strengthened by the inertia of physical space. The opportunities that individuals have are largely defined by the specificities (e.g. the availability of schools and jobs) of the place in which they grow up, and also by the specificities of the other inhabitants (Bourdieu 1999:128).

Bourdieu disagrees with segregated and capitalistic society but at the same time cannot see a way out of it. Indeed, he is pessimistic, believing that an individual cannot liberate himself from the negative influences of his own neighbourhood and his own habitat. Bourdieu does not answer the obvious question about the ways in which urban planning could cause a shift in society's existing power relationships. Giddens, using his structuration theory, also believes that existing power relationships cannot be easily overcome. They are being constantly established by the reproduction of structures over several generations.

Foucauldian notions of Space

A whole history remains to be written of **spaces** – which would at the same time be the history of **powers** (both these terms in the plural) – from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations. (Foucault 1977:149, original emphasis)

Foucault's interest is clear. He stresses that space has long been regarded as either belonging to 'nature' as a given pre-condition, or as a place in which activities take place (e.g. residential use). He wants to extend the research about space beyond the dialectic notion that space is the place where societal discourse leaves its sediment, in the hope that space can, in turn, influence society. He argues that the anchorage in space is an economic-political form that requires our specific attention (Foucault 1977:149).

According to Foucault, until the end of the 18th century, architecture was used to confirm the status of those with power in a society, ranging from the monarch to God. However, from that moment on "the disposition of space is used for economic-political ends" (Foucault 1977:148). He exemplifies this with the neighbourhoods that were being constructed for the factory workers. Not only did the spaces become functional (e.g. for eating, sleeping), they also became materialised symbols of the moral family-life, whereby living and sleeping areas were separated, and the parents' bedroom, with its function being for reproduction, was separated from the children's space. Thus, as with labourers, the organisation of spaces acquires a triple function: reproduction (in the case of labour: production), a symbolic function and a disciplinary function.

Foucault uses the metaphor of Bentham's Panopticon when discussing our current, controlling society. The Panopticon is Bentham's answer to the question of population[2] growth and economic changes during the 18th century. The effects of power extend like capillaries, and "circulate through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily activities" (Foucault 1977:151-152). The Panopticon realises an ever present controlling gaze, while 'encouraging' people to engage in 'normal'/expected behaviour. This notion of the Panopticon can range from the physical, e.g. a prison, to panoptical ideals of control in educational systems or the built environment, covering the South African townships to the square at the Pompidou art centre in Paris. Deleuze defines Panopticism as a way "to impose a particular conduct on a particular human multiplicity" (Deleuze et al. 2004 [1988]:29). When power is managed in this way, and is dispersed to numerous micro-centres, it can no longer be identified with one individual, instead becoming a machine, which involves everyone, from those who are subjected to power to those who are in a position to exercise it. The all-encompassing gaze becomes important, not so much as one viewpoint exhibiting total control over others, but as a dispersed gaze whereby everybody looks at everyone else. Thus, surveillance is an important element of control and discipline. It becomes even more powerful when it is internalised, and when people begin to gaze at themselves. Consequently, control is being established through self-reflection. It is precisely these mechanisms that connect the societal discourses (macro) with the everyday practices (micro) (Foucault 1977; Macleod & Durrheim 2002).

Does Foucault believe that resistance is possible? He firstly makes it very clear that resistance does not take the form of a revolution, there is "no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt" (Foucault quoted in Macleod &

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2   Whereby Foucault defines populations as 'object of relations of domination' (Foucault 1977:151).

Durrheim 2002:55). For Foucault, resistance comes about through oppositional discourse or practice, namely by questioning what is the norm. These oppositional discourses or practices are those of the 'marginal'.

Grab the opportunity and make a difference … or … the neo-liberal pitfall … again
Now, taking into consideration the discourse above, as well as the local every day reality, we need to contemplate the road ahead.

Historically, the UWC campus was located at the outskirts of the city. It was established as a university for the coloured population group and as such only offering schooling leading to middle and lower-middle class jobs. Following Bourdieu, it was not only geographically peripheral, it was also at the fringes of society.

However, in 1982 the University formally rejected apartheid segregation policies and in 1983 it was recognized under the same conditions as the 'white' universities. Following Deleuze, it then questioned existing power relations and the segmentary craving. Now, it also has the opportunity to establish itself in the new geographical centre.

African scholars have often been questioning Western approaches and theories with regard to African matters (e.g. Nnaemeka 2005). In this there is an opportunity to question Western theoretical contemplation. With the redevelopment of the Northern expansion of Cape Town, planners can leave Western, segmentary planning behind and aim for an integration of campus with cultural facilities, science park(s) and numerous medical facilities, linking all these with the Bellville urban centre, giving it a much needed new élan and reconnecting it with history and local community life. The choice for taking this road is motivated by the historical emancipatory role and the (growing) student base of young people coming from the surrounding (previously peripheral – on al levels) neighbourhoods.

Other options look more shining, more glamorous… The growing number of (international) companies, the 2010 sports dream and the idea of playing an important role in a globalised world might tempt the university's leaders to invest in shiny spin-off companies, build expensive and oversized sport-infrastructure and huge science parks … as such following typical Western neo-liberal planning.

After apartheid, the country's overall economic path was influenced by the negotiations made during the transition period. While all media attention went to the political 'battle' between Mandela and De Klerk, more covert, but also more far-reaching, negotiations where ongoing, dealing with the economical question. While the ANC's Freedom Charter of 1955 indicated that a redistribution of the country's resources was needed to achieve true freedom, this was not at all achieved during the negotiations. On the contrary, the mediators for the Nasionale Party succeed in keeping control of the centres of economic power away from the ANC, using new policy mechanisms and agreements with international institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF. Consequently, the ANC ended up with the political obligations of running the country, but without the financial resources to do so (Klein 2007). In her book 'The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism' (2007), Naomi Klein accurately describes why the ANC leaders chose not to contest the consequences of the economic negotiations and instead opted to sail a neo-liberal course, trying to integrate the country in the global economy. The consequences of this neo-liberal pitfall for the poor have been tragic (Gumede 2007; Klein 2007). Referring to Klein's and Gumede's work, I want to make a plea for not taking this capitalistic turn, but instead to work on an own, very particular, approach, as the specific context of UWC is not that of an American university. Agreeing with both Furedi's and Bourdieu's contemplation on the role of academics, I argue that the university should focus on their very loyal student and alumni base, providing the best possible training to deliver critical thinkers to the new South Africa, who are able to think independently, voice their concerns and focus on preserving and stimulating prosperity for all, especially the former deprived communities. Consequently a participatory approach needs to be followed, which builds on true collaboration that is beneficial for the university and the local communities, and is situated within the empowerment and capacity building model. If this is the turn taken the historically 'marginal' (using Foucault's terminology) will be able to establish a new, truly balanced, city centre by using a discourse that is oppositional to the dominant neo-liberal one, and so questioning Western capitalistic practices.

TO CONCLUDE

If universities want to uphold their historical role as linchpins in the upliftment and empowerment of surrounding communities, they have to be aware of the strong societal and economical forces they will encounter. From a strictly theoretical perspective I have provided an insight into the complex working of socio-spatial interrelations

of which I believe planners, especially those who take upon themselves social (moral) obligations, need to be aware before entering into debate on and negotiations about space with capitalistic entrepreneurs.

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