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# The Journal of Public Space

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SPECIAL ISSUE

## Public Space and Placemaking in African Cities

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*Convenor* Ayanda Roji

*Guest Editors* Tariq Toffa, Josephine M. Malonza

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Dr Luisa Bravo

The Journal of Public Space, *Founder and Editor in Chief*

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(from the statement submitted at the 26th UN-Habitat Governing Council held in Nairobi, Kenya, 8-12 May 2017)

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An abstract of about 300 words with up to five keywords is also mandatory.

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# Public Space and Placemaking in African Cities

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Cover image: A public space in Johannesburg. Credit: GIZ VCP, Inclusive violence and crime prevention programme.

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Lagos Marina, Nigeria.  
Photo by Namnso Ukpanah (2022) on Unsplash.

EDITORIAL

## **Shaping the Public Space Discourse with the Global South**

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When I presented The Journal of Public Space at Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, in Quito (2016), during an event at the Urban Library, I made it very clear that the partnership that City Space Architecture had established with UN-Habitat inspired our mission to give voice to unheard countries in order to include them in the discourse on public space. I was interested in overcoming the Western-oriented approach that currently shapes the knowledge of public space and to expand to a more complex understanding. This commitment was included in the editorial of the first issue (Bravo and Guaralda, 2016). Being a Diamond Open Access Journal reflects this mission by giving authors from fragile countries and territories, who are too often excluded, the opportunity to publish without article processing charges.

At the end of 2021, I started discussing with UN-Habitat the possibility of producing a thematic issue on the African continent. The idea was to give an overview of the state of the art of public space in several African countries, both in terms of research, by outlining issues and meanings, and in terms of practice, by looking at how it is implemented, with the intention of also showing the richness and diversity of cities, landscapes and urban settlements.

At the beginning of 2022 we launched a call for papers inviting scholars, designers, planners, city practitioners, historians and writers to offer critical and innovative contributions to understanding meanings and practices in plural and diverse African spaces, contexts, climates, regional and local scales, and histories. The issue was intended to contribute to the establishment of the Centre on African Public Spaces (CAPS), a project initiated by the City of Johannesburg (South Africa) in collaboration with other African cities, universities and community advocacy groups. As a Pan-African urban lab for public space, CAPS was designed to be a home and resource to a community of urban practitioners and thinkers, students, scholars and civil society activists dedicated to connect, exchange experiences, advance knowledge, share resources, grow expertise and mobilize on a wide range of relevant local, regional and global issues.

In response to the call for papers we received 70 submissions. We shortlisted 27 papers for this issue and we invited African scholars to serve as peer reviewers and to support the production of quality contents. The peer review process involved more than 60 African scholars and two African guest editors, for more than one year.

An overview of the issue was presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> World Urban Forum in Katowice (2022) during an event organized by the Centre on African Public Spaces (Fig. 1), in partnership with UN-Habitat Global Public Space Programme and GIZ Inclusive Violence and Crime Prevention Programme. The event discussed “Building community networks for participatory governance of public space”, with the participation of global stakeholders, including City Space Architecture as well as Block by Block, Public Space Network, Pepinieres Urbaines, Dreamtown, HealthBridge, Kounkey Design Initiative, PlacemakingX and Open Streets Cape Town.



Fig. 1. Global stakeholders attending the event organized by the Centre on African Public Space at the 11<sup>th</sup> World Urban Forum in Katowice (2022).

This thematic issue of *The Journal of Public Space* on “Public Space and Placemaking in African Cities” includes 15 academic articles and 9 case studies, from South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Northern Rhodesia, Namibia, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Morocco, presented in over 400 pages after a double-blind peer review process, that also engaged public space experts from UN-Habitat.

We're currently developing a second thematic issue focusing on the African continent. Our aim is to increase its impact and highlight the importance of shaping public discourse with the Global South.

## References

Bravo, L. and Guaralda, M. (2016) “An open access forum for the discussion and advancement of research about public space”, *The Journal of Public Space*, 1(1), pp. 1–4. doi: 10.5204/jps.v1i1.3

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EDITORIAL

## **Rethinking Public Spaces in Africa. The Necessity for the Centre on African Public Spaces**

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The struggles for land and spatial justice feature very strongly in the modern history of the African continent, which has not only deeply shaped the continent's history, but continues to shape its present and unfold in its future. In such contexts, geographic space as well as public space is layered with physical, symbolic and political meanings. Who has access to the benefits and resources of the city and who does not, who is able to flourish and who cannot, are therefore part of much larger historical and societal questions, reflecting the beliefs and values we hold and pursue as communities, governments, nations, and perhaps also as Africans.

The centrality of public spaces in Africa informed the formation of the Centre on African Public Spaces (CAPS). Initially established by the City of Johannesburg metropolitan municipality in response to the 2018 Africities Summit's call for a regional knowledge-sharing platform on public spaces, CAPS is the first multidisciplinary initiative formed through international collaborations with the 'UN-Habitat Global Public Space Programme' and the 'GIZ Inclusive Violence and Crime Prevention Programme'. CAPS also brings together municipalities and provincial governments across the continent, universities and civil society organisations.

CAPS is dedicated to sharing and advancing knowledge and growing expertise related to African public space. It does this through advocating for progressive policies, planning frameworks and facilitating related research, education, skills and practices with the vision of creating African cities that are filled with shared, inclusive and sustainable public spaces.

One of the most significant programmes that CAPS undertook in its formation was to engage with young people across the continent, to get a sense of their interpretations, experiences and vision for public spaces. The objective of this undertaking was two-fold. Firstly, Africa has the youngest population in the world. According to the *State of African Youth Report*, more than 60 percent of Africa's population is under the age of 25 and by 2030, young Africans are expected to constitute 42 percent of global youth (AU Commission, 2019). This indicates that African youth plays a profound role in defining the socio-spatial dialectic on the continent. Secondly, a key principle at CAPS is that



knowledge about public spaces must be developed by those who live within and experience these spaces.

The establishment of CAPS was necessitated by multiple interlinked economic, political, social and cultural factors that define African societies. Urbanisation is one the most significant transformations that the African continent is confronted with in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to UN-Habitat (2023) the continent's rate of urbanisation increased from 15 percent in 1960 to 40 percent in 2010 and is projected to reach 60 percent in 2050. It is expected that urban populations in Africa will triple in the next 50 years, leading to the transformation of the profile of the region and the reconstruction of its urban space.

Secondly, while discourse on spatiality has found expression at a global scale, published knowledges about public spaces in particular have emerged largely from scholars and researchers in the global North and transposed to the experiences of the global South. But public space, both at a definitional level and in terms of its experiences, has particularities that are specific to local forms within African communities. This means that public spaces in Africa must be understood as cross-cultural notions and as socio-spatial phenomena. It is especially so because "African indigenous aesthetics and conceptions of form and use remain present, while merging with the changes brought on by colonisation, industrialisation, and ongoing modernisation" (Harteveld *et al.*, 2018: 10).

Thirdly, the question of public spaces is directly linked to that of democracy. As Africa experiences rapid urbanisation, the response is often to privatise public spaces. Across the continent, there are growing levels of gentrification which not only displace vulnerable communities, but also impedes on people's right to the city (Mahlatsi, 2022). This has implications for freedom of movement and by extension, freedom of both expression and association. Furthermore, in an increasingly privatised world, public spaces will only increase in importance as refuge for people to meet, converse and share experiences that build and shape democracy (Gehl, 2010).

Finally, countries across the African continent are grappling with urban policy formulation and the governing of urban spaces, both public and private. According to Pieterse (2018), urban governance policy discourses are now connecting urban investments, and regulation with macroeconomic imperatives. However, these imperatives are silent on the value of the creative industry in the fashioning of a transformed urban reality. The implication is that the re-imagination of urban forms, including public spaces, remains firmly rooted in neo-liberal ideations and constructions. It is for this reason that CAPS believes in the leveraging of scholarship, culture, activism and creativity for the construction of inclusive and sustainable public spaces in Africa. This special issue of *The Journal of Public Space*, with its focus on public space and placemaking in African cities, is an expression of the dynamic and diverse communities that are critical in the discourse on African public space. It is a collection of research articles by scholars and researchers, case studies and photo essays by artists, community activists and public space practitioners – all of whom are a motive force for inclusive, sustainable and equitable public space that African communities are constructing. It serves as a foundation on which further debates about the meanings and experiences of African public space will be built. Ultimately, the African cities that CAPS envisages are vibrant, safe, inclusive and accessible, with quality context-sensitive public spaces at the heart of their development.



Fig. 1. A public space in Johannesburg.  
Credit: GIZ VCP, Inclusive violence and crime prevention programme.  
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EDITORIAL

**‘Here is a table’.  
Considering Contemporary African Public Spaces**

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This special issue of *The Journal of Public Space* on “Public Space and Placemaking in African Cities” raises awareness and articulates the importance and value of urban public space in the context of the African continent. A key contemporary driver of such issues is the context of Africa's urbanisation, which is exponentially faster than comparable processes in the Global North. A vibrant, diverse and supportive public life in these contexts will increasingly become a critical public good, which will depend on the conceptualisation, design, development, process and maintenance of public space. Already the continent's vast diversity of communities and cultures is visible in the utilization of public open spaces such as streets and markets and the congestion of pedestrian activities therein. The so-called ‘informality’ of many of these urban conditions is indicative of the increasing imperatives of public space. Such spaces are often faced with extraordinary demands, not easily visible in cities of the Global North. They are often expected – or forced – to accommodate extensive forms of cultural diversity, from street markets and food and drink, to outdoor gyms and children's playgrounds, to dance and ceremonies, and even the urban presence of cattle and livestock. Yet a lack of appropriate planning can also lead to conflict and an exacerbation of incidences of urban insecurity.

Therefore, this special issue of *The Journal of Public Space* provides a collection of unique content aimed at developing an articulation of African contexts to public space. The special issue is a result of a north-south collaboration: between the ‘Centre on African Public Space’ and the local City of Johannesburg government (through its arms of ‘Joburg City Parks and Zoo’ and ‘Johannesburg Development Agency’), in partnership with the Italian non-profit organisation ‘City Space Architecture’ (the publisher of *The Journal of Public Space*) and ‘UN-Habitat’. Following an open and multi-disciplinary call across the continent for African public space-related contributions and reviewers, a large number were received from multiple disciplines, and ultimately eighteen different countries on the continent are represented in this issue of the journal. The large



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volume of submissions is perhaps indicative of the current level of interest, engagement and topicality of such questions and themes.

Most authors and chapters focus on city contexts and projects that are familiar (rather than distant), but comparisons and reflections between cities in Africa are not uncommon, and there are also several north-south authorship collaborations. Perhaps indicative of the weight of challenging social contexts, both broadly and specifically, a wide variety of social and cultural themes feature most strongly through the chapters. Several chapters also deal with theoretical and pedagogical approaches. While environmental dimensions are present in many chapters and certainly not neglected, it is noticeable that the types of approaches tend toward more implicit or less foregrounded ones than what may oftentimes be the case in western or other contexts.

Ultimately this special issue of *The Journal of Public Space* is the creation of a collaborative platform, as a neutral space to develop thought, discuss critical interventions and inspiring case studies, and offering recommendations or lessons that can contribute toward developing more responsive and people-centred public spaces in Africa.

### **A global conversation**

Rather than viewing public space in Africa as an essentialist or parochial issue, we believe that any developments in thought, policy or practice from the continent would, in turn, contribute to the broader global conversations on public space. In this sense, this special issue initiates and deepens a cross-cultural understanding of public space, both in Africa and globally, as a moving and unfixed signifier of the meanings and practices of collective life.

The calling of attention to cross-cultural nuance and to different kinds of historical processes and contemporary conditions in particular contexts – whether in African contexts or elsewhere – should not come as a surprise. Even in western historical contexts alone (let alone in relation to other times and places), public space has never been a stable category. The development of Ancient Greek public space types, particularly the agora, are typically considered archetypes or a kind of 'ground zero' of public space in the western imagination, particularly where as a public political space they bear resemblances to modern notions of citizenship. Such spaces in the Greek city (i.e. Athenian, Hellenic, and Hellenistic) were contained in a three-part concept of a zoned city, namely the zone associated with religion (such as represented by the Acropolis or 'high city'), that associated with the affairs of state and economic activities (such as represented by the agora), and then finally a private domestic zone of the city.<sup>1</sup> But the more practical market functions of the agora also had its detractors. In further delineations of the concept and functions of a city, Aristotle for example held that the public life of the agora should be associated purely with higher political activities of assembly and debate, and separated from places of mere commerce – and in Athens the latter to be transferred to the city's port of Piraeus some 10 kilometres outside the city:

*"The temples and government buildings should occupy a site towering over the city, as becomes the abode of virtue. Near this spot let there be an agora for freemen, from which all trade should be scrupulously excluded. There the gymnastic exercises of the elder men may be performed in the presence of some of the magistrates, while others*

*superintend the exercises of the youth in another place. There must also be a traders' agora in some other spot—this should be easily accessible both by land and sea”* (The Politics of Aristotle, Book VII).<sup>2</sup>

In practice, everyday activities did indeed shift towards the harbour of Athens during the classical period of Ancient Greece in the late fifth century, while popular assemblies also shifted from the agora to a nearby hill outside the city proper called the Pnyx.<sup>3</sup> Despite the centrality of Greek concepts and forms of public space in western thought and their ubiquity across global architectural and urban design curricula, still the question remains whether these models of urban form and public life really are the normative and appropriate models for grounding and driving public space in contemporary African contexts.

Not unlike notions of the Greek city, another core aspect of design notions of public space are city-making concepts derived from renaissance and baroque periods in western Europe, particularly in cities like Florence, Rome and Paris. These too are considered the normative features and forms of public life across global curricula, and yet they are also indicative of the lack of stability of public space as a category. In Florence, the introduction of perspectival space and the related conception of the 'ideal city' – ultimately derived from optical or visual theory (*'ilm al-manazir'*, or 'the science of what appears') in classical Islamic culture<sup>4</sup> – would lead to the attempt since the fourteenth century to physically construct it into the medieval urban form of the city over several centuries, through elements such as the realignment of streets and the construction and termination of views.<sup>5</sup> Beginning especially with the redevelopment of *Piazza della Signoria*, this approach would ultimately be expanded to tie together several key public open space sites and monuments across the city, in an attempt to create a unified aesthetic and experience of the entire city (Figure 1).

Following the lead of Florence, at the same time in Rome a Counter-Reformation pope, Sixtus V (1521 –1590), would also employ perspectival tools of urban space to similarly create a unified field for the whole city. In an attempt to stem the tide of the Reformation, it was thought that reshaping the religious experience of urban space through theatrical perspectival devices would make the church more open, accessible and appealing to popular opinion. These ideas of public space and 'the image the city'<sup>6</sup>, including an equestrian statue on a pedestal as an integral feature of a public space (from the 16<sup>th</sup> century precedent of *Piazza del Campidoglio* in Rome), would all become normative touchstones for cities and public spaces all across the western and colonial world. But despite this ubiquity, again, still we may ask: are these models for a single unified aesthetic, religious and cultural experience of the city normative, appropriate or even possible in contemporary African urban contexts? Indeed, in almost any large and complex city anywhere in the world today with a significant level of social diversity, it would be hard to imagine where such a unified world would be possible. Unlike when western cities were once emerging from older medieval forms, the sheer scale and extents of modern cities – both physically and socially – and rates of urbanisation now also make this kind of vision seem dated and impractical, if not altogether inappropriate. Similar spatial and aesthetic tools to Florence and Rome were also adopted in Paris. Major sixteenth century projects such as the Tuileries Garden, the *Place Dauphine*, the *Place Royale*, the *Palais Cardinal*, and the *Hotel du Luxembourg*, and followed in the

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seventeenth century by royal *places* such as the *Place des Victories* and *Place Vendôme*, were all built to serve the uses of elites of royalty and nobility and not the 'public'. New kinds of public space in Paris would only emerge in the nineteenth century after the upheaval of the French Revolution and the confiscation of the properties of the Crown and the Church, when these grand and sumptuous grounds of the elite – a character these spaces still continue to exude even to the present day – would become 'public'.

So again, we may ask: are the public space-making models which originated (rather undemocratically) through extremely powerful and wealthy figures and institutions – such as the wealthy families of Florence, the papacy in Rome, and the kings of France – appropriate or even possible in contemporary African contexts? As a somewhat analogous contemporary case, do private developer-driven urban developments constrain urban social life and diversity more than they enable it? Further, are violent confiscations of spaces for public purposes, such as those which built the public realm of Paris, appropriate or desirable in the context of contemporary cities, of a democratic ethos, and a human rights culture? Few today, for example, would wish for a return of the kinds of public life that made such public spaces. It was a world where public executions in public space for instance were regular occurrences. Of the 2,498 persons guillotined in Paris during the French Revolution, 1,119 were executed on the *Place de la Concorde*, 73 on the *Place de la Bastille* and 1,306 on the *Place de la Nation*. Likewise in Rome during the reign of Pope Sixtus V, according to legend it is said that there were more heads on spikes across the *Ponte Sant'Angelo* than melons for sale in the marketplace.<sup>7</sup>

Many of the more unpleasant historical aspects of public life that often shaped the public spaces that are globally considered normative have today faded into history. In many cases these have been replaced by global international policy frameworks for cities and public spaces (such as the UN's 'Sustainable Development Goals' or UN-Habitat's 'New Urban Agenda') or present-day global human rights discourses. However, although taking the form of universal declarations and standards, these emerge through political processes.

Tensions between declared universalisms and the particular kinds of politics and power, which are at

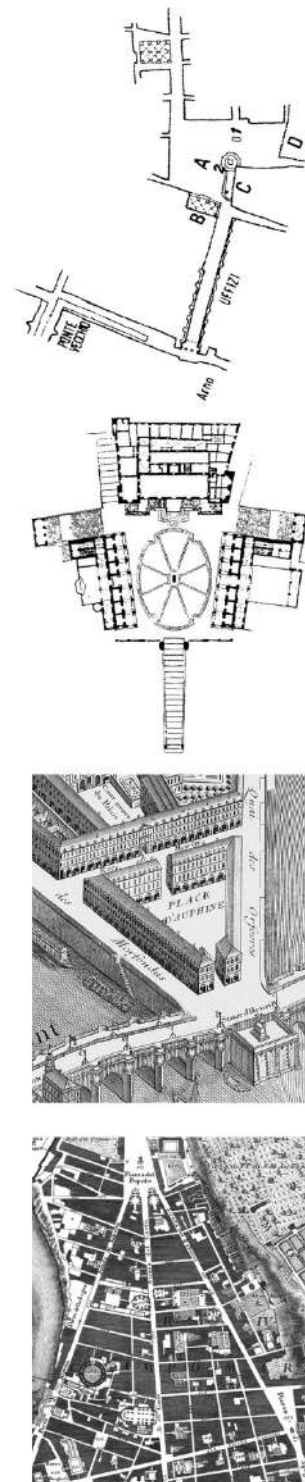


Figure 1. (From top) Shaping urban space through aesthetic perspectival tools in Florence (Piazza della Signoria), Rome (Piazza del Campidoglio), Paris (Place Dauphine), and to create a unified field for the entire city of Rome. Source: Morris, 2013.

play in their formation, is not new. Already from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, human rights discourse had many very different meanings in different historical contexts, having legitimated both revolutionary practices (e.g. the French Revolution, the American Revolution, etc.) and counter-revolutionary practices (e.g. the alignment with liberal politics, capitalist development and neo/colonialism).



Figure 2. Imagining African public spaces – artwork by Sechaba Maape (used with permission).

*'Here is a table'*

Within the late colonial era of the last century, after Europe was ravaged by two wars whose effects had an impact across the globe due to colonialism, human rights discourse was formalised as a major universal declaration in the form of 'The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. But this Declaration only recognised individuals and States (and not the many peoples, nations, and communities that had no State when the Declaration was adopted) and, although collective rights have very slowly become part of the political agenda since then, today there remains the ongoing contradiction or tension between collective and more individualistic conceptions of human rights.<sup>8</sup> Further, international and global agendas and standards do not emerge from the living traditions, religions or cultures of the world, and so as a driver of global contemporary public space-making also tends to be more an applied than a grounded theory or practice, and hence can often lack in direct cultural or spatial translations. The purpose of pointing to the conditions of power, politics and historicity (rather than ontological or canonical 'truth') of conventional international frameworks and global human rights discourse – and one that has been largely western-based both culturally and politically – is to understand that these tensions are not confined to abstract debates but often also have corollaries in practice, where liberatory or counter-hegemonic currents often find little tangible uses for it in their struggles. For example, twentieth century national liberation movements against colonialism, like the socialist and communist movements, did not invoke the human rights grammar to justify their causes and struggles. Still across the world today, and evident in movements like 'Black Lives Matter' in the United States and 'Rhodes/Fees Must Fall' in South Africa which challenged past and present injustices, not only was the conventional discourse of human rights almost non-existent, it was impossible for these concepts and visions of justice to be articulated through its grammar. Instead, other grammars of human dignity like 'decolonisation' found expression, which also appeared more embracing of indigenous concepts and historical experience.

Like the shifting historical and conceptual terrain within global conceptions and forms of public space, and the politics and historicity of dominant forms of policy frameworks and discourses which increasingly underpin them today, there is also an increasing recognition that much has been left out of the modern and western understanding of the world. This must now point us to the critical need for new kinds of dialogue and conversations that include other conceptions of human dignity and the (spatial) practices that may sustain them. This will imply making not only public spaces but 'spaces of publics', where the various and diverse publics across the African continent or elsewhere are not only more centred, but also more themselves the makers rather than the objects of meaning and practice (Figure 2). If cities entail densities of urban populations (i.e. peoples or publics), then almost by definition 'public' spaces also entail *people or publics-centred* environments – organized around people and people organized around space.

### **Here is a table**

In 'Here is a table'<sup>9</sup>, the title of a book of contemporary African critical philosophy, 'a table' is conceived as a metaphor for a range of normative discourses and practices. It also implies the possibility of other 'tables', whether 'here' or elsewhere. What then could be considered as 'a table' of concerns and questions for public space in cities in

African contexts? Such questions, which are attentive to African contexts and histories, should not imply 'Africa' as a monolithic, essentialist or mystifying condition. Rather, here they seek to understand the broader range of questions and issues that such contexts are confronted with or enabled by. Our provocation then is not an iteration of a counter-normative African uniqueness or inherent difference (be it 'un-western', 'un-modern', 'in-formal', etc.), but rather a foregrounding of a range of questions, challenges and considerations, and the appreciation of the compound existence of both general and specific, and both historical and contemporary conditions and challenges.

While Africa's urbanisation is in many respects unprecedented, as will be the level of challenges in social and infrastructural responses, this does not preclude other similarities or learning and adapting from global best practice. In this regard, in cities like Johannesburg and Kigali various projects and programmes already exist that draw from global best practice models for transit, density, mixed-use or public open space. Further, much of mainstream contemporary discussion around public space since the second half of the twentieth century can be traced to critique and responses to the effects of modernist designs, suburbanization and urban sprawl, and hence increasing focus on topics such as spatial reintegration and social integration. These public open space contexts still remain relevant and pressing challenges, as do considerations of social diversity in the context of its erosion through modernism, globalization, and powerful economic forces.<sup>10</sup> Hence global and regional/local scales are in many ways interrelated and interdependent.

At the global scale, it is also undeniable that international organisations play a critical role in promoting the development of public spaces across the world. 'Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: Target 7' seeks to ensure by 2030 the "universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities". At the continental level, this is reflected in the African Union's Agenda 2063, which aspires for cities to be "safe and peaceful spaces for individuals, families and communities." At the continental or regional scale, it is therefore logically expected that national governments/organisations not only domesticate/localize global concepts and aim to optimize on the benefits they may offer, but reconfigure or adjust these to speak to African and local contexts, toward context-specific urban development interventions that are tailored to the needs of its residents/people.

While acknowledging similarities and interdependencies, there is also much that cannot be adequately conceptualised, articulated or engaged at international framework and policy levels. These include layered historical and social contexts, such as the long development of inequalities, class, race, gender, or other constructs that have shaped societies and the urban fabric, as well as cultural forms and norms, and different social and economic conditions and prospects. Many urban contexts also face questions of safety, which could result from forms of modernist planning, dislocation or lack of social integration. In all of these contexts and conditions, global best-practice models and frameworks cannot be formulaic or they risk being ineffective even on their own terms – even the internationally recognised Bus Rapid Transit model is in some cases an example of this. Unlike more secular or post-Christian norms in western contexts, belief and ritual also remain integral in many African contexts – not only as part of lived realities, identities and communities to which any framework should be sensitive, but as important parts of a wider ecosystem or biosphere of responses to global challenges.



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In addition to the various kinds of similarities and differences, public space contexts can also suggest or compel redefinitions of thought and practice. Redefinition can apply even to the shape of questions regarded as universal, such as environmental degradation and sustainability. Much of the greatest impact on climate change for instance will be felt across the Global South and within relatively religious societies. For example, there are distinctly strong concentrations of Muslim populations in regions that are particularly affected by global warming, such as in Northern and Sub-Saharan African regions which are particularly vulnerable to rising heat stress and shrinking fresh water availability, as well in many parts of central and south-east Asian countries vulnerable to extreme weather events. These and other similar African contexts suggest that high-technological green solutions will not in all cases be where the answers lay, but may also lay in re/defining more indigenised solutions and responses.

Other examples of important redefinitions can relate to notions of 'informality' beyond conditions of lack, but rather as sets of relations between 'hard' and 'soft' infrastructures, in the physical services that operate through softer human and non-human interfaces and networks and the various kinds of opportunities that these can facilitate.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, we may ask: is public space a new concept in African contexts? Our answer is no. Are global models of public space appropriate in African contexts? Yes and no. Within reconfigurations and redefinitions, and similarities and dissimilarities, building this kind of 'table' within African contexts implies a double work – that is both global and local, both a learning and an unlearning, and which both includes but also stretches beyond a simple adoptive mode of application of global discourses and international policy frameworks into local settings. This 'table' is a "science of cities ... for the planning, construction, development, management, and improvement of urban areas" as stated in the 'New Urban Agenda'<sup>12</sup>. However, it should also involve a practical and diverse ethical imagination.

### **Challenges for new directions**

In addition to underpinnings in diverse cultural factors, public space is also thoroughly transdisciplinary in concept, and cross-sectoral in its production. There are therefore, for example, diverse professional and multidisciplinary approaches and engagements with public space. In some cases, urban planners may conceptualize public space as a piece of carpet-like landscape, which functions as a spatial situation that people can access and interact with like a park or a square. In other cases, social scientists may see public space as a process or an action or an arena of politics, capturing the spirit of the people, allowing performances, or enabling social cohesion. All of this compounds the complexity of the issues and the difficulty of developing fuller and more integrated thought, policy and models of practice.

The linguistic diversity of the continent presents a second challenge. Research articles in African Studies and politics for instance has tended to cluster heavily on a small number of more populous and English-speaking countries, and from these generalising to the continent (such as Francophone and other linguistic regions). This is even more the case for researchers based at institutions outside of Africa, as they are more likely to generalise to the continent than are researchers based at institutions in Africa.<sup>13</sup>

This special issue of *The Journal of Public Space* is also confronted by similar kinds of challenges, and largely reflects general norms of Anglophone over-representation despite efforts to the contrary (with smaller representation by Francophone and Arabophone countries). Diversification therefore requires active future Africa-based institutional initiatives. Indeed, it may be in the space created between new conversations, linking Africa with itself as well as with the globe, that may prove to be fertile grounds for new knowledges, approaches and directions to take shape. If there are no shortages of challenges for developing integrated urban public space models in African contexts, then by contradistinction a third challenge is that the resources, institutions and platforms to develop these are few. Bridging urban theory in academic disciplines with government and policy, the 'African Centre for Cities' (ACC) is an interdisciplinary urban studies programme based at the University of Cape Town and is one of few such examples on the continent. More recently, and similarly recognising the importance of inter/trans-disciplinarity as well as bridging a cross-sectoral space, the 'Centre on African Public Space' (CAPS) was formally launched across diverse platforms in 2022, internationally (at the 11<sup>th</sup> World Urban Forum in Katowice, Poland), continentally (at the 9<sup>th</sup> Africities Summit in Kenya), and finally at local government level at it is based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Building closely on the work of ACC, CAPS extends these questions into the space-related and design disciplines, while bringing greater focus on public space-related questions and processes, from conceptualisation through to implementation and maintenance. Necessarily collaborative in its work, CAPS was instrumental in putting together the current special issue of *The Journal of Public Space*. Such African-based intuitions – spanning across the thinking, making, and organising of core components of urbanism and city-making – are crucial in a rapidly urbanising continent. Developing required institutional capacity may also help to address another challenge, which is that the various emerging roles of public space is perhaps not yet fully appreciated, both culturally and politically. The authors and articles in this special issue present public space in Africa as a complex 'table' of questions, concerns, challenges and opportunities. Composed of social, economic, political, cultural, religious, environmental and geographical realities, in challenging contexts public space might serve as a crucial public good, and aimed at transforming the African city towards the betterment of the lives of all its inhabitants.

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## Memorialising Madiba in South Africa. The Role of Graphic Heritage and Toponymy in two Contrasting Urban Places

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### Abstract

Hundreds of public places across the world are named in honour of Nelson Mandela. However, there is no consistent level of expectation in terms of what we might learn about this great man when visiting these places. This paper examines an explanatory hypothesis that the process of place naming involving people – and any material representations that then refer to that person – not only offers the opportunity to learn about that person but also impacts one's experience and understanding of place. We refer to these material representations as 'graphic heritage.' We examine two highly contrasting urban places named after Mandela (also known as Madiba by South Africans), namely Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton, Johannesburg, and Nelson Mandela Park in Mamelodi, Pretoria in South Africa. In looking for traces of his values and legacy using graphic heritage, our methodological approach is guided by the design inquiry method of Zeisel, which uses annotated diagrams, observations of physical traces, and photo-documentation of these spaces. We position graphic heritage as an empirical research tool and as a form of critical inquiry that reveals very much (Sandton) and very little (Mamelodi) about the former president and rebel leader. The findings reveal contrasting settings and significantly different levels of access, diverse motivations through the naming acts, and differing levels of attentiveness to the visual-aesthetic considerations shown by those responsible for the two sites.

**Keywords:** Nelson Mandela, placemaking, public spaces, South Africa, graphic heritage

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## Introduction

Nelson Mandela, hereafter referred to as *Madiba* as he is affectionately known in his home country, was a much-admired symbol of the Black political movement. His name endorses a significant number of places across the world: streets, buildings, gardens, neighbourhoods, bridges, squares, schools, universities, hospitals, highways, stadiums, plazas, parks, and statues. Several hundred are known to the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF - <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/>) in South Africa, but there are countless instances of naming that are listed. For those who wish to seek ratification, there is a formal process. According to Zandile Myeka, archivist at NMF, an institution, project, or entity, may write to the NMF requesting the use of Madiba's names, images, or sobriquets that are registered trademarks of the Nelson Mandela Foundation. However, these are never licensed out for commercial purposes.

The intention of the research reported here is to observe and gather data about how Madiba's name is associated with public places and placemaking, and how he is further represented through physical traces in locations named in his honour. The research was inspired by empirical observations of Nelson Mandela Park in Leicester in the United Kingdom during 2020 and 2021. Further discussion ensued between the research team about a hypothesis that questioned what can be learned about a person from a place that bears their name and how this process might inform one's understanding and experience of the place itself. We initially set out to explore the hypothesis by undertaking an initial scoping study of the contrasting but similarly named Nelson Mandela Park in Mamelodi, Pretoria, to determine the feasibility of further research reported in this paper.

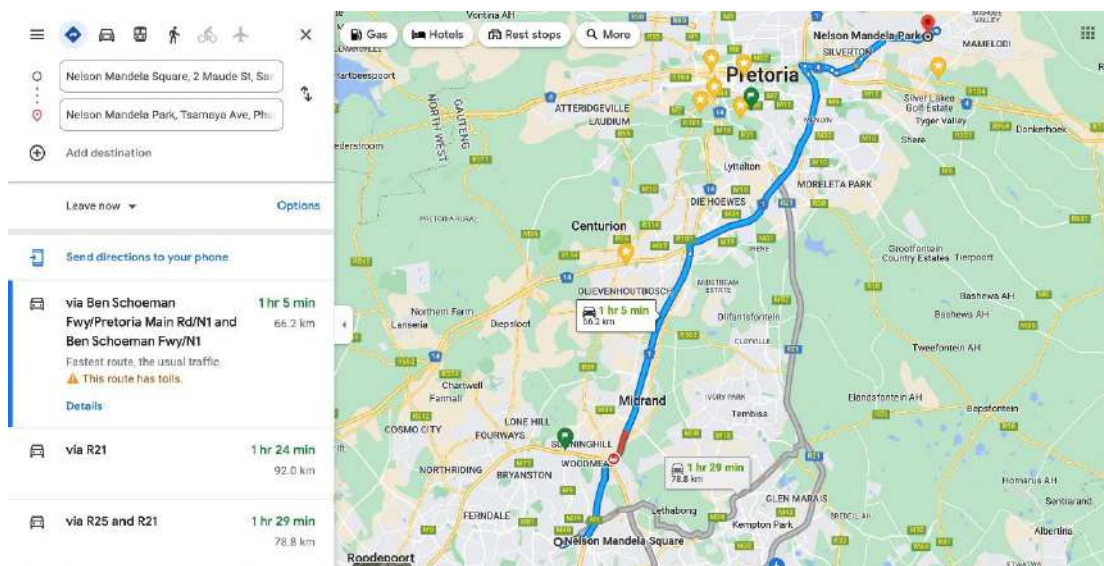


Figure 1. Map of the Johannesburg-Pretoria megacity in Gauteng, South Africa, with Nelson Mandela Park in Mamelodi to the North and Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton to the South (Google Maps, 2022a).

In this paper, we extend the initial scoping study of the park in Mamelodi (Harland, Barnes, and Burger 2022) by comparing it with a second site named after Madiba in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, namely Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton,

Johannesburg, which is almost 70 kilometres from Mamelodi (Figure 1). The two sites are contrasting in terms of statistics and data around population characteristics, living conditions, and economic activity.<sup>1,2</sup> However, they are also representative of the social divisions in the Johannesburg-Pretoria urban area (McGuirk, 2011, p. 306). For example, they differ in terms of how Madiba is memorialised to the users who visit either the square or the park, which is highly unlikely to be the same social group.

The identification and analysis of these two case study locations provide an opportunity to develop an understanding of how graphic heritage contributes to placemaking strategies for public urban environments that draw on heritage associations with people of distinction. The naming of both sites after Madiba may be deemed to reflect the success of the anti-apartheid movement and a shift in power as to who might name a place and what history might be told and celebrated. It also suggests that bearing Madiba's name is a critical part of the process of creating (for example, Nelson Mandela Park, Mamelodi) and remaking places (for example, Nelson Mandela Square, Sandton) since the apartheid era in South Africa. Looking closely at the two locations reveals different motivations, strategies, and intended audiences, as will be revealed. In what follows, we introduce a framework for undertaking the research, provide background information for two case studies, and describe their physical locations before drawing some conclusions.

## Materials and methods

The research is exploratory and descriptive in nature to identify the extent that Madiba is depicted in these two locations. "Exploratory hypotheses serve as the basis for observing and gathering data about the topic and then for describing and understanding it" (Zeisel, 2006, p. 33). As such, the research follows three main activities associated with observing physical traces, namely developing concepts, formulating hypotheses, and empirical testing (2006, p. 34).

Our approach frames how representations (meanings) and re-presentations (means) of Madiba prompt memory, promote dialogue, and perpetuate his legacy work. Through graphic heritage associated directly with him, this is an important and highly influential aspect of his and South Africa's cultural heritage in the early twenty-first century. By this, we refer to a specific form of graphic communication used to convey heritage as a version of the past received through graphic object displays, representations, locations, memories, and commemorations, in the preparation of places for cultural purposes and consumption. Both case studies meet this definition and, as such, may be understood as purveyors of Madiba's graphic heritage.

Additionally, we acknowledge that the making of places requires that they are labelled. This relatively innocuous act of naming has far-reaching consequences, and in the context of design inquiry demands special attention for reasons that will become apparent as the paper unfolds. Its importance in the context of this paper is further explained below as an integral motivation and influential process in this study.

### *Observing physical traces and urbanism*

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<sup>1</sup> Population statistics of Sandton: 50% of population is white; 56.4% higher education; 96.6% in formal dwelling; 63% language English (Statistics South Africa, 2022a).

<sup>2</sup> Population statistics of Mamelodi: 98.9% of population is Black African – 0.1% white; 9.5% higher education; 61% in formal dwelling; 2.1% language English (Statistics South Africa, 2022b).



Several aspects of environmental behaviour research and urbanism research have guided the study. Our approach aligns with the established methodological perspective of design inquiry for environmental-behaviour research (Zeisel, 2006) and the nuanced methodologies associated with Urbanism (Campkin and Duijzing, 2016). In the case study locations, we have been guided by 'observing physical traces' (Zeisel, 2006, pp. 159-190) as a systemic approach to explore, document, describe, and analyse the physical surroundings of the selected locations from the perspective of placemaking (Table 1). We also acknowledge contemporary urbanism approaches such as everyday observation, visual ethnography, visual analysis, in situ reading, collaborative and systematic photography, documenting inscription, visual comparison, mapping, and walking (Campkin and Duijzings, 2016, end matter). We further incorporate critical toponymy as an important starting point and initial stimulus for wanting to know why and how such places were named after Madiba and what impact this might have on placemaking.

Table 1: Aspects of design inquiry that guide this study (adapted from Zeisel, 2006)

Doing research	Observing physical traces	Physical traces to look for
<i>Developing concepts</i> Characteristics Approaches Preconceptions	<i>Qualities of the method</i> Imageability Unobtrusive Durable Easy	<i>By-products of use</i> Erosions Leftovers Missing traces
<i>Formulating hypotheses</i> Classifying hypothesis Explanatory hypothesis	<i>Recording Devices</i> Annotated diagrams Drawings Photographs Counting	<i>Adaptations for use</i> Props Separations Connections
<i>Empirical testing</i> Observing Sampling	<i>What to Look for</i> By-products of use Adaptations for use Displays of self Public messages Context	<i>Displays of self</i> Personalisation Identification Group membership
(2006: 34)	(2006: 160)	(2006: 170)

Although environmental behavioural research and urbanism provide the established research framework, our approach is also informed by the research team's disciplinary perspectives from graphic design and urban design (Harland, 2016), creative representations of place (Barnes, 2018), and how these perspectives may be directed towards heritage. Emphasis is placed on the function of graphic images such as pictures, statues, architectural imagery, and designs (Mitchell, 1986, pp. 10–13) in heritage places and spaces that function as a form of graphic heritage (Harland and Xu, 2021). Heritage in the built environment is framed by uncertain views, variable definitions, and different representations of heritage (Sykes and Ludwig, 2015, p. 26). These will not be

reviewed here, but for the benefit of anchoring the research in a heritage context, we adopt the following interpretation of heritage: 'Heritage is a version of the past received through objects and display, representations and engagements, spectacular locations and events, memories and commemorations, and the preparation of places for cultural purposes and consumption' (Waterton and Watson, 2015, p. 1). This definition is broad and may be applied to numerous interests, but for the purpose of this paper, it is useful with regard to graphic representations of Madiba in urban places named in his honour.

### *Toponymy and placemaking*

The study of place names, known as toponymy, includes a focus on the origin, etymology, meaning, and patterns of use (Monmonier, 2006, p. 9; Tent, 2015, p. 65). Often revealing much about a place, place names can connect us to geographical features, political struggles, historical figures, or industrial heritage, for example. The act of place naming can be framed as a heritage act in that place names recall 'events, activities, ideals, people and knowledge' or assert land rights that contribute to a community's intangible heritage (Capra and Ganga, 2019, p. 126). Therefore, place names are not just a neutral locative act; they are part of the 'social production of place' (Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu, 2010, p. 454) and may be socially and politically contested (Berg and Vuolteenaho, 2009). To critically interrogate place naming is to bring issues of power and visibility to the fore (Rose-Redwood Alderman and Azaryahu, 2010, p. 457). The study of place names can also reveal whose history is commemorated and whose heritage, and, in turn, who has the power to name a place and who does not. In many instances, therefore, toponymy plays an active role in making place. Adopting a critical toponymic approach can reveal how places reflect particular social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. Many everyday, ordinary signs denote the name of a particular street, park, or square. They are powerful connotative 'texts' encountered daily by residents and in some places even international visitors. In their interactions with these signs, they bring a variety of understandings, values, and beliefs to bear on the names, the place, and often the community they are situated in. However, as time passes, memories fade, and new generations of residents move in, place names that originally commemorated a moment in history often become stripped of their connotative power, transitioning to a functional sign with an emphasis on geography (Rose-Redwood Alderman and Azaryahu, 2010, p. 459). The locative aspect of the place name and sign comes to the fore through its everyday use – to establish a meeting point between friends or give directions to a visitor unfamiliar with the local area. This shift from connotative to locational is also likely to change how such signs impact placemaking within the local community and beyond.

### **Background on locations in South Africa named after Madiba**

In South Africa, Madiba's legacy and the struggle for freedom against the apartheid movement have been recognised widely through the act of place naming (Weldon, 2019) and the designation of locations connected to his life. For example, Robben Island – where Madiba was held captive for 18 years – has been declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021). The two case study locations noted above, both listed on the NMF database, are explored, recorded, described, and analysed in this paper. Although both bear Madiba's name, these two public spaces have distinctly different functions in the communities

they are in, for the people who use these spaces, and how they memorialise and honour Madiba's legacy. They also utilise graphic heritage in different ways and engage distinctly different audiences. By applying a critical toponymic approach in conjunction with an analysis of the graphic heritage representing Madiba, we can begin to understand how these elements contribute to the making of place in each location.

### 1. Nelson Mandela Square, Sandton, Johannesburg

The suburb of Sandton has a varied history from being a place where the San, a hunter-gatherer society of Southern Africa, used to live (Sandton Chronicle, 2022) to now as Africa's richest square mile (Stoughton, 2021) (Figure 2). The suburb was established in 1906 and is a combination of the two areas it consists of, namely Sandown and Bryanston (Sandton Chronicle, 2022) (Figure 3). In the 1900s, the area was a farming district but due to the rapid urbanisation of the area it formally became part of the city of Johannesburg in the 1960s (Sandton Chronicle, 2022). The suburb is a financial, business, tourism, and retail hub for wealthy South Africans and international visitors.



Figure 2. Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton City, Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa (Google Maps, 2022b).

The square was formally known as Sandton Square but was renamed in 2004 in honour of Madiba and as part of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the country's democracy (Gerber, 2015) – an example of place (re) naming to reflect a shift in power and in whose history and heritage is celebrated. The square was selected for this project due to its geographic location in the economic hub of South Africa (Gerber, 2015). The place is a pseudo-public space co-owned by two companies, namely 'Liberty Group Limited' and 'Liberty Two Degrees' (Nelson Mandela Square, 2022a). As an open-air piazza in Sandton's Central Business District centre, it is said to incorporate 'local heritage with international flair' and provides visitors with glamorous shopping, dining, and leisure experiences (Nelson Mandela Square, 2022a). The square has restaurants around the edges, a fountain where children often play, and a line of trees and greenery to the one side that visitors often seek for some shade. Its main visual attraction is a giant statue of Madiba overlooking the square, where many people will pose for a photograph in memory of their visit.



Figure 3. Map of the surrounding area around Sandton City in Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa [Google Maps, 2022c].

## 2. Nelson Mandela Park, Mamelodi, Pretoria

The township of Mamelodi was originally established on the farm Vlakkfontein 329JR to the north of the city of Pretoria in 1945 to provide temporary labourers with a place to live (Van der Waal, 2000, p. 1) (Figures 4 and 5). The farm's name was formally changed to Mamelodi in 1950, meaning 'Father or Mother of Melodies', and became the permanent home for many temporary workers after World War II (Van der Waal, 2000, p. 1). The township mainly consists of low-quality housing with a range of permanent and temporary structures, with the latter often having limited access to basic services. Madiba personally accepted this naming tribute to his legacy and was the guest of honour at the park's opening ceremony on 6 September 1996.

The park was established to provide recreational facilities to the community in East Mamelodi as the first project of the Greening of Mamelodi initiative (NMF, 2021b; Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre, no date). Geographically it is situated between key places in the community. The Mamelodi Heritage tour passes by the park on the way to the Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre, attracting local and international visitors. The park has an abundance of trees that provide shade to visitors, a playground with different equipment to the east, and an open field used to play soccer and have picnics to the west.

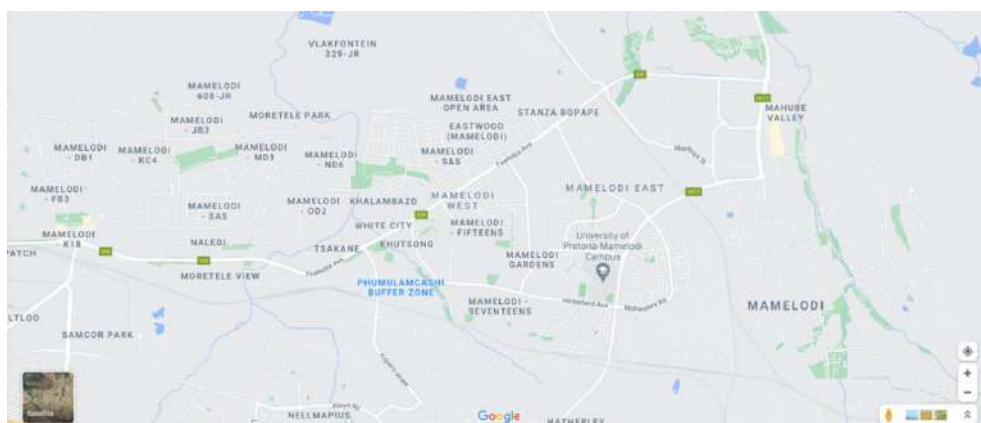


Figure 4. Mamelodi, Pretoria, South Africa (Google Maps, 2021a).

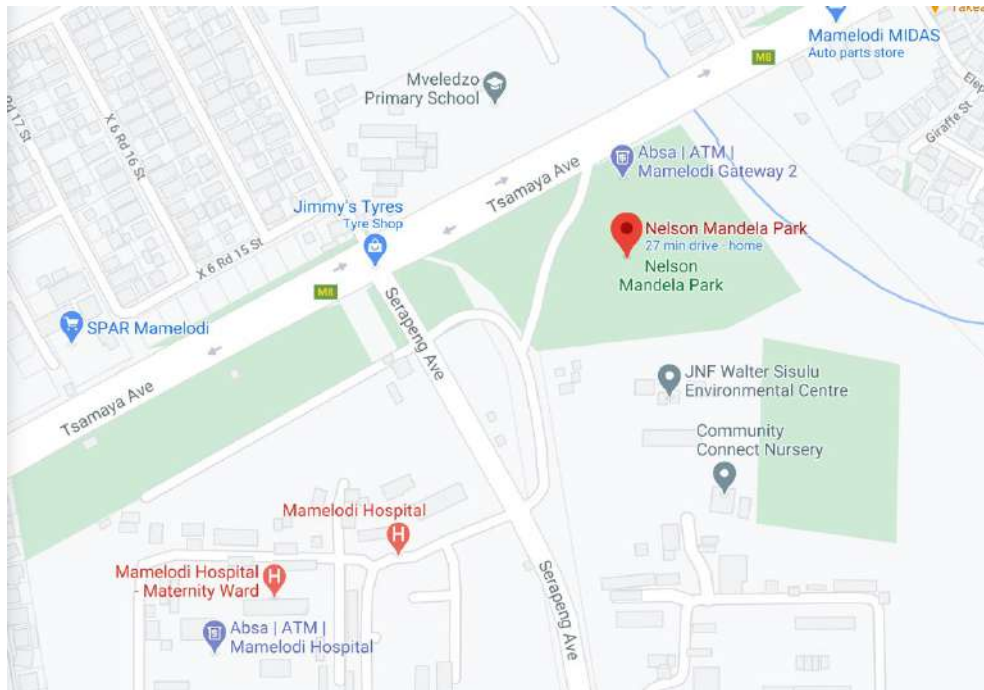


Figure 5. Map of the surrounding area around Nelson Mandela Park in Mamelodi, Pretoria, South Africa (Google Maps, 2021b).

### **Descriptions of the physical traces in two urban places**

This section provides detailed descriptions of the two case study locations. Our research revealed significant contrast in how Madiba's values are communicated, and his legacy maintained through graphic means. The Sandton location displays an excessive use of visual references to Madiba, whereas in Mamelodi the bare minimum is shown and offers no reinforcement or association. This raises important questions about the intentions of the respective naming acts and the possibility and opportunity for future interventions.

#### *Traces of Madiba in Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton, Johannesburg*

The square was documented through a combination of desktop research, diagrams, photo-documentation, and two site visits (16/02/2022 and 23/02/2022). The place provides a visually rich representation of Madiba through a plethora of statues, inscriptions, timelines, and images – some of which offer interactive opportunities to engage – documented in the annotated diagram in Figure 6.



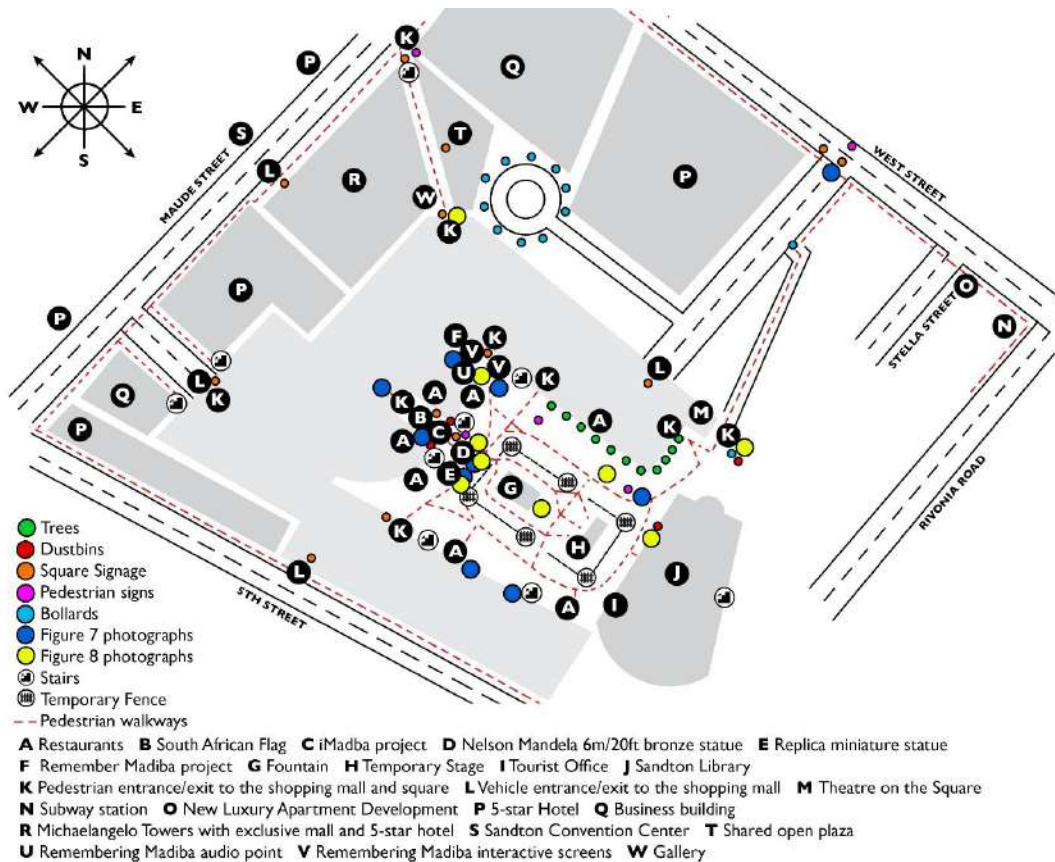


Figure 6. Annotated diagram of Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton, Johannesburg.

There are four distinct graphic heritage links to Madiba in the square. The first is the bronze statue (Figure 6-D). We observed that most visitors stop to take photographs with the 6m (20ft) bronze statue upon their entrance or exit to the square (as the South African research team did – Figure 7.8). The statue portrays a happy Madiba doing the "Madiba jive" in front of the South African flag (Figure 6-B). The "Madiba jive" celebrates the South African people and their spirit of joy (Gerber, 2015). This portrayal of Madiba in this specific location represents the "sophisticated, eclectic, cosmopolitan success story" of South Africa post the apartheid era (Gerber, 2015). Next to the statue is a miniature replica of the statue with visual and braille placards that pay tribute to the artists and donors of the statue (Figure 6-E; Figure 7.7). The second heritage project in the square is the iMadiba project (<http://www.imadiba.com/>), a global interactive, participative art project located at several micro-museums in South Africa (Figure 6-C; Figure 7.9). The iMadiba project offers a timeline of Madiba's life from birth to death on twelve perspex boards mounted on the sidewalls of the entrance behind the statue (Figure 7.10). The Remembering Madiba project (<https://nelsonmandelasquare.co.za/tag/remembering-madiba/>) is the third heritage element and is integrated into the design of the square (Figures 7.2 - 7.5, 8.11). This project offers visitors the opportunity to listen to Madiba's speech at audio points (Figure 6-U; Figure 8.9), interact with touch screens with information of the square and the project (Figure 6-V; Figure 7.3), read embedded quotes on the ground (Figures 7.4, 7.11 and 8.8) and scan QR codes for additional information (Figure 8.3). The visuals,

quotes, and QR codes of the Remembering Madiba project are scattered across the square (inside and outside), thereby complementing the brand identity of Nelson Mandela Square, which is the fourth graphic element in this space (location of signs are indicated by orange dots in Figure 6). Of lesser distinction is the display of pedestrian wayfinding signs at the purple dots in Figure 6 and Figure 7.6. All the locations of the photographs of Figures 7 and 8 are indicated with dark blue and yellow circles, respectively in the annotated diagram of the square in Figure 6.

At first glance, the square did not show many physical traces of visitors during the site visits since it is cleaned regularly. However, upon closer inspection, we uncovered many physical traces of use. The smoking trays next to the library contained cigarette butts and disregarded paper that might suggest that people linger at that point during breaks (Figure 8.10), and a discarded paper cup under the archway of the library. Erosions can be seen on the Braille placard mounted on the platform of the miniature statue situated in the square (Figure 6-E) and the placard at the feet of the bronze statue that has scratches and dents from use (Figures 8.2 and 8.7 respectively), fading inscription of quote tiles on the ground (Figures 8.4 and 8.8), and the border of some of the QR codes that are missing (Figure 8.3) which suggest excessive use of these elements. Missing traces include the absence of by-products of use, including empty dustbins that we assumed were cleaned recently (Figures 7.5, 7.6 and 7.11), and people interacting with the Remembering Madiba project throughout the square. Upon our two visits to the square, no visitors interacted with the audio points, touch screens, embedded quotes, or QR codes of the Remember Madiba project, but with the iMadiba project and the statue as mentioned. We acknowledge that this observation may be linked to the day and time of our visit to the square since it is interesting to note that the embedded quotes and QR codes have signs of erosion. However, this might be due to visitors walking over them rather than engaging with them.

Adaptations of use are evident in several places in the square. For example, a temporary structure and border around the fountain have been constructed to host live music sessions every weekend at the square during February and March 2022 (Figures 6, 7.1 and 8.14). In addition, restaurant patrons are separated from the public visiting the square by the tree-lined area that provides some privacy (indicated with green in Figure 6) and raised platforms that need to be accessed using stairs to enter restaurants and sit outside on the decks (Figures 6.1, 7.1 and 7.15). Figure 8.15 provides an example of how the public adopts the tree-lined area for seating purposes in the square since there are no benches available nearby – the only benches that are provided in the Remembering Madiba section are unused and hidden away in a shaded corner of the square (Figure 6-F and Figures 7.4 and 7.11). Another adaptation is how children change the use of the fountain from an aesthetically visual element to a play space on hot African days (Figure 8.14).

An opportunity for personalisation is available to every visitor who wants to take a photograph with Madiba's statue (Figures 7-8). No cameras are allowed in the square (Figure 8.4);<sup>3</sup> however, you are welcome to take a selfie with the statue or ask a friendly passer-by to take a photo with your mobile phone.

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<sup>3</sup> The research team obtained formal permission from the Nelson Mandela Square Management to take photographs of the square for the purpose of this research.



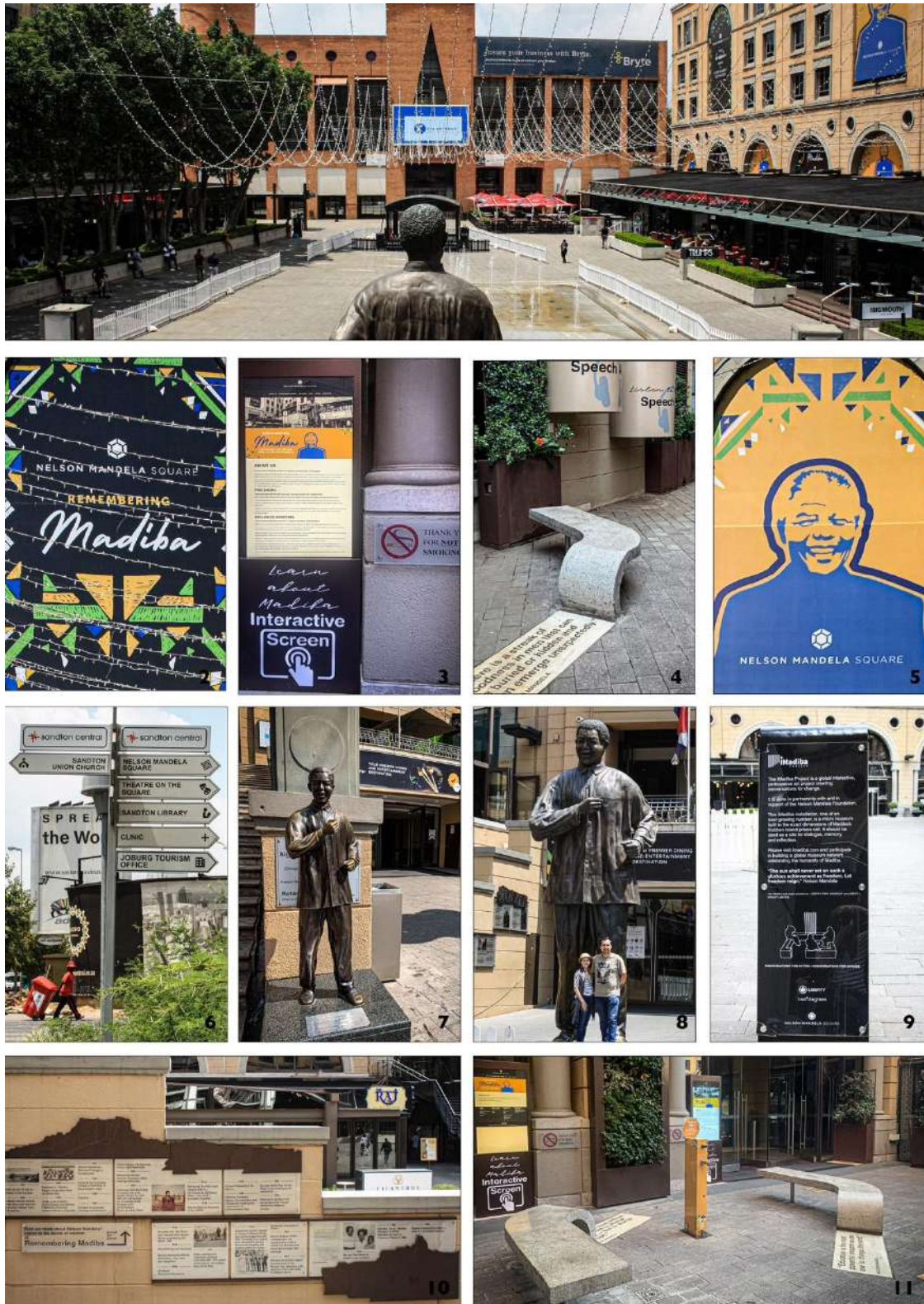


Figure 7 (1-11). Various design features of Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton, Johannesburg. Photography by Everardt Burger and Yolandi Burger (2022).



Memorialising Madiba in South Africa

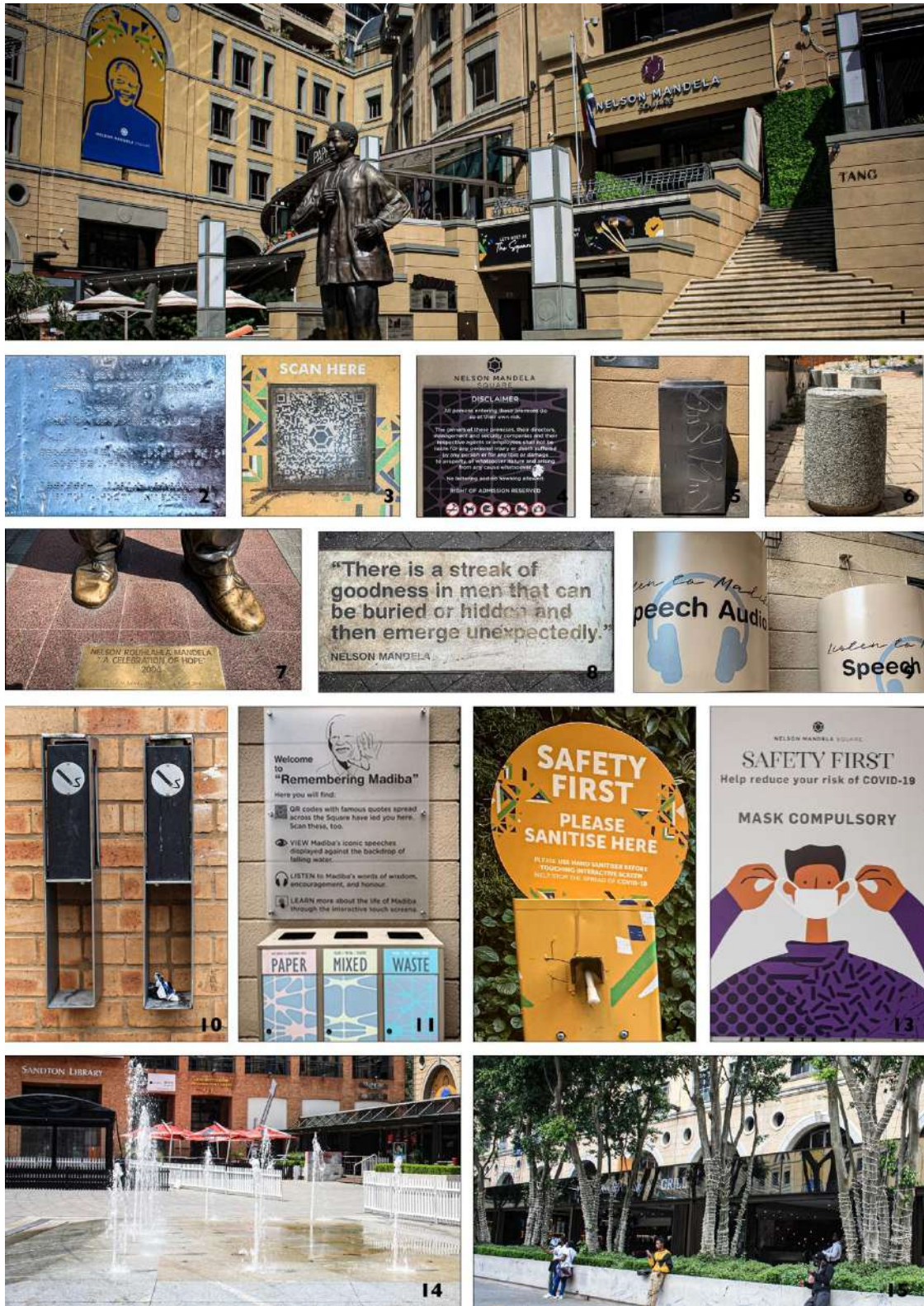


Figure 8 (1-15). Various design features of Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton, Johannesburg  
Photography by Everardt Burger and Yolandi Burger (2022).

The square also offers group membership to the public – a reminder of the actions of Madiba, his legacy, and how he contributed to the transformation to post-apartheid South Africa. However, group membership seems limited to the wealthier South Africans living and shopping in the area (see the socio-economic profile of the area), people who work in the area, and international tourists – the tourist office is located at Figure 6-A. Dining and parking in the area are also expensive and unaffordable for many South Africans, meaning it may be an uninviting place for the lesser privileged. Public messages in the square are only official with no sign of unofficial or illegitimate messages (for example, Figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.5, 7.9, 8.4, 8.12, and 8.13). These include the Covid-19 campaign of the square, the branding of the square including their website and interactive screens at the square, direction boards, the Remembering Madiba and iMadiba projects.

### **Traces of Madiba in Nelson Mandela Park, Mamelodi, Pretoria**

The initial desk research and further in-situ visual research undertaken in Mamelodi reveal a vastly different context compared to Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton. The starkest contrast in undertaking this research is that we could not visit the park due to safety concerns as we are not members of the community. Hence, the photographic documentation was commissioned and undertaken by Fidel Mosupye of Supreme Images, who is familiar with the place and is known to the local community. He undertook the visual research on 8 May 2021 based on a briefing from the research team supported by examples of photo-documentation that guided the process of what kind of traces to look for. Additionally, the physical traces of the park have since been observed and recorded on an annotated diagram (Figure 9) in support of the photo-documentation in Figure 10. The diagram shows the approximate locations of the elements observed in the park through the photo-documentation and a satellite view of the park on Google Maps.

A notable contrast with Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton is that Madiba's presence in the park in Mamelodi is in name only. There are no attempts to inform the park's visitors of the man after whom the park is named apart from two signboards on the park's outer edges (Figure 9-K; Figures 10.1, 10.9, and 10.10). The graphic elements of the signboards communicate that the sign is an official Tshwane City Municipality sign that belongs to the Parks and Horticultural Services Section of the Environmental Management Division based at Silverton, Pretoria (Figure 10.10). In addition, the two signs include icons that inform the public of the various activities allowed while visiting the park (Figures 10.9 and 10.10). The signboard on Tsamaya Avenue even promotes the local township apparel brand '4ourth 7even' (Figure 10.9).

Analysis of the photographic research showed evidence of physical traces reflecting how this public space is used (but not what determines the place name). The park is separated in the north, west, and south by bollards, paved walkways, and trees on the sidewalks of the roads (Figures 10.12–10.14) and in the east and south-east by natural flora boundaries on the edges of the park (Figure 10.1). The playpark is also separated from the greater park and the open field by the formal and informal walkways, from Tsamaya Avenue by the disconnected stormwater pipes, and a small hill behind the playpark (indicated in Figure 9).



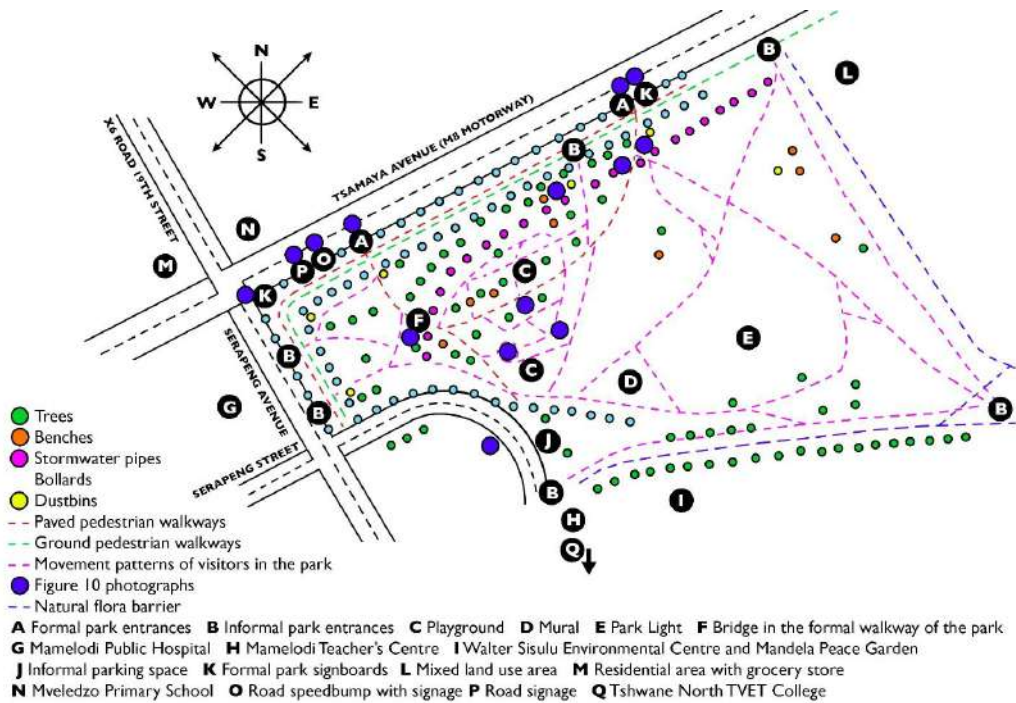


Figure 9. Annotated diagram of Nelson Mandela Park in Mamelodi, Pretoria.

The annotated diagram documents people's movement patterns in the park (Figure 9). Visitors use formal (paved) and informal (grass and ground) walkways to connect the M8 motorway, Serapeng Street, and the area to the east of the Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre (Figure 9-I) with each other. The park also provides a scenic thoroughfare for pedestrians travelling along the M8 motorway to the Mamelodi Public Hospital located to the west of the park (Figure 9-G). The informal walkways show the erosions of children playing on and between the various playground equipment (see the circular pattern around the roundabout in Figures 9 and 10.6, and 10.14). Other physical traces such as leftovers, erosions, display of self, public messages, and missing traces were also noted. Leftovers in the park include disregarded takeaway packaging and litter in dustbins and on the ground (Figure 10.2). Erosions include the disconnected stormwater pipe, which has not been attended to for more than a decade (Figure 10.7), and missing swings in the playground (Figure 10.14). It is interesting to note that the children adapted their use of the swings to climbing frames in the absence of the seats and chains. The park signboards and road signs near the park are vandalised with illegitimate public messages of advertisements for informal medical procedures and graffiti (Figure 9-O and 9-P; Figures 10.1, 10.5, 10.10, and 10.12). There are also some informal public messages mounted on trees advertising services (Figure 10.11). We observed that missing traces include safety signs for play equipment, sports markings on the open field to the east where soccer is usually played, and of course, graphic heritage elements connected to Madiba. The community mural in the south-east of the park is a display of self of the community of the township (9-D).



Figure 10 (1-14). Various design features of Nelson Mandela Park in Mamelodi. Photography by Fidel Mosupye of Supreme Images (2021).



Similar to the signboards' graphic elements, the colour scheme of the play equipment, benches, and bridge also bear no formal representation to Madiba, but it might be argued that the bright colours used may represent Madiba's "Rainbow Nation" (Figures 10.2, 10.3, 10.5 and 10.7). However, the park's function in the community gives tribute to the legacy of Madiba, even though it is not adequately maintained like Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton. It provides recreational facilities to the community of East Mamelodi (e.g., soccer, picnics), provides a space for the community to come together for projects (e.g., the mural in the park), serves as a connector between different areas, provides a space for children to play, and a thoroughfare for hospital patients and visitors.

## **Conclusion**

In analysing these contrasting sites through both Zeisel's inquiry by design methodology and applying a critical toponymy approach, we have positioned both place naming and graphic heritage as implicitly connected to placemaking. As a result, we have been able to develop the concept of graphic heritage not only as an approach for the classification of graphic communication in public places but also as a form of critical inquiry that establishes where there is a need for attention to social, cultural, and economic factors that determine if a place fulfils the promise suggested by its name.

We speculated on testing a hypothesis about how much can be learned about a person by visiting places named in their honour (in this case, two contrasting locations) and, thus, what other graphic interventions may contribute to placemaking. The Mamelodi case study provided no opportunity to develop a classifying hypothesis further, whereas Sandton did.

The case studies are set within a context that has already witnessed at least one place name change and is connected by a placemaking strategy with national and local intent post-apartheid. Now both named after Madiba, Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton, and Nelson Mandela Park in Mamelodi are set apart by their respective urban and peri-urban locations and the diverse socio-economic conditions in which their respective communities live. These differences result in contrasting uses of graphic heritage in communicating Madiba's history and heritage.

In applying an abundance of signs, statues, digital connections, and information panels, Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton uses these to look globally, going beyond its local environment and making place with international visitors in mind. The graphic heritage here is used to make place via the heritage economy – often critiqued for its lack of focus on wider local communities and leveraged by corporate development companies (Watson and Gonzalez-Rodriguez, 2015, p. 460). In Sandton this is, in part, being used to create an image of place as a 'prime lifestyle and fine dining destination' (Nelson Mandela Square, 2022a). This is a place that is unmistakably positioned as open and welcoming, actively attracting visitors from far beyond the local area and as such, it was easy for us to visit and record the imagery under discussion. Yet it is also perhaps a place that seems somewhat at odds with Madiba's legacy and seems to leverage his place in international history partly for economic ends.

In contrast, Mamelodi was difficult to research. The park features very little graphic heritage that reflects Madiba, with the only signs being those that state the park name.

This is a place that predominantly plays a functional role for the local community and the lack of signage reflects it. People use it to make journeys to and from their homes and children use it for play. Yet, strangely, the sign is written in English. The population of Mamelodi speaks a mixture of languages, of which only 2.1% speak English as their first language (Statistics South Africa, 2022b). However, English is most South African's first additional language and might be the reason for writing the sign in English. The absence of graphic heritage in Nelson Mandela Park in Mamelodi may lead, over time, to the park functioning purely as a locative feature, losing its connotative connection to Madiba. We could perhaps position the park as intrinsically more closely connected to Madiba's legacy than the square in Sandton, given that it brings local people together provides sports pitches and a communal play area for local children. In Madiba's opening speech at the Nelson Mandela Park in Mamelodi, he expressed his wish that "this park be filled with the sound of children laughing, playing and learning" (NMF, 2018). Our visual research confirms this is the case even though some equipment parts are not there anymore, such as the missing swings.

It is tempting to define Sandton as the more successful of the two in terms of its ability to deliver on the promise set out by a name. But looked at from a different perspective, say that of sustainable urban development, the greater need for investment in the social, cultural and economic fabric is clearly needed in the township of Mamelodi to make it accessible to a wider audience, who may, in turn, bring investment and resource that will benefit the community. Furthermore, in Sandton, the overt presence of graphic heritage about Madiba leverages Madiba's memory and place in global history, attracting tourists and the resulting economic gains. The square is managed around the clock as a part of the Sandton Central project to prevent crime and keep the Sandton central area clean and well-maintained (Nelson Mandela Square, 2022b). South Africa is well known for its high crime levels; thus, creating a safe place for visitors who are unfamiliar with the area – both South African and international – very appealing. Indeed, the reviews on Trip Advisor list security as one of the most popular mentions concerning the square. In contrast, the park in Mamelodi plays more of a local role, bringing people together and providing a communal play area for local children despite the much less-than-perfect conditions of the park. The run-down nature of the park, the graffiti, and the obvious lack of investment is also likely to further discourage visitors who are not local to the area. Visitors from outside the local area may attend events at the Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre or visit the centre as part of the Mamelodi Heritage Tour, but they are unlikely to extend their visit to experience the park.

Both places prompt us to question what we might expect when encountering a park or square named after Madiba. Both places explored in this paper impact their respective users in different ways. One has far greater resources with which to utilise graphic heritage to further its economic success. It seems that the graphic heritage associated with Madiba – both the means and the meanings – is there for those who can afford it and not those who cannot, which raises questions about the public/private motivations of those responsible for these places. If looked at from the perspective of connection to Madiba, Mamelodi has the greater claim for authenticity and commemoration due to the park having been visited by him – there is a strong personal connection. Sandton cannot make the same claim. It also raises interesting questions about toponymy concerning the association between design and placemaking. How much should visitors to the park or square expect its design to be associated with the person's values? How might a

place fulfil the promise suggested by its name? However, we are less concerned with whether a site has more or less graphic heritage that connects to its toponymy; instead, we contend that the analysis of such materials has been hitherto overlooked when discussing placemaking activities at both local and global scales. Therefore, place naming and the critical analysis of graphic heritage are presented here as acts associated with urban development and capable of offering new perspectives on place and placemaking.

### Acknowledgements

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## African Spacemaking. Critical Narratives and Urban Co-Creation in Five Virtual Reality (VR) Productions

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### Abstract

The emerging use of Extended Reality (XR) by African artists and collectives is sparking a revival of a “third space” in urban storytelling. Addressing topics ranging from expropriation in Lagos to public surveillance in Nairobi, a new wave of artists is appropriating the spatial dimensions of virtual reality to interrogate the neocolonial dynamics of urbanization in African cities. This forms what we term “*spacemaking*” or, the production of virtual worlds and critical practices in the act of narrative expression. These narratives range from postcolonial to Afrofuturist, vary in interactivity or forms of address, and, fundamentally, centre the pluriversal identities of the people and places that construct urban city centres in Africa. This study is a contextual analysis of five XR works produced by African directors and Africa-based artists/collectives, developed from in-depth interviews with each creator. The works, countries, and creators in discussion include: “The Other Dakar” (dir. Selly Raby Kane, Senegal, 2017), “Spirit Robot” (dir. Johnathan Dotse, Ghana, 2017), “Azibuye – The Occupation” (dir. Dylan Valley, South Africa, 2020), “Lagos at Large” (Jumoke Sanwo, Nigeria, 2019), and “African Space Makers” (dir. TheNrbBusCollective, Kenya, 2020). Our findings reveal how artists have co-created with their cities in their VR productions, foregrounding Africa-based spatial modalities in an otherwise Westernized technology. These practices derive from decolonial lineages in spatial thinking and arts activism, while integrating new technologies into innovative expressions of agency, resistance, and transformation in postcolonial times. Decentring consumption or distribution of VR media, this research presents the narratives of production and co-creation that demonstrate new possibilities for how the arts and storytelling are core parts of shaping how we imagine public space.

**Keywords:** third space, 360-degree filmmaking, urban storytelling, co-creation, arts activism

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## **Introduction**

Urban space belongs to the people, yet too often is organized by the economic interests of a select few. When making decisions about urban geography, many policymakers and politicians rely on urban data that prioritize industrial projects and commercial activity to the everyday lives of people living within it. As Ghanaian political philosopher Ato Sekyi-Otu quotes of Martiniquan political philosopher Frantz Fanon, “the manifest measure of ‘colonial exploitation’ and the palpable index of its ‘totalitarian character’” is found “in the magnitude of the physical and metaphysical chasm dividing the colonizer and the colonized” (Sekyi-Otu, 1996, p. 77). The “palpable index” as measured today can be seen in the fact that African cities are 29% more expensive than European cities with similar income levels and citizens pay 55% more for housing, 42% more for transport and 35% more for food (World Bank, 2017). As the population is expected to double by 2050, African cities will soon become megacities and these trends may become the fundamental reason behind new social uprisings.

This article demonstrates how 360-degree filmmaking constructs a new vantage point from which artists interact with and imagine public space in a critical way. While the early development of 360-degree camera technology was driven by its functional use for urban data capture and mapmaking with the launch of the panoramic images of Google’s Street View in 2007 (McQuire, 2019), the increased accessibility of 360-degree cameras and mobile-based headsets, such as the Google Cardboard, have expanded the tools for spatial geography into more critical and artistic domains. For XR artists in Africa, spatial mapping takes on a new focus—one that is embodied, sensory, and relevant to the political realities their communities inhabit.

Using virtual reality (VR) for urban storytelling, a new wave of XR artists is appropriating virtual space to critique the neocolonial dynamics of urbanization. Addressing topics ranging from expropriation in Lagos to public surveillance in Nairobi, these artists are doing what we term “spacemaking” or, the production of virtual worlds, a “third space” as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha, through critical practices and narrative expression. These narratives range from postcolonial to Afrofuturist, vary in interactivity or forms of address, and, fundamentally, centre the pluriversal identities of the people and places that construct urban city centres in Africa.

Notably, virtual reality works pose limitations as media in that the protocol for open access to and long-term preservation of independent content is only now being researched and established. Because of the rapid changes of VR hardware manufacturing and a lack of standardization with media formats within the commercial industry, many virtual reality works are hidden from view and some are even obsolete (Ensom and McConchie, 2021, p. 52). Organizations such as the Open Documentary Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as well as the Tate Modern Museum have addressed this issue through documentation initiatives, such as curating a web-based database like Docubase or developing recommendations for preservation of works in a museum context. While much work is yet to be done in archiving and curating 360-degree films for further research, this article contributes to this effort through a series of conversations that argue for the relevance of such work in fields of urban planning and related fields, particularly with regards to perspectives from the Global South.

## Methodology

Our study includes close readings of five exemplary virtual reality works coupled with contextual analysis and in-depth interviews with the directors of each work. The interviews were conducted primarily through Zoom and Whatsapp, with one in social VR using VRChat. Our research embraces multimodality as discursive praxis, drawing not only from cultural and media theory but also from accounts of media production and the artistic process within the field. One of the co-authors, Vincenzo Cavallo, is also an XR practitioner based in Africa for more than fifteen years and directly involved in the production of one of the five analysed works. By centring the narratives of creators within the continent, this study traces how each of their productions is tied to the emergence of a discourse that challenges global developmentalism from the margins.

Our close reading includes an analysis of the narrative and aesthetic techniques of each VR work. We look at how these African artists and collectives have uniquely appropriated XR as an artform through their perspectives as African artists and/or through co-creation with local people and perspectives. Through the in-depth interviews, we consider how VR integrates with the sociopolitical, discursive, and artistic interests of each author. We also asked each author how their ideas have evolved through the production process and how artmaking as an act is situated in the historical-social context of artmaking in their cities. What ensued are radical perspectives that entirely reframe the way virtual reality and spatial computing is understood all together.

The field of interactive documentary (referred to as i-docs) positions the artform as between narrative journalism, fine arts, and social activism (Dowling, 2021), and is defined by its creative use of digital tools such as drones, locative media, and the web to tell stories in a socially-driven way. Many i-docs are made to engage audiences and rely on the consumer to play an “active role” in “defining the content” (Toursel and Useille, 2019, pg. 338). With the “immersive turn” that arrived with XR (Extended Reality) technologies and the onset of projects largely funded by technology companies and the humanitarian space, the position of the media consumer, often a Western user placed within a distant context of journalistic news, quickly became problematized much like in the early days of documentary film and its construction of an ethnic other (Rose, 2018; Crawford-Holland, 2018). In our approach, rather than focus on questions about audience reception, we select VR works in which the creators and their communities are precisely the locus from which meaning is derived. We focus on the labour of production, its socio-cultural contexts, and the performances of subjectivity involved in the making of the work.

The selected VR films, cities, and authors in discussion are: *The Other Dakar*” (dir. Selly Raby Kane, Dakar, 2017), *“Spirit Robot”* (dir. Johnathan Dotse, Accra, 2017), *“Azibuye – The Occupation”* (dir. Dylan Valley, Johannesburg, 2020), *“Lagos at Large”* (Jumoke Sanwo, Lagos, 2019), and *“African Space Makers”* (dir. TheNrbBusCollective, Nairobi, 2020). All of these films are 360 videos accessed by a virtual reality (VR) headset, of which only *African Space Makers (ASM)* offers narrative interactivity through gaze. The criteria for selecting these works include its relevance to the topic of urbanization in Africa, aesthetic innovation using 360 videos, and engagement with local arts scenes. These approaches counter dominant trends in VR filmmaking about Africa in which

directors rely on naturalistic realism, are not from the locations depicted, and thus have little to no investment in the creative culture in the city.

Our approach unravels new meanings to the concept of virtual reality itself that are more applicable to the varied spatial contexts and complex identities of the Global South. In their work, these artists critique a functionalist approach to space, both at the level of perception in virtual reality and that of everyday, public space in radical acts of narrative construction. By also highlighting issues of identity and the constraints of artistic engagement with public space, we emphasize the need for more financial and political support for the creative sector in urban cities across Africa, and how a discourse for spacemaking may contribute to enacting further change.

### **Virtual Reality and Spatial Politics**

Virtual or not, politics is ultimately about negotiating space; as the Marxist scholar Franz Fanon articulated, the spatial is an inherently decolonial plane (Fanon, 1990). Writing within the context of British colonialism more than half a century ago. Born in colonial rule, Franz Fanon established the spatial as inherently decolonial (Fanon, 1990).

Preceding Foucault and the “spatial turn” of social theory, Fanon's spatial metaphor of being a prisoner of a “fixed position” in a “compartmentalized” society captures the essence of being in the colonial world. Thus, the existential position and conditions from which spatial thinking has emerged inherently holds a decolonial ethos tied to lived realities in relation to oppressive power structures (Fanon, 2020; Sekyi-Otu, 1996).

A compartmentalized space of its own, VR brings the spatial modality back to the fore, serving as a discursive tool for critiquing urban developmentalism. Given that space is an operative concept of decolonization, we argue that virtual reality is predisposed for analysing compartments, boundaries, and unjust spatial relationships and power dynamics. Seeing “space” in post and neo-colonial cities as Fanon suggested, as the manifestation, cause, and consequence of imperialism and social injustice, African and African based artists are adopting spatial technologies such as virtual reality and 360 video for expressing the complexities of urban identity.

Virtual reality (VR) as defined in the nonfiction media field loosely refers to 360-degree media experiences accessed through a head-mounted display (HMD) (Rose, 2018) (Uricchio, 2016). Like the photographic camera, the technology of virtual reality comes from linear perspectivism in Western visual culture (Lorenzin, 2021), a fraught lineage of military-industrial development (Farouki, 2009), and the colonial fantasy to control space, information, and identity of Euro-centric worldviews (Hillis, 1999). In this way, the prevailing aesthetic language of VR has codes and biases baked in its form, such as “naturalistic realism,” which media scholar and filmmaker Deniz Tortum describes as an aesthetic that replicates “forms of perception mimetic to real world experience,” similarly to continuity editing in early cinema.

Naturalistic realism, Tortum argues, limits the creative potential of the medium and undergirds Silicon Valley's techno-solutionist claims of VR being able to place you “in the shoes” of others (Tortum 2016), an approach critiqued for creating “spectral voyeurs” rather than real exchange with the characters' lives (Crawford-Holland, 2018). Naturalistic realism is used in many acclaimed nonfiction VR works created for Western audiences to depict communities impacted by global poverty and conflict,

including those based in Africa, producing the guise of first-hand experience in a “touristic gaze” while actually erasing the voices of people of marginalized identities (Nakamura, 2020).

Spacemaking is precisely the opposite. Spacemaking decolonizes subverts the paradigm of naturalistic spatial perception by instead privileging the creative act of spatial production. As postcolonial theorist Homi Bhaba argues in *The Location of Culture*, the production of meaning is not in between the “I and the You” in a statement, but rather requires that “these two places be mobilized in the passage through a “third space,” or, “an empty space of non-representability that opens up between signifiers (identity and difference, self and other) in performative play (Kipfer 2011, pg. 93). Spacemaking encompasses the production of a 'third space' through performances of subjectivity and its interrelated social processes. This spacemaking does not automate communication through a one-to-one channel, to “empathize” with a racialized Other, but rather requires actors to reposition themselves, and look at the ordering boundaries from a different perspective. In the hands of spacemakers, XR holds the power to “open the way to conceptualizing Third Space as an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (Bhabha, 1994, pg. 38-39).

African spacemakers are those drawing from a range of creative tools to empower political autonomy in face of the global. Virtual reality can be seen as a productive analogue for urban developmentalism, and the way in which artists and their communities have engaged with the technology during its production hold important insights about the medium. Spacemaking is a form of expression that centres the socio-political value of marginality as a space of resistance and political innovation (bell hooks, 1989). It is precisely through the activation of decolonial sense-making that the arts become a mode for repositioning one's self and their ordering boundaries from a different perspective (Mignolo, 2013). Thus, we propose spacemaking as a transdisciplinary tool that brings critical discourse, media arts practice, and arts activism together with policy and urban planning. The artists featured in this study are pioneering decolonial storytelling methods in which the ultimate objective is not automatizing empathy but rather deconstructing the spatial impositions of colonial cities and making space for hybridized identities.

### **Spacemaking using 360 video**

In the following table, each work is classified according to their aesthetic strategies, methodological approach, and socio-political intentions. This study does not aspire to or seek to propose a singular continuity in aesthetic or approach but rather embraces multiplicity. In constructing a “third space,” spacemaking opens up “possibilities for multiple meanings and demographic plurality,” “a world where many worlds fit,” rather than rely on “one to one cultural translations” (Kothari et al., 2019). Some of these artists have been focusing on dispossession, gentrification, and resistance, while others focus on speculating alternative realities through Afro-futurist mysticism. Each of these creators use VR to make space for alternative modes for thinking and being.



	<u>Aesthetic Strategy</u>	<u>Methodological Approach</u>	<u>Socio-Political Intention</u>
African Space Makers	Afropunk, DIY, slapstick comedy, Self-reflexive address	Co-creation with art collectives, Performative Reenactment of Self, Psychogeographic Intervention	Inspire youth in challenging post colonial boundaries and fight for non commercial creative spaces
Lagos at Large	Narrative parody, Deconstructing tourism, Collage, Urban poetry, Drifting, discover the city	Auto-fiction, Psychogeographic intervention, Contemporary arts and Postcoloniality	Inspiring a new vision of Lagos, discuss transnational citizenship, the role of the diaspora coming back, the privatization and dispossession of public space
Azibuye - The Occupation	360 Cinema Verite, Neo-Marxism	Co-create with art collective, Appropriate capitalistic gaze	Discuss post-apartheid into materialist analysis beyond race
Pandora / Spirit Robot	Looking through the lens of futurity Afrofuturism, observing from within	Observing techno-culture in Accra	Inspire youth to see Africa as producers, Techno-Progressive
The Other Dakar	Magical Realism, Afro-mysticism, Afro-futurism, Drifting	Short story, Costume and set design	Connect the role of artists and indigenous mystics in the city

Table 1. Five case studies of XR Spacemaking

1. *African Space Makers: Afro-Punk Gamification of the 'Third Space'*

*African Space Makers*, weaves five different 360 videos with a central interactive-choose-your-own-adventure in which the user takes part. In this work, which is directed by one of the co-authors of this paper, Vincenzo Cavallo with the Nrb Bus Collective, the third space is represented by a liminal space in which the protagonists break the fourth wall in referencing themselves as the filmmakers. Choosing an avatar to follow, the user “becomes” the director and tours around the city with a videographer and an audio-technician. *African Space Makers* strategically centres the filmmakers and conditions of production with all its contradictions at the centre of the narration. The video makers are usually the observers but, in this case, they are observed and judged by the object of their investigation and the user who is in their shoes feels both uncomfortable and thrilled by the experience. Nobody asks you to empathize with the filmmakers or any other of the subjects encountered, on the contrary you are asked to listen and understand, you are given the power of choosing among predetermined options but your decision-making does not count at all, the interaction is just a fake and you will have to do what they want you to do.



African Space Making embraces the psychogeographic strategy of *détournement*, a rerouting, or hijacking (Debord, 1994), as an aesthetic and a methodology that comes from the world of street art and political activism. The choice of using the Mockumentary as a stylistic form is inspired by the street art film documentary “Exit through the Gift Shop” (Banksy, 2010) while the participatory script writing process relies on previous experiences of collective forms of art creation, developed from and by the same art collectives that are both the object and the subject of the immersive experience. The participatory approach of African Space Makers is exemplified by the episode featuring the Chokora Fashion Collection from the slums of Kibera, in that high-end fashion is hijacked by the aesthetics of the garbage collectors. The participatory session ended with the creation of a new phrase, “let’s chokorize it,” which means “appropriate.” The episode ends with a scene in which members of the collective informally organize a fashion parade on a red carpet in the middle of a mall just outside Kibera.

It is because of this AfroPunk ethos that the theatrical re-enactment of the artists involved and the way the technology is used are both meant to deconstruct neocolonialism and neoliberalism through satire rather than trying to make the user



“feel good about feeling bad” (Nakurama, 2020). The artists are trying to represent themselves in relation with and within the context of privacy deprivation, religious oppression, environmental apocalypse, public space dispossession, but they are not asking the user to be themselves and that’s the main point-- you are an observer and even in your best intention you need to be re-educated, your perspective needs to be decolonized through this absurd game.

African Space Makers gamifies the “third space” by providing a space to creative collectives living in marginal parts of the city centre of Nairobi to re-enact their practices of liberation, from different socio-political perspectives and physical locations and by forcing the privileged audience to listen and choose what the collectives already choose for them. These stories are performed in a ludic way making fun of postmodernity interactivity and its contradictions without falling into any unitary political rhetoric. Using both interactivity and systemic constraints of VR, the authors decided to deliberately bring awareness to the fine line between agency and suppression, the privatization of public spaces and spaces of resistance, and ultimately, aims to draw young people in and participate in the creation of a new reality. Ultimately it suggests that the only way to decolonize the city is by first “experiencing it”, which means to ignore the boundaries, both the physical and the mental ones and be where you shall not be, even if you feel uncomfortable.

## 2. *Lagos at Large: Afro-Diasporic Identity, Memory, and Spatial Divides*

*Lagos at Large* explores the diasporic identity of Afro-Europeans and their experience of the postcolonial city. The opening scene depicts a resounding call to prayer, instantly recognizable at a bodily level to many, then transitions into progressive Afrobeats overlaid with a poetic narration by Njideka, a character who guides users through an experience “returning” to Nigeria after living abroad. “There’s a prism to which someone not living in the city looks at a city— it’s very touristic,” Sanwo says.



Through her style of narration that parodies a city tour, Sanwo draws people into the gentrification of Lagos, looking critically at the juxtaposition between the crowded mainland city and the pristine beaches of the neighbouring island. This narration style,

which draws from parody and self-reflection, highlights both the social inequities of land and how the colonial order is reproduced by the elite.

Before working with VR, Sanwo explains that that she had been interested in exploring the boundaries of the city as the manifestation and instrument of social injustice.

*I have been interested in dispossession [and how] people don't have access to public space. Everything has been commercialized. People don't have access to spaces [other] than bus stops. I'm trying to engage in the new normal ... The public is no longer public... Now all the beaches have been privatized ... that's the reality ... This is a distinctive feature of every post-colonial city. In Lagos it is very evident. The island is for the colonialists and the mainland for the colonized, then after independence the elite takes the space of the colonialists and the social hierarchy still exists thanks to the same form of spatial violence.*

It was through VR, however, that Sanwo began more explicitly experimenting with how narrative elements, such as diasporic identity, are tied to the spatially embodied expression of space itself. Approaching VR as a “memory box,” Sanwo aimed to bring a contemporary postcolonial temporality to experience. For Sanwo, themes of nostalgia and memory are compatible with VR as a medium, which she sees as a restorative tool:

*I had been thinking about how to document the phenomenologies of the now for the future, because I come from a post-colonial society, we have a lot of absences and erasures, and all of these many challenges in terms of reflection on history and how history is perceived or recorded.... So, I inserted people in different places, at the beach for example... as well with the park at the end scene... I tried to insert people in these different locations, as an act of resistance ... so we actively brought in the people and shot there ... We also did a bit of layering using my own green screen.*

Through the use of layering 360 video, Sanwo repopulated privatized spaces with people to restore the meaning of a public. Embracing the fragmented nature of the image, Sanwo aims to restore aspects of cultural memory that are lost in the rapid pace of urbanization and change. When Sanwo was creating the work, she was not thinking as much about the audience as much as she was in documenting her present experience, using VR as a tool to stitch together subjective experience.

Another technique Sanwo uses to express postcolonial subjecthood is through the narrative voice of an Afro-European narrator of mixed race. Fascinated by how an Austrian-Nigerian friend of mixed race described her desire to return to Lagos, Sanwo interspersed auto-fictional elements of her own experience to construct the character of Njideka. In this way, *Lagos at Large* reflects a dialogue between Sanwo's identity and that of a broader Nigerian diasporic community to construct a collective experience. Through this narrator, Sanwo touches upon the tensions between the romantic lens coloured by diasporic longing, and the sound and structures of the city, a bustling metropolis that in many ways speaks for itself. “The architecture is the third character in *Lagos at Large*,” said Jumoke Sanwo. Anchored by iconic sites in Lagos, from its buses and public squares to the marketplace, *Lagos at Large* captures the effect of navigating a busy city through sound and constant movement. “I wanted [the narrative] to be very much authentic to the realities of producing the work in Lagos,” she said.

*Lagos is a city of spatial divide, a place of many inroads, many liminal spaces. She is not Black, she is not white – she is in between these spaces. She is a space of neutrality, an entry point....How do you reflect without objectifying ... I wanted a gaze that was present without being too present. An observer [and] a space of neutrality.*

In *Lagos at Large*, space-making involves both imaginary and material space, the physical and the psychological which can finally coexist in the virtual world. In this way Sanwo breaks the rigid dichotomies of the colonial organization of spaces to create a “third space” in which the diasporic Afro-European identity of the narrator becomes the hybrid dimension of a unique set of affinities through which the conditions and locations of social and cultural exclusion are unveiled. *Lagos at Large* reflects on different physical and symbolic human conditions that are indeed the result of how the post-colonial city has closed or opened locations of cultural exchange. Sanwo highlights the boundaries of spatial injustice and subverts the order of post-colonial dispossession by occupying the space using psychogeographic interventions. *Lagos at Large* creates a “third space” in which conflicting political actors can coexist temporarily in a sort of place of neutrality and romantic contemplation of the colonial boundaries that continue to shape the life and trajectories of the post-colonial citizens.

### 3. *Azibuye - Post-Apartheid Sensibilities and Decolonizing Postcoloniality*

*Azibuye* —*The Occupation* depicts inside a mansion in Johannesburg that had been vacant for 20 years, now occupied by Black artist-activists Marcelle and Ivan. Addressing the ongoing issue of land redistribution in post-Apartheid South Africa—72 percent of the nation's private arable land is owned by white people although Black South Africans make up 80 percent of the population (Land Audit Report, 2017) — *Azibuye* challenges the user's relation to private property at an embodied level.



One of Dylan Valley's aims with this piece was to bring attention to the systematic dispossession of land that Black South Africans have faced, while also bringing nuance to



the interpersonal dynamics at the heart of contestation. “[Marcelle and Ivan] see the occupation as an art project or installation, but at the same time as a protest against the broader system of neoliberal capitalism,” said Dylan Valley, particularly addressing that of a postcolonial state. While Valley knew about this story and this specific collective in the past, he was not interested in making a traditional film about them because many others had already approached the occupants and this issue (“what do I have to add to the story?” he asked himself). After the opportunity to work with 360 VR, however, Valley changed his mind. In our interview, Valley shares that:

*The story came to me after I had the 360 opportunity. [Originally] I wanted to do a story about [the] uber sharing economy and digital exploitation, [because of the] many strikes in South Africa and then I realized it would not work with 360. So then I thought: what about that story? Azibuye was there in the back of my mind... I thought, 'this is it.' There must be a synergy between the story and the medium. I knew it could have been a good story but if it wasn't for the 360 video I would not have done it, it just would not have made any sense. [emphasis added]*

In his aesthetic strategy, Valley appropriates the user's experience of the 360 videos, which usually is consumed through a capitalistic gaze. For instance, 360 videos are often used in real estate to give full, visual access that proposes potential ownership of the property, or used to create a “touristic gaze” over racialized Others who have little to no agency in the image (Nakamura 2020). In *Azibuye*, the user's capitalistic gaze in VR and the occupant's presence within the space contrasts the explicit lack of presence of the owner of the mansion. “You have this access to space that he doesn't have,” says Valley, “not seeing [him] actually makes it more uncomfortable that you're there.” This dynamic is pronounced in the climactic moment of *Azibuye* near the end of the film:

*Suddenly you hear a voice [and] someone answers the phone [while] you are in the house.... 'Oh shit this is the owner.' When you realize this, you feel you are in someone else's space. This was my intention in Azibuye. Hearing his voice only over the phone while being inside the house gives you a different sense of proximity and distance...We actually hear his voice saying, 'This is my house. I don't actually want you in that house. This is hurting me,' which is what he said and, “you are trespassing my house and now I'm losing out on a house that I bought. I had to live through apartheid [as a Black South African] and I don't even have access to my own house.' And one of the reviewers of the film said it made her feel like an intruder in the house.*

Valley terms this psychogeographic strategy as invoking a “hegemonic voice,” in which the prism of power infiltrates the user's own frame of reference to their experience. The hegemonic voice in *Azibuye* upends the capitalistic gaze onto itself by the emphatic assertion by the owner that the occupants, and by extension the user, do not own this space; it belongs to him. Thus, *Azibuye* goes beyond challenging the racial order imposed by the apartheid system and its legacy by including an unexpected twist in which the audience discovers that the owner of the house is Black. Dylan Valley states:

*Six comrades left the house when they found out that a Black guy was the owner. This is not part of the film because they left much before we arrived. They had an internal*

*disagreement because some did not agree with the idea of keeping the house occupied despite the owner was Black while for the others what really counted was not the color of the skin but the fact that the property was obtained by capitalist means in an unjust and unequal society in which the end of apartheid did not change the life of the majority...Initially I was worried that [incorporating] his voice [in the film] would have made the occupants feel very bad...But actually, they didn't mind all that. They thought it was good. They liked that addition of having his voice in it. They thought it was really funny, actually. They're very firm in their conviction [and] their ideology and know where they stand in terms of that house. They've actually had conversations with the homeowner before. So for them, it was kind of like hearing an old friend complain about something. They already knew what he was going to say...For them, it was kind of like a time machine in a way. It's like going back in time a few months ago. It's really quite something. I think all these different experiences were going through their minds as well as for me. It's really weird watching a VR film in the space you filmed in.*

The use of virtual reality as a medium brought about the complex and contrasting bodily affects the filmmaker, audiences, and protagonists experienced depending on their level of engagement with the issue. From the filmmaker's point of view, the use of virtual reality also influenced the production process, and subsequently the story, at multiple stages in a co-creative way. "They were new to 360 so there was an excitement [and] a different energy that created a more horizontal situation, less hierarchical," said Valley.

Like the production process of *African Space Makers*, a spirit of play emerged through the use of a new technology in a way that contrasted with approaching a set with a more clear and defined filmmaking agenda. The mutual attitude of figuring things out bred a more experimental and synergetic approach to working together. Moreover, the technicalities of the 360 camera itself, such that 360 filmmaking requires the camera operator to remove themselves from the field of view, led to the protagonists feeling more candid in their own space in a way that heightened the verité objectives of the documentary.

Making *Azibuye* changed Valley's approach to the analysis of the causes and the effects of social injustice in his own country. "Something deeply clicked after *Azibuye*," he said, "It made me think about other possibilities of talking about spatial violence, what it means, and renovating neglected spaces," he said. In this way, Valley's artistic direction took a new direction, to question the use of private property in the post-apartheid city, such as in the case of another occupation in Cape Town, in which thousands of people evicted due to gentrification are living in an old hospital, for his next project.

#### 4. *Spirit Robot* - Afrofuturist take on Virtual Reality

*Spirit Robot* is a VR documentary about the Chale Wote Street Art Festival in Accra, a large-scale cultural event founded in 2011 by the art collective ACCRA[dot]ALT. Subtitled "Renaissance on the Streets of Accra," *Spirit Robot* uses virtual reality to evoke the energy of Chale Wote through immersing users directly "into" the crowd, applying aesthetic techniques and themes drawn from the festival while simultaneously innovating VR as an artform.



*Spirit Robot* begins with the opening scene of a dancer in a caged apparatus from which she began her performance, who then emerges into the centre of the crowd. “Arts is an expressive space to create and imagine a different kind of world [with] new possibilities for all life outside of existing circumstances,” the piece narrates shortly afterward, highlighting the main goals of Chale Wote to “break creative boundaries” and bring art, music, dance and performance out of the galleries and onto the streets. This initiative is in response to the lack of infrastructural support for the arts in Accra, which has led artists to take matters into their own hands and build community through public art making and gathering. In this way, Chale Wote is a public demand for more investment in the arts, and the organizers call out its appeal to corporations and institutions, many of which explicitly use its images for marketing or station their products at the festival for financial gain without compensating the artists for fair use of their work, as evidence to the cultural value of the creative industry (ACCRA dot Alt 2015). Involving public murals, photography exhibitions, installations, live performances, street boxing, parades, design labs, and more, Chalte Wote breathes with life and the flurry of people that make up the bustling city of Accra.

Authored by Ghanaian artist and technophile Jonathan Dotse, the prehistory of *Spirit Robot* actually dates back to 2015, in the early days of 360 filmmaking. Following Google's release of the Cardboard in 2014, Dotse successfully reverse engineered a VR headset using recycled fabrics and PlayStation 2 CD cases and customized the mobile software protocols to best fit his needs. To exhibit this headset, Dotse decided to produce his own VR work, *Pandora* (2015) with Accra-based start-up Nubian VR featuring local actress Doris Mamley Djangmah, as opposed to pre-using existing 360 videos online, in order to “exhibit a prototype African electronic device, [...] share [his] love of technological innovation with other African youth, [and] promote Ghana as a

place where technology is not only consumed but also produced” (Electric South, 2019). As he explains, “Pandora [paints] an allegory about the transformative potential of VR in Africa, but with an implied warning to respect this power.”

Dotse's earliest memory of “virtual reality” wasn't from a headset, but from reading on the bus - immersed in William Gibson's fictional cyberpunk universes. Inspired by Western science fiction, Dotse had learned how to code and tinker with different technologies, teaching himself the fundamental mechanics of VR headsets and networked media. Given that the cyberpunk aesthetic has come largely from Western imperialist histories, Dotse expresses having “a lot of work in translating [and] finding analogues to those ideas” with his own cultural identity. To this end, Dotse draws from Afrofuturism to appropriate cyberpunk, leveraging the alienating specter of virtual reality to capture the techno-cultures in Accra. To create “deeply immersive experiences through narrative world-building” in his XR praxis, Dotse draws from partly-ethnographically methods rooted in the hybrid techno-cultures of Accra. In our interview, Dotse states that:

*Overtime, I found a way to approach [Western technology and African identity] simultaneously mostly by taking inspiration from how these interactions happen over here [in Accra] by observing how science and technology interfaces with life here ... how people naturally integrate those different concepts of tradition and technology as my basis for exploring these ideas. [For example] these guys called the 'sakawa' boys, who are involved in lots of spamming and electronic crime related activities, managed to integrate African spirituality to their business. And so you have these guys who are very tech savvy, not necessarily highly educated, but very fluent in modern technology eventually creating this ecosystem around African spirituality in terms of finding ways to adapt existing traditional practices that have been used to grant luck and good fortune in African cultures and brought that into this technological space. Its very uniqueness gave me an idea of what to expect going forward.*

The hybrid epistemologies of African spirituality and hacking modern technologies is rooted in Ghana's broader techno-culture, from the excess of refurbished goods at massive flea markets to pervasive data farming and cybercrime. Some proponents of “sakawa,” a Ghanaian term for Internet-based fraud drawing from African spiritualism, even consider internet scamming as a form of reparations against Western exploitation of Africa throughout history. This cultural hybridity and hacktivist spirit holds particular resonance when considering how Ghana is impacted by hazardous e-waste due to the over combustion of electronics and poorly regulated global flows (Yeung 2019). Self-identifying as “techno-progressive,” Dotse views technology as both the problem and the solution to sociopolitical issues, viewing African-led technological development youth to enable a future of critical, hybrid relations to technology that integrates African identity into the very fabric of its development. In doing so, Dotse has developed his own framework as a Ghanaian native for pragmatically working with virtual reality in African contexts. Just as the alternative cultural scene of Chale Wote enabled Dotse to exhibit his VR headset and first work, Dotse continued to approach the city as a collaborator rather than a point of tension in *Spirit Robot*.

Just like the 360 camera uniquely reinforced theatrical re-enactment in *African Space Makers* and verite filmmaking in *Azibuye*, for *Spirit Robot*, it created a collective voice out



of the crowd. Throughout the piece, the bustling crowds and people that make it up take on an almost singular identity and presence, reflected by the filmmaker becoming a member of the crowd like anyone else. “There are no boundaries between you and the people around you,” he said, a sentiment shared by Jumoke Sanwo in filming *Lagos at Large*. “I had to find cover right after pressing the record [...] if the crowd was dense enough, I could just melt into it,” he said. Sure enough, the participants of the festival are constantly interacting with the camera throughout *Spirit Robot*; in one scene, a man dressed as an angel spirit gesticulates towards the camera and in another, people take photos of the camera, reflecting a dual interactivity between the filmmaker and the subjects being filmed. Dotse also plays with the circularity of 360 video and how users must interact with the apparatus in order to understand the story and be a part of it. Finally, the centrality of the crowd and position of being in the crowd is solidified in the last scene of *Spirit Robot*, which is a timelapse of the festival from a distanced point of view, where the sheer number of people are made apparent. In this way, the way virtual reality makes an active participant of the story reflects the synergy between the ethos of the Chale Wote Festival and virtual reality as a medium, producing a transcendent “third space” in which users can entertain this identity through a new Ghanaian form of technological appropriation.

##### 5. *The Other Dakar - Preserving the Mysticism of the City*

*The Other Dakar* follows a young girl named Maguette as she walks through mystical zones in Dakar, encounters various spirits, and signs a contract to access the city's secrets. Authored by Selly Raby Kane, a prominent fashion designer and multimedia artist from Senegal, *The Other Dakar* blends elaborate costume and set designs with graphical visual effects in virtual reality to create a 'third space' that hybridizes traditional vernacular culture in Dakar with the modern artistic identity of the city.

Like the Chale Wote Street Arts Festival, *The Other Dakar* draws from Afrofuturistic aesthetic modalities grounded in mythologies local to the city, specifically, the Lebou community in Dakar. Differently from *Spirit Robot*, however, *The Other Dakar* follows a fictional story that evokes a sense of magical realism. “I wanted to explore those invisible worlds,” said Kane, “[our team] had identified many places in the city that were charged with a mystical energy so we wanted people through the VR experience to discover places that count for us in Dakar, but also make a tour of all those entities that are in the city.”

Before and during production, Kane sourced mystically charged spaces preserved by the Lebou community, offering an alternative view of the post-colonial city impacted by French grids. By integrating aspects of Lebou oral traditions, which link its geographic origins to its proximity with the Senegal River and bodies of water, Kane's work makes visible the vernacular cultures that shape Dakar public spaces. In our interview, Kane states that:

*You can feel [the energy] at the healing ceremonies. You can feel them when there is tuuru, the tuuru is the large-scale sacrifices that are done by the Lebou community and generally they pour milk and other things into the ocean and that's an offering for the spirits of the cards to continue to protect the city. Those are the moments where I really feel that some people are taking care of a world that I cannot see for myself, and for many people in the country.*





In one scene, Maguette encounters a spirit in a graveyard-like area covered in forestry. The set references oral legends such as Daour, a protector of the fishermen and residents of Dakar. In this space, the spirit says:

*I am the heart of Dakar. I see the unseen, tomorrow, and the day after. I feed Dakar with divine inspiration. I am an artist. Indeed, we artists hold the secret wonders of the city. Dakar needs to hear her artists. I only speak through them. Now listen! I am everywhere. Follow my lead, obey my warnings. Peace be upon you.*

In this scene, Kane cements her analogue between the vernacular and pre-colonial culture of Dakar with modern artists in the city, articulating a hybrid identity as protectors of the metropolis. In Kane's conception, the root of artistry of Dakar comes from its oral traditions, and preserving this history is an integral part of contemporary art-making practices. Through forming an affinity between vernacular mysticism and modern artistry, Kane also is articulating a political solidarity to the post-colonial city structures that misrepresent the spiritual core of its indigenous people. Liora Bigon and Thomas Hart's study of the entanglements between vernacular and postcolonial urban planning cultures in Dakar found that contrary to assumptions in city planning literature, indigenous spatial practices have permeated in most of the Westernized parts of Dakar and in the region. For instance, a key component of pre-colonial settlements in Dakar had been the pènc, known as a public square, a central place for communal activities, often organized around one or several large trees. Although the colonial French urban grid conflicted with vernacular settlements, displacing many of the eleven original

pèncs, the Lebou community were hardly passive receivers; rather, through pockets of privately owned Lebou land, “the grid-pènc relational interactions became intimately entangled and hybridized” and maintained a dual relation in the city (Bigon and Hart, 2018, p. 204) Just as the way ancient vernacular designs have been woven into the grid in the very city centre, Kane uses virtual reality to reinscribe the centrality of these spaces. Once again, the relation between the private property and the commons is at the centre of the artist's reflection, the dispossession and the reappropriation at the centre of the political proposition.

*There are many stories that I want to tell about Dakar and some propositions about reality - visible, invisible, material, subtle - those contrasts that I really want to put into film and it's supported by many things that happened in the past two years, such as the restitution of African heritage and many things that happened for the continent.*

Using 360, Kane reports the need for having a higher level of awareness of the set direction. As a fiction piece, each element of the scene was highly curated, heightening the specificities of art direction in the process. In this way, the 360-degree filmmaking style brought participants into the author's world, this world it's ultimately political in both its aesthetic and magical realism, the proposition again is to break with the rigid thinking of functionalism, imposed by western colonial ideologies, and re-centre the role of mysticism and spiritualism in post-colonial urban planning.

## Conclusion

*This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/ colonizer. Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberation.*  
(bell hooks, 1989)

Spacemaking, as exemplified by the five artists of this study, offers a framework for bridging virtual reality praxis with broader spatial discourse in public policy, urban planning, and related fields across the humanities and social sciences. In contrast to contemporary approaches to XR that attempt to automate empathy, spacemaking embraces the appropriation of technology as a technique for subverting broader techno-cultural discourses, embracing the position of cultural hybridity and marginality in their expressions. Feminist theorist and educator bell hooks argues that to seek true liberation one must choose marginality (bell hooks, 1989). One must choose to occupy the space outside the binary between colonizer-colonized, hegemonic centre-periphery, and us-them in order to create a location of possibility. Marginality is not only a place of deprivation, it's not simply a place of self-pity or nihilism, nor is it a way to claim attention or help by using XR as a humanitarian tool. On the contrary, marginality can be seen as a privileged perspective.

*Marginality... is the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance...a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in*

*habits of being and the way one lives. As such I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose - to give up or surrender as part of moving into the centre - but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers one the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives. (Ibidem.)*

It is not a coincidence that these artists have chosen to approach the city from a marginal perspective- from the art collectives of African Space Makers, the diaspora living in the mainland of Lagos, and the squatters of Johannesburg, the street artists of Accra, and the urban mystics of Dakar. For these artists embracing the “third space” as a practice which involves multimodality as the only possible hybrid and unique dimension was not necessarily a conscious choice; it was a logical consequence of being part of and living in African cities impacted by neocolonial spatial violence, constrained by physical and mental boundaries. The decision of the authors to approach storytelling from these spaces of marginality, with the intention of challenging narratives rather than approaching from the constricted lens of humanitarianism or aid, connects these XR pieces, and ultimately makes them radically different from many other XR works made in Africa that adopted empathy as the core idea behind their narrative of the oppressed.

This article has explored how artists from five urban hubs in Africa have used XR to critically interrogate urban developmentalism and the privatization of public space, and in doing so, constructed innovative spatial languages that recentre the voices of Africa-based art collectives and the creative culture of their cities. For the artists in our study, XR as a medium offers the possibility to approach topics of neocolonialism and capitalist exploitation from a fresh vantage point and also plays an important role for their critical narratives to emerge. Using 360-degree video enabled a more democratized and participatory production process in which the authors, cast, and crew needed to co-create with their local surroundings, simultaneously shaping how their narratives are told. Moreover, spacemaking afforded artists a new type of creative freedom detached from conventions found in their traditional filmmaking contexts, such as linear fiction and documentary, offering new avenues from which critical narratives can emerge.

In this sense the “third space” becomes not only the place of a new identity but also the only possible way of describing the political dimension from which these artists are operating, the real reasons and the true practices behind all these works. The “third space” allows us not to succumb, not to generalize the “*multitude*” (Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, 2004) into a singular political identity, but rather acknowledging the active construction of many forms of identities that are all challenging the same form of spatial violence experienced or simply observed by the artists behind these 360-degree works.

Together, spacemakers are reviving Fanon's legacy of spatial thinking while at the same time pioneering multimodal artforms, new technologies and new forms of co-creation strategies, all of this by putting performances in urban spaces at the centre of their work. The technological appropriation is shaped by the old colonial and postcolonial struggles rather than the new market based on automatized emotions, in this way XR becomes a tool to engage with the ongoing critical discourses occurring at the margins of urban life by whoever and however wants to engage with it. Each one of these

experiences are spacemaking in their unique contexts by way of disrupting social and identarian boundaries through innovative artistic processes. Spacemaking through XR for these authors became a unique way to reconfigure the margin and the centre in an attempt of redefining the first and giving them a new hierarchy, a new socio-political and cultural status. Spacemaking from the margins is an act that can help civil society and social movements in general to reflect the social injustice behind the neocolonial city of the present and engage with urban policy makers and citizens in new ways.

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## Inclusive Environment.

### Disabled Bodies in the Built Environment of Dar es Salaam City

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#### Abstract

Some people are left out of their community because of matters they have no control over. Some are excluded from the built environment because of their age, ethnicity, race, disability or migrant status. The “right to the city” concept provides an arena for the discussion of the inclusiveness of disabled and aging population in the built environment. Dar es Salaam city provides an exemplary case of a city excluding disabled and/or older people, confining them in their homes. This qualitative study investigates how being unable to access services within the built environment hinders participation of disadvantaged individuals in social, political and economic arenas. It is argued that forgetting these disadvantaged groups in the planning and design of built environment that urban managers, engineers, architects and planners are creating, enhances unjust societies. Therefore, contemporary urban design and policy-making approaches should inform practitioners to leave nobody behind.

**Keywords:** inclusive environment, urban design, disability population

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## **Introduction**

Making quality cities and towns accessible, inclusive and safer for all people is essential for sustainable urban development and is also human rights imperative. This applies identification and elimination of obstacles and physical barriers to accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public (UN, 2006). Effective participation of People with Disabilities (PWDs) in their community life largely depends on environmental accessibility. Disadvantaged and marginalised groups are more likely to face access barriers than normal people considering poverty as the causative side of disability (Venter, et al, 2004 and Takamine, 2003). Consequentially, disabled people excluded from social interaction hence economic hardship.

Over the years, cities across the world have been struggling to successfully provide quality life in areas that people are proud to call home regardless of their age, ability or disability. Thus, to ensure safer, inclusive and accessible urban environment, the United Nation's convention on the Rights of PWDs (CRPD, 2006) agreed on promotion, protection and exercising full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all PWDs. This applies to inclusive urban environment through identification and elimination of obstacles and physical barriers to access buildings and other facilities open to the public including public spaces, (UN-Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda).

## **Dar Es Salaam City Space and PWDs**

Settlement development in Dar Es Salaam city has long history of embracing informality in social, economic and physical space. Somehow, this account on how people's power has contributed in the decolonization of settlement development in Dar es Salaam city. Currently, the city has more informal settlements than formal and hence less public spaces (Magina *et al.*, 2020; Rasmussen, 2013). The Dar es Salaam Master Plan of 2016-2036 intervened by providing 3452.12 Ha for recreational in which open spaces occupies 573.86Ha equivalent to 0.35% (URT, 2018). Nevertheless, this is the case for planned settlements that occupies small population including PWDs in the city. The fragile nature of available public spaces within the city is exacerbated by encroachment and haphazard change of use (Hassan & Mombo, 2017; URT, 2018). The nature of open spaces in Dar es Salaam has similarities in use but differ in terms of spatial distribution and conditions. Scholars have explored the socio-economic aspects of PWD in Dar es Salaam for instance, education (Kavishe & Isibika, 2018; Ngonyani & Mnyanyi, 2021; F. Tungaraza, 2018); health (Sequeira D'Mello *et al.*, 2020); economy and employment (H. Aldersey, 2012; Joseph, 2021; Kavalambi, 2016; Mpemba, 2007; Mushi *et al.*, 2022; Wilson & Shishiwa, 2023); transport (Chengula & Kombe, 2017; Mushule, 2010); social and family (Johansson, 2014; F. D. Tungaraza, 2012); and housing (Huba Mary Nguluma & Kemwita, 2018; Huba M Nguluma & Magina, 2019).

There is little discussion on the spatial inequality produced for PWD in Dar es Salaam for example urban planning practice in Tanzania is based on land provision and development control rather than land development (Peter & Yang, 2019). Land development is entirely based on private and individual developers (Kazaura *et al.*, 2019; Luteranya & Lukenangula, 2023) who has less consideration on regulatory framework and social inclusion directly affecting PWDs. The failure of planners to facilitate the investment in urban areas in Dra es Salaam city infringed the right of the poor including

PWDs to enjoy the city life. For instance during the implementation of BRT routes, the actual walkways designed consideration were altered to reduce the size of walkways which could accommodate PWD comfortably (Shigella 2022). Moreover, non-consideration of the setbacks to promote walkability and over utilization of road reserve by informal activities (Scholz *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, PWD negotiation of their presence in urban space is problematic because participation in development processes is still low. Despite efforts to provide and maintain public spaces in planned and unplanned settlements respectively poor accessibility and underdevelopment are major challenges to users and inclusiveness to PWDs (Woodcraft *et al.*, 2020). Sanga and Mbisso (2020) noted that communities are experiencing lack of sense of place because of lack and poor maintenance of the few existing facilities. The poor accessibility and facilities affect usability of public spaces by PWD significantly.

### **Literature Review: Background to the Study**

Statistically, over 1 billion (15%) people of the world population live with disabilities (WB, 2008 and WHO, 2011). As cited by Venter, 2004, UN estimates that between 6% and 10% of people in the developing countries are disabled. Disability in such countries is associated with poor access to health care, poverty, accidents and the effects of armed conflict (UN, ECMT 1999). The PWDs face difficulties in accessing most of the urban environments in their localities in many parts of the world (Meshur and Alkan, 2013). Too often urban environment has served as a barrier to the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in economic and social developments in cities and communities (WB, 2008 and WHO, 2011). Many countries fail to solve the issue of accessibility towards PWDs in urban planning because of the capacity constraints, lack of resources and competing priorities (Akiyama, 2005). The PWDs face various barriers in accessing quality public services. These barriers have contributed to inequalities and exclusion of PWDs. Developed countries have achieved a lot in reaching such visions by using urban design (Lynch, 1960) Great Britain (2000), Akiyama, 2005). Similarly, cities in developing countries have progressed in creating and promoting built environment that support suitable life for its inhabitants in all aspects of economy, social, political, technological and environmental, that would sustain quality life (Adam, 2009). Nevertheless, urban expansion around the world is characterised by uncontrolled urban sprawl leading to inefficient use of space and natural resources (Lupala, 2002). Urban design is used as a means to address these challenges. Good design creates liveable places with distinctive character, streets and public spaces, which are safer, accessible and pleasant for all (Adam, 2009). Relationship between the natural environment, urban form and structure, economic and institutional processes, and social livelihood requires a transformation of the existing socio-economic, environmental and urban design settings (Aina, *et.al*, 2013). It seeks to enable the natural processes that sustain life to remain intact and to continue functioning alongside initiatives for the improvement of individual quality of life and the well-being of the society (Champa, 2015). Today, mobility and accessibility are the two key components in designing and expanding of cities for efficient functioning of different systems. The degree of good city performance is determined by its ability to provide biological, psychological, social and cultural requirements to its inhabitants.

Sawadsri (2010) specifies that the availability of accessible facilities in the public built environment is extremely important as they facilitate physical access to use those public spaces and also support a public presence that leads society to integrate with one another. The UN in its Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda discussed the importance of cities and countries worldwide to promote and ensure quality in human settlements, which are inclusive, safer and sustainable. This political commitment also needs to be translated into actions and measures to ensure universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces, adequate and affordable housing, urban and peri-urban transport and basic services for all urban dwellers, whether or not they have a disability (UN, 2015). This agenda has also identified the critical need to focus on empowering people living in vulnerable situations including the PWDs. Marshall, et al., (2003) discuss inclusive environment in terms of accessibility to the built environment by everyone regardless of age, gender, ability or disability. He linked environment with society's and individual's attitudes, the design of products and communications and the design of the built environment itself. People's attitude can affect built environment in a positive or negative way. The needs of people with disabilities are often considered separately from other groups of people and often after the design has been completed, the practice which indicate exclusion of in the design process (Marshall et al., 2003). Tanzania has a history of disregarding disable people. Tribes like Maasai, Pare and Kuria have persisted negative perception on disabilities. The belief is associated with curse and misfortune in the society (Seya, 2009). This is also reflected in the built environment where designs continue not to address disability issues. Way after independence in 1995 charity initiatives under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare were undertaken, as there was no policy statement on operationalization of such issue. In 1975, Tanzania signed a declaration on the right of disabled people. Similarly, in 1993, she joined the National Standard Rules on the Equalisation of opportunities for PWDs. The country also joined the continental decade of persons living with disabilities in 1999-2009. The Arusha Declaration advocated for disabled individuals to seek help from other people instead of their participation in the job market. In 1992, Disable Person (Employment) Act No 2 encouraged their participation in income generating activities. In 2004, the national Policy on Disability was established. Currently, the disabled population is estimated at 3.6 million, which is 8% of the estimated population of 51.82 million in 2014 (Disability report, 2008). Tanzania enacted the Person with Disability Act in 2010 to facilitate provision on health, social support accessibility and others. Effective participation of PWDs in their communities depends on the environmental accessibility. Existing built environment is limited in allowing disabled people to exercise their right, for instance more roads in Dar es Salaam City have clearly demarcated carriage ways only. Inappropriate physical planning and implementation has negative impact on mobility and accessibility. Women and children face double burden in that matter (Sabbath and Mazagwa, 2014).

#### *Disabled People's Right to the City*

Disability is viewed in wide context depending on factors such as geographical location and culture, which is linked to socio-economic and physical aspects. Right to the city provides a framework in understanding disability within the built environment (Harvey, 2008). This framework highlights variety of choices urban environment provides to its inhabitants. Choices the city offers to its inhabitants include services, accessibility and

purchasing power. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources; it is a right to change oneself by changing the city (Harvey, 2008). Moreover, ideas assist to understand PWD position within urban space. The struggle of the urban poor as manifested in the informal activities in the global south and migrants in the global north mirrors the struggle of PWD as they navigate the spaces from one point to another. Few places like Japan's built environment have succeeded to provide an inclusive environment and showcased cities of barrier free environment since 1953 (JICAPED, 2002 and Akiyama, 2005). The motto for creating such environment ensures an individual regardless of age, size, ability and disability to enjoy quality life. Barrier free environment in Japan gave rise to 'universal design' approach, which focuses on production of plans, which are inclusive (Akiyama, 2005). Similarly, Imrie and Hall (2001) pioneered guidelines, which are currently used within the construction industry, reduce environment pressure and architectural disability. Specific mobility barriers are social, psychological and structural to accessibility. From a design point of view, sidewalks that are unpaved, poorly maintained, or crowded by vendors are common across the cities, and limit pedestrian mobility, blockage of sidewalks, heavy traffic, difficulties in affording public transport (Venter, et. al., 2004, Sawadsri, 2010).

#### *Disability as a Social Barrier*

Seirlis (2002), identified several myths about people with disabilities in their societies, including PWDs are abnormal, always need help fragile, sickly and unhealthy. Those with psychiatric disabilities are mad, insane or mentally ill. In Ethiopia for instance, a disabled person is one who is unable to ensure an independent life as a result of deficiency in his or her physical or mental capabilities (JICAPED, 2002). Some Koreans believe that lifelong disability is payback for wrong doings, making the disabled and their families to suffer from shame, helplessness, denial, withdrawal, and depression (Zelleweger, 2011). The same views are relevant in African developing countries, where lack of equal consideration facing PWDs tend to result in barriers in accessing public facilities such as education, health, religious and recreational facilities. The society's belief has a degree of impact on what transpires in the built environment. Disability as the process of social exclusion identifies sources and factors for exclusion of PWDs from family level, community and social, as well as institutional and state level. In these levels exclusion happens as a result of lack of movement and transport, which creates lack of capacity, unfriendly roads and transport, unfriendly human environment, and lack of equipment. For example, due to lack of individual capacity, social ignorance, unfriendly environment, inaccessible communication and transport, the PWDs cannot meet most of the public facilities. Poverty is both a cause and consequence of disability (Venter, et. al., 2004 and Takamine, 2003). People with disabilities are more likely to face access barriers than normal people considering the causative side of disability. Consequentially, disabled people are excluded from social interaction, in reaching recreational areas, inaccessible public facilities and employment opportunities, thereby causing economic hardship. Disability has impacts and implication on person's life, regardless of one's sex although it is seen as a discriminatory fact to marginalised women group. Women with disabilities frequently suffer a double discrimination, both on the grounds of gender and of impairment. Women in developing societies are responsible for daily household activities making them more exposed to various challenges such as lower access to credit, education, and reaching public utilities. A significant proportion of children with



disabilities are denied access to basic services including education and health care. While all children have an equal right to live in a favourable environment, many children with disabilities continue to spend much or all of their lives in institutions, nursing homes, group homes or other residential institutions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

People with disability face physical environment obstacles preventing them from fully exercising their rights and participating in social, cultural and professional life equally so with others. This includes access to all public services, the opportunity to earn a living and the right to participate in family, community and political affairs. Challenges faced by disabled people are similar worldwide; access solutions cannot simply be copied from developed to developing countries as clearly known that priorities, resources and operating conditions vary. Urban design should meet design requirements allowing people of all age, size, abilities and disabilities to work shop and enjoy recreation locally or to travel easy. However, in Dar es Salaam City this is rarely the case. People with disabilities endure difficulties within their neighbourhoods. This study aims to explore the existing position of the disabled people in urban areas in relation to understand how the built environment enhances exclusion of disadvantaged groups in urban areas by looking at the role of urban planning and design in promoting mobility for PWD.

### **Research Methods: Meeting the Disabled People**

This study is qualitative in nature. It analysed the disability in the built environment of Dar es Salaam City in Sinza neighbourhood (Figure 1). Sinza is one of the few planned residential neighbourhoods developed in the 1980s to cater for the low-income residents and its original plan included the provisions of different space uses (Kironde, 1991, Hossain et al 2018). Currently, the neighbourhood is experiencing vast physical and social transformation from its original typical residential use to economic and institutional clusters characterized by busy streets. The increasing potentiality of Sinza links potential areas which has made the neighbourhood a nexus in almost every part of the city. It is well connected to three (3) major highways to Julius Nyerere International Airport, neighbouring regions, and countries. Even though Sinza is a planned area, it is characterized by limited mobility for the residents on daily basis (Sanga, 2015). This is a generalized spatial risk in the neighbourhood that has greater impact to PWDs. This is similar to the recently raised concern by PWDs on lack of disability infrastructures to support walkability (Lukenangula, 2023). Planned open spaces and road reserves in Sinza have been used for commercial activities either by encroachment or temporarily licensed (Hossain et al., 2018; Scholz et al., 2013). Qualitative data collection techniques were applied including in-depth interviews, observation and photographing. Snowball sampling was used to reach the people with disability. The ward leader provided initial information of the lead respondent. A total of 15 individuals were involved in the research; including 12 disabled whose real identity remains anonymous due to sensitivity of the matter on individual basis and dissent on the identity disclosure; 2 non-disabled and 1 town planner. The interviews were face-to-face allowing the researcher to gather rich data from the respondents. Back and forth question-and-answer sessions allowed respondents to provide their encounter as disabled in the built environment.



Figure 1: Location of Interviewed People with Disabilities

### Findings of key issues

a) *Social-economic and cultural construct of disability in Sinza built up area*

Social inclusiveness for people with disabilities encompasses aspects of social life and social services including health and educational services. Disabled people in Sinza attain their services on act of charity and this is mostly observed through education and health services provided to these people. Under certain circumstances parents deny to take their children to schools because they feel ashamed or afraid of subjecting their children to possible accidents and bullying. As explained by Anna it is clearly seen that the shame felt by her father resulted to her loss of education.

*“Owing to my disability, my father refused to take me to a formal education while in Chato despite the willingness and support of my mother and brother. Nevertheless, after moving to Dar es Salaam my brother decided to take me to adult education”. (Anna Christopher (1), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza A).*

Some parents who are motivated to take their children to school, poverty acts as the major constraint. For instance, there is one special school providing education service for children with disabilities (known as Sinza *Maalumu*) but located in Kijitonyama.

Benedict Godfrey is dealing with children living in difficulties in Sinza A, he explained how children living with disabilities are not provided with social services like education and health services but through charity and aid some of them attain these services;

*“Children living with disabilities do attain basic needs like education. There is only one school providing education service for special children (Sinza Maalumu) at Kijitonyama but serves at adjacent areas like Sinza”  
(Benedict Godfrey (13), non-disabled, May 2016, Sinza A).*

Women with disability are more prone to discrimination within Sinza. This concurs with WHO assertion that, women face double discrimination and non-caring attitude, being a woman and being a disabled (WHO, 2011 and ICD, 2012). Despite that education and other social services are essential and right to all individuals, socially it is still unacceptable to let disadvantaged group access the services. It is stated that within Sinza society a man with disability to marry is normal but for a woman with disability to be married is linked to witch crafts, also type of disability have impact on marriage issues, this fact has been proved by Anna as she explained;

*“People have wrong perception about my marriage, they ask how did I get married with this disability or did I use witchcraft for my husband to marry me”  
(Anna Christopher (1), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza A).*

In Sinza when a person with disability is born the main suspicion and myth would be; the child was bewitched while in the womb, the mother slept with multiple partners during her pregnancy, the father slept with another partner while her wife was pregnant, the family tried to get rich by using traditional doctors but failed to carry out the traditional doctors' instructions to the letter, or the family tried to get rich by bewitching their child. This happens especially to the business people as she explained;

*“People have wrong beliefs on disability, for instance people believed I was bewitched thus I had a leg problem something which is not true, but I heard there are business people who make their children cripple to be successful in business”.  
(Halima Athumani (3), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza C).*

Similar to the study done by Boys (2017), acceptance of the myths around disability has a strong historical and cultural background in Tanzania emanating from most of the tribe-based cultures. PWDs are believed to be unfit and unfortunate members of society. Over the decades, this myth has shaped the way people perceive and consider disability, and how that perception is received and embraced by the disabled. As discussed by Dolmage (2017), society perception on disability affects self-determination by disabled so does their socio-economic participation in the urban environment. This perception has shaped our way of thinking beyond our normal life to professional practices. This implicates spatial thinking and consideration of disability as much as planning professionals' outputs and the decision-making process mimic such perception. Thus, disabled people accept their disabilities and learn how to cope within the society. Significantly, social exclusion and discrimination within their societies provides no

option for them rather than adopting to aggressive behaviours to ensure their safety. This includes being afraid to demand for their rights and sometimes to isolate themselves. For instance, bullying is an everyday thing for disabled people despite that the affected individuals cope with it by accepting the bulls as Walter explained:

*“Sometimes am given improper names like ‘Mabaga Fresh’, it’s not that I like it but I accept because it wasn’t my intention to be born like this, so I have nothing to do rather than to get used to them”*  
(Walter Ernest (2), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza C).

Bad attitudes, discrimination and mistreatment within the societies play a virtual part in making disabled people fill abnormal. Disability is an individual problem so the society has it in mind that it has to do with paying of the wrongs committed by one’s parents. Therefore, disabled people take their disability as a personal burden. Very few people relate disability with external factors like injuries, accidents, wars and medical impacts. Similarly to what have been discussed by Antika, 2010 and Vehmas, 2004:34 that people with disabilities are marginalized by being seen as less human than others. Anna Christopher explained:

*“Why did you give birth to me mother? I once asked mother such question because of discrimination I experienced.*  
(Anna Christopher (1), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza A).

Others relate disability with charity and the missing part of the body is considered to be an icon of pity, this affects self-perception of people with disabilities. For them to get services and their daily needs depends on people’s pity on them and charity; others sometimes use their impairments as a source of income through begging. It is not the only option but rather a point of no return due to failed initiatives to support employment for people with disabilities. This includes government support on the right to productive and decent work, vocational training, and basic services (H. Aldersey, 2012). Studies shows low employment rate which is mostly caused by denial of employment as observed in various case studies in Tanzania (Uromi & Mazagwa, 2014). A 2010 collaboration survey study done by CCBRT, Radar Development and Disability Aid Abroad within Tanzania Union of Industrial and Commercial Workers (TUICO) in Dar es Salaam, found that over 120 companies with more than 25,000, only 0.7% of the employees are disabled (H. Aldersey, 2012). Employers argued for additional financial support, diminishing production, and required additional workplace support (Kiweka, 2010). Significantly, this draws a line that begging becomes the best option for the survival of disabled people except for those who have family support. For instance, Namwata *et al.* (2012) study in central Tanzania found that physical challenges and disability significantly contribute to more than 45% of street begging compared to other factors. Hence, this implicates begging as an important source of income for disabled people. As explained by Mohamad Rashidi;

*“I am a Bajaji driver; sometimes I get lost and ask for location to drop off my passengers but whenever I try to ask most of the people think I want to beg”.*  
(Mohamad Rashidi (10), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza D).

These acts make disability issues in Tanzania a private or family matter and thus most disabled are hidden or confined in at home. However, situation is different in other places around the world, for instance as cited by Antika, 2010, Puig and Tetzchner, 1998 asserts that in ancient Roman, people with disabilities believed to have special ability, a person with blindness thought to have talent in music and prophecy. This proves to the society that people with disabilities can still do something for their lives regardless of the situation and difficulties they face like accessing employment.

Disability reduces economic opportunities for people with disabilities including for their families and friends and in the long run reduces economic output of the nation at large by reducing economic contributions of certain members of society. Living standards of disabled living in Sinza is affected by the economic well-being of their families.

Nevertheless, disable people are working hard to reduce dependence on other family members (Figure 2). Given their limited education background informal sector accommodate them as explained:

*“Am not married, I live with my parents. Despite of them being able of taking care of my needs still I see no reason of staying idle at home. So, am self-employed, I do shoe shinning to earn some cash. I don’t want to be dependant. Most companies are not ready to employ a disabled person, they think we are helpless and beggars. This is not true most of us are self-employed and can produce as abled persons. Why do companies don’t trust us?”*  
(John Jacob (2), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza A).

This was ascertained by Geoge’s friend:

*“George’s family has good and stable economic base, however he doesn’t want to stay at home thus he decided to be a shoe shiner to make his own living”* (Patrick Filbert (14), non-disabled, May 2016, Sinza A).

Unemployment and lack of equal economic opportunities for people with disabilities push them into poverty. Although Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2000 and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had clear intention of alleviating poverty in Tanzania reaching 2015 especially to people with disabilities, but existing situation does not relate to its vision and mission. People with disabilities still live under poverty, being disabled means: one is limited to various services within the society; it is difficult to access public services, access financial resources like loans for self-employment. Critical situation lies in accessibility to various basic social services including health and education service. Increasingly planning practice where planner is not fully engaged in the land investments has resulted into intentionally exclusion of the PWDs in the Sinza neighbourhood spatial reality. As PWD continued being confined in their homes, liberation from poverty continues to be a dream for them. Michael Jackson explained;

*“I was lucky my parents were able to afford hospital bills for my treatment otherwise you could find me crawling. Medical services are costly like use*



of calipers and worse still CCBRT<sup>1</sup> offer such services at a cost while they receive them freely from the donors”.  
(Michael Jackson (11), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza D).



Figure 2: Self-Employed Shoe Shiner at Sinza A and C.

Under certain circumstances laws, policies and acts can be ineffective in a sense that do not directly enforce people to follow them or personnel responsible to enforce these laws to be active are not fully responsible. People with disabilities are not aware of the legal framework that protects their rights. Except for the 1977 constitution which is familiar to all respondents but there are other acts, policies, regulations, rules and guidelines in different fields that protect the rights for people with disabilities which these people are not familiar with. For instance, by mentioning a few there is High Way Code 2008 which provides obligation to all road users to protect the vulnerable groups including PWDs. It restricts misuse of pedestrian walkways to protect the safety of all pedestrians and vulnerable groups including PWDs (URT, 2008); National Road Safety Policy, 2009 gives special consideration to PWDs in any infrastructure development in the country. It directs compliance to inclusive infrastructure design and standards to cutter the need of disadvantaged groups including PWDs. It obligates responsible authorities to create awareness and special emphasis on safety of vulnerable groups including PWDs (URT, 2009). Understanding of legal framework gives confidence to people with disabilities the way forward to seek for their rights, this includes on occasion such as breaking of rights and rules, requesting for provision of services that support easy movement within the urban environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation Tanzania (CCBRT). A locally registered NGO that provides health services for vulnerable members of society.

*“I have no idea of any legal framework that protects rights for people with disabilities except for the constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania which says all Tanzanians are equal, no one is above the law”*  
(Walter Ernest (2), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza C).



Figure 3: Disabled with Private Assistive Devices at Sinza C and Sinza D.

b) *Barriers in Built Environment for Disabled people*

Existing urban environment in Sinza does not eliminate barriers for free accessibility towards people with disabilities. Buildings, roads, transportation and outdoor facilities, including houses, shops and workplaces are not friendly to people with disabilities. Non-adherence to planning of standards and guidelines for accessibility facilities and services, increase problems that disabled people face within the built environment. Awareness of the right to serviced places within the built-up area is insufficient. Important and supportive facilities like guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to the built environment are not provided for. Halima reiterates,

*“I don’t go out most of the times, instead I do home duties. Road drivers are very rough especially Bodaboda and Bajaji, they do not respect pedestrians, there are no facilities for people with disabilities”.*  
(Halima Athumani (3), Disabled, May 2016, Sinza C).

c) *Public Spaces*

Public spaces in Sinza neighbourhood are not utilised by disabled, there is no any kind of facilities provided within these public spaces relating to the need of disabled people. From different concepts of neighbourhood design, allocation and design of the public spaces considers evenly distribution and accessibility in travel times and convenience. This is relevant in Sinza however current situation shows that most of the open spaces and water point’s areas were sold as plots. Consequentially, there is a significant reduction of public spaces in the area. Studies shows that, securing land in surveyed

areas is a long-standing challenge in Tanzania. For the past decades from the 2000's, there has been a vast gap between demand and supply for surveyed land. In Dar es Salaam alone, between 1990's and 2000's, there was more than 200,000 demand for surveyed plots and only 8209 were allocated by the authorities (Kironde, 2006). Similarly, Moshia (2012) found that low supply for surveyed plots led to informal means of securing plots including purchasing open spaces and public utilities areas. From 1990's, Sinza alone, 17% of open spaces and public utility areas were converted to surveyed plots, significantly creating a shortage for public spaces for social amenities (Moshia, 2012). The current situation shows that some of the public spaces are converted and invaded for housing and commercial purposes as observed on paces designated for footpaths and public utilities such as communal water points. Selling off of public open spaces signifies increasing demand for surveyed plots and the preference for planned settlements by urban dwellers. For the public especially vulnerable groups, this creates a gap for social inclusion, spatial exclusion, and social classes.



Figure 4: Barriers in Sinza B built environment.

Arbitrary, selling of plots due to lack of clear coordination between the municipal and the ministry responsible for land, thus there are complains that some people bought plots from the municipal and they have title deeds (Figure 5). Other people saw some of open spaces are vacant for 15-20 years hence decide to grab them (Land grabbing). It is legal to purchase surveyed land according to the town planning provisions, and the entire process is legally bound whether it is from the municipal, private companies, or individuals. However, land for public use; hereby defined by Land Acquisition Act cap 118 of 2013, Section 4(1), pg.3, and GN No. 88, Urban Planning Act, Cap 355, pg.2, Control and Management of Public Open Spaces regulation; as land for the general public; cannot be purchased under any circumstances. Moreover, the Urban Planning Act No. 8 of 2007 section 7(5) provides a full mandate for planning authorities including

municipalities to *reserve* and *maintain* all land planned for public use including open spaces, recreational areas, and parks (p. 23). This means, under no grounds, planned and surveyed land for public use cannot be purchased for another use unless stated otherwise in the corresponding laws. Therefore, the act of selling and buying such land is fraudulent.

Moreover, existing public spaces have been used for private interest like settling of construction materials and parking. This is an impact of responsible personnel and society to abandon these areas. This situation poses a question to town planning professionals as to why people are attracted to invade and purchase of open spaces understanding their importance and the illegality behind it. This may be a result of high demand for serviced plots within urban centres as well as corruption. The power and mandate of urban planners under respective authorities are clearly stated in sections 4 and 5 of the Urban Planning Act No. 8 of 2007; including the power and responsibilities to consider vulnerable members of society in planning. However, such power lacks simulation on special needs of PWD on their outputs which is mostly justified on the implementation on the urban environment. For a positive consideration of the needs for PWD, there is a need for a change of normal practice that urban planners are expected to provide only space for various use and other planning professionals to utilize them. According to the Urban Planning Act No. 8 of 2007, the urban planners should extend their roles to ensure cooperation between all planning professionals in the implementation of plans and protection of these areas. Currently, within Sinza neighbourhood there is a internal initiative by the Ubungo Municipality under the Department of Town Planning and Lands Administration, to eliminate all buildings constructed on open spaces and other public spaces like water points. As a result of the initiative, most of the citizens direct their claims to the local leaders (political leaders are ward and sub-ward levels) saying they are the reason and responsible for such breakdown. Despite being unjustified; the claims were established based on the public understanding that the local leaders have legal jurisdiction on the land administration at the ward level through the established land committees. Therefore, any vagueness on matters about land is directly associated with them. Moreover, such claims raised a need for further investigation for justification but failed due to limited resources and such investigation is highly classified and dangerous.

Lack of facilities such as paths, walkways, signs, lights which are important for people with disabilities to enjoy public spaces are missing, and this means it is difficult to attract people with disabilities to use such areas. Some of the assessed public spaces in Sinza neighbourhood are not serviced with facilities that could aid in determining their intended use such as active, passive recreational, or gardens. For instance, except for the playgrounds that are active during the evening, other public spaces difficult to determine their use. Open spaces bring people together through different social events like children's games, chatting and integrating and through services like gardens, path, benches, lights, water kiosks, small shops may attract people to use these spaces. People understand functions and important of these public spaces but poor maintenance and lack of control makes them to lose its meaning. Thus, other open spaces are used for private matters for instance settling materials for their constructions, parking etc (Figure 5, Sinza A.).



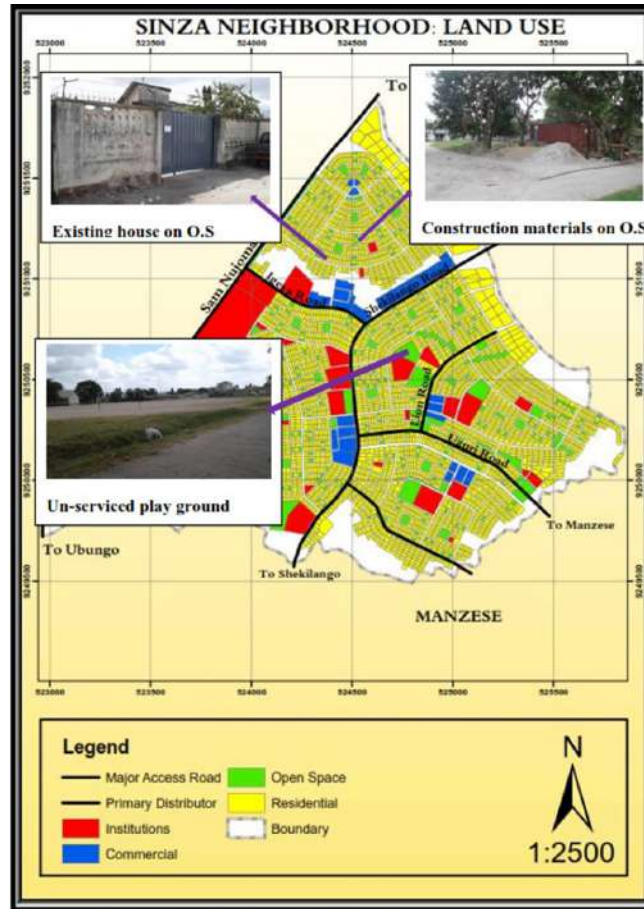


Figure 5: Location of Public Spaces with Accessibility Challenges for PWD's.

Moreover, barriers like blockage of the walkways due to unauthorized parking is caused by existing business along the other side of the road for example bars, offices, shops, restaurants, and car wash. These businesses have no areas for parking therefore, use pedestrian walkway as parking and eventually forces pedestrians to share carriage way with vehicles.

### Discussion of Key Findings:

Sinza neighbourhood is a product of social relations and physical space which demonstrated how PWD negotiate their presence in the physical space albeit not favourable to them (Lefebvre, 1947). Urban planning practice still embodies the colonial past (Hossain *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, the increase of none state actors in land development has spearheaded the transformation of Sinza neighbourhood with limited spatial inclusion of PWDs. The continuous negotiation of PWD access to public spaces because of concerns about safety, comfort and community acceptability.

### *Lack of Inclusiveness*

Exclusion is prevalent and directly driven by the built environment and therefore the built environment (how it is planned, designed, implemented) is the catalyst for change or critical site of action in the built environment. Socio-cultural and economic situation



worsen the case. Dependence of the PWDs under poverty condition is a two-way sword as disabled people fail to meet their basic needs hence it further pushes them to extreme poverty. The built environment restricts the number of individuals with disability who can participate in social, cultural and economic activities. Inclusiveness of people with disabilities in built environment in Sinza is not only affected by the urban design itself but factors like lack of facilities that promotes mobility for people with disabilities. Poor roads condition and maintenance of the street signs, road signs increase the level of inaccessibility for disabled within the urban environment. Landscape design is not much considered within the neighbourhood, facilities such as bollards and pavements if provided for could ease the accessibility of the disabled. Moreover, poor maintenance and control of public spaces results to poor social interaction within the neighbourhood. Planning of road infrastructure in the neighbourhood has followed a road hierarchy system which brings a sense of connectivity, accessibility, and permeability to people with disabilities. However, the study found that the physical conditions of the infrastructure and lack of facilities are the main barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities within the neighbourhood.

Furthermore, walkability is considered as one of the important factors in measuring the mobility of people with disabilities within the neighbourhood, and it has close interrelationship with urban environment. Built environment can either facilitate or discourage walking and other types of mobility considering PWD example wheelchair users. Through land use and transportation systems, good urban design creates safer pedestrian environment especially to people with disabilities. PWD are affected not by the design of the neighbourhood but by poor infrastructure systems and lack of important facilities that promotes mobility for people with disabilities. In planning context walking has been promoted and motivated as the means of avoiding traffic congestion within urban centres for instance *Posta CBD*. However, urban designers give little attention on creating walking environment that attract and motivate walking behaviour including quality of the streets, walking facilities, as well as pedestrian safety. This is justified from the current urban planning practices that are limited to the role of space provision only. To ensure the inclusiveness of their plans, their roles should extend to designing and close supervision and cooperation during the implementation phase. It is high time planning authorities leave their offices and visit the neighbourhoods where land investment is taking place to ensure that suggestions and requirements provided in the plans are adhered to safeguard the rights of the people with disabilities and other urban poor.

#### *Permeability and Connectivity*

The quality of permeability in the neighbourhood plays a major role in making places more accessible by both the able and non-able persons. Accessibility and mobility within Sinza neighbourhood has been indicated by the design and layout of buildings and road infrastructure. The main factors that determine permeability and connectivity within the neighbourhood include blocks size and shapes; where by blocks are not too long and are provided with access roads to residential area. However, permeability is also affected by road conditions within the streets which can impact to delays, carelessness of *Bodaboda* and *Bajaji* drivers.

Primary distributor roads of 30 m right of way bound the neighbourhood as specified by Clarence Perry's concept, following major access, access roads to residential plots as

well as foot path. This prevents heavy traffic to cross the neighbourhood and to ensure pedestrian safety including people with disabilities. However, the hierarchy misses facilities that segregate motorised traffic and non-motorised traffic, facilities such as paths, fly overs, under paths and green belts, the only facility observed is sidewalk in one road among many.

### **Conclusion: Enabling Built Environment for PWDs**

Most of the urban areas in Tanzania have been planned and designed without considering the accessibility of people with disabilities. The central aim of the study has been to assess the role of urban design in promoting mobility for PWDs in the built environment. Social exclusion makes them become introverts hiding their individual behaviours; hiding in their houses making them feel safe and being aggressive. Economic opportunities: lack of employment, education and financial support pushes them to poverty line. Low political participation gives little chances to exercise their rights, moreover lack of representatives within political positions hinder them to be heard. Therefore, social exclusion, less economic opportunities, and low political participation consequently, lead to failures in affording social services and facilities, increase poverty and a voice to be heard giving them less access to urban environment.

This study found that built environment condition are the main barriers to the disabled access to services in the neighbourhood. Urban planning within Sinza neighbourhood does not affect much mobility for people with disability; the neighbourhood is physically permeable with a variety of routes that give choice to the users to jobs and social interaction which are key to the wellbeing of the PWD.; the neighbourhood is physically permeable with variety routes that give choice to the users on different destinations. This is seen through mixed land use within the neighbourhood and high-density settlement. In terms of connectivity the neighbourhood is not well connected, there is no segregation between disabled pedestrians and motorised traffic from one block to another through green spaces, most of public spaces are dead and others are used for private matters. Moreover, facilities such as sidewalks, paths, traffic signs, road signs, bollards, pavements, ramps and benches which are important for mobility of people with disabilities are given less attention during the design of infrastructure systems. In conclusion the built environment characteristics of Sinza neighbourhood results to exclusiveness, poor walkability and lack of connectivity hindering mobility for people with disabilities. It is argued that none engagement of planners in the implementation of neighbourhood plans contributes to the economic, social, and physical exclusion of individuals with PWDs. The role of planning professionals should extend to constructing their way of perceiving vulnerable groups in self-sustained neighbourhoods. By doing so, planning professionals would be the pioneers of inclusive and sustainable urban environments. Urban planners should look at the built environment and provide services which cater for all groups of people regardless of their limitation. Inclusive environment is an ideal slogan for urban development that is sustainable.

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## Spatial Orders in Spontaneous Settlements. Findings from Five Domestic Spaces within Kasokoso Neighbourhood in Uganda

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### Abstract

Spontaneous settlements are a feature of urban areas across the world, and the global south in particular. Over the years, studies of these settlements have been framed around upgrading. Premised on the idea that spontaneous settlements were (and are) an undesirable part of the urban fabric. Often described by what they lack (land tenure, space, water, sanitation and adequate shelter), spontaneous settlements appear as a problem to be fixed. Upgrading schemes were thus geared towards 'regularising' them, so as to ensure they could fit into the formal desired characteristics of urban spaces. Upgrading largely concentrates on the built fabric, often neglecting the complex social structures that exist and even less about the intricate public/private linkages within these settlements. Interfaces are a physical manifestation of the parochial social order which forms a transitional zone between the public and private territories.

To unpack the spatial negotiations, present in spontaneous settlements, this paper studies the relationship between the built and social environment of the Kasokoso neighbourhood in Uganda. From a study of five dwellings, the study seeks to answer what defines private or parochial (semi-private) spatial orders, and what is deemed as spaces within the public realm? Are these permanent divisions, or are they temporal, varying between day and night? The paper highlights the important aspects of the physical environment including dwelling location, private to public space thresholds, and arrangement of shared open spaces that are interwoven with the social environment of the settlement.

To generate these findings, the study combined observation, interviews, on-site sketching, and field notes to arrive at a comprehensive spatial and social analysis of activities in a spontaneous settlement. Drawing on this data, spatial domains around the five representative dwelling units were mapped and categorised under the social order structure (private, parochial, and public) with supplementary information recorded from narratives by actors within the study area describing their everyday activities.

**Keywords:** spontaneous settlements, spatial domain, public/private interface

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## **Introduction**

Spontaneous settlements are a feature of urban areas across the world, and the global south in particular. The term *spontaneous* settlements is derived from a paper by Kellet and Napier (1995), which explored the product and process dynamics of marginalised urban settlements' and the people who create and inhabit them. It encapsulates the people who shape, use, alter and are shaped by these built environments. Spontaneous settlements emerge alongside formally planned areas, providing accommodation for thousands or in some cases millions of individuals who work in urban centres. Authors such as Hackenbroch (2011) and Roy (2011) indicate a hybrid relation between seemingly separated geographies, on the one hand space arrangements laid down in statutory rules and regulation, and on the other, norms or social relations governing spatial configurations. The hybrid relation allows actors within these two geographies to claim and use public space in what Hackenbroch (2011) terms negotiated space. In Uganda, spontaneous settlements have developed and grown parallel to both traditional and colonial urban centres. These were documented during the early 1900s around the traditional capital of the Buganda Kingdom, the *Kibuga* (Nkurunziza, 2007). With the opportunities that emerged when Kampala was established adjacent to the Kibuga, spontaneous settlements became the haven for those who were not permitted to take up residence in the colonial city. Over the ensuing years, and with the arrival of (and subsequent end of) colonialism, spontaneous settlements have become a significant part of the urban landscape. For the most part, these settlements are driven by policies that dictated planning and development agenda, which often did not keep pace with economic realities and population growth. They serve as an alternative to the constraints of formal structured urban areas as they provide flexibility and negotiation of rules that govern political, spatial or social behaviour (Bayat, 1997).

It is estimated that approximately 60% of the population of Kampala resides in these spontaneous settlements spread across Greater Kampala (Richmond et al., 2018). The settlements provide low-income earners with affordable housing, as well as space and access to finance for small scale business ventures (Jones, 2021). Regardless of the contribution the inhabitants of these settlements make to the urban economy, they are considered an eyesore that does not meet the Uganda government's sanitised view of what urbanism should be. This is exemplified through a number of resettlement and redevelopment projects, including the Namuwongo project (Heslop et al., 2020). 'Slum upgrading' led by UN-Habitat and the Ugandan government resulted in material reconfiguration and spatial transformation of Namuwongo. While much needed infrastructure and services were provided, many of the original beneficiaries were marginalised from the process or sold their plots, in turn losing their social and welfare networks. The settlements and their inhabitants are marginalised, relegated to the periphery. The marginalisation of these settlements has meant little is known of how residents in these settlements negotiate space and carry out their daily activities. For urban planners and architects who are often tasked with these redevelopment and resettlement schemes, understanding the spatial dynamics and spatial negotiations of these settlements is crucial. More so as spontaneous settlements are often difficult to access and are guarded by the residents due to their informality. Undertaking a study within this context thus provides an opportunity to unpack the spatial orders that exist contributing to our understanding of how people use space in these marginalised neighbourhoods.

### **Spatial negotiations within Spontaneous Settlements**

Over the years, studies of spontaneous settlements have been framed around the need to upgrade them (Gilbert, 2000; UN Habitat, 2014; Dobson et al., 2015). This has been premised on the idea that informal settlements were an undesirable part of the urban landscape. Often described by what they lack (land tenure, space, water, sanitation and adequate shelter), spontaneous settlements are continually viewed as a problem to be fixed. Upgrading schemes are often geared towards 'regularising' and ensuring these settlements are aligned with formal desired characteristics of urban spaces derived from colonial planning policies. Some upgrading projects in Uganda include the Namuwongo Upgrading low-cost housing in 1984 and 2014, and the Masese Women slum-upgrading housing project in 1989. Upgrading in these projects largely concentrated on the built fabric (Govender & Loggia, 2022), mostly neglecting the complex social structures that exist and even less about the intricate public/private linkages within these settlements. It is acknowledged that within these urban spaces, more so for shared public spaces, it is often difficult to unpack this complexity, given the multitude of actors involved (friend, neighbour and citizen). It is also difficult to delineate the hierarchies and domains that make up the totality of these spaces (Hunter, 1985). Rapoport (1990) suggests studying the systems and settings within which activities take place, it is possible to gain a better appreciation of the relational quality between people, the spaces they inhabit and the activities carried out within, leading to more comprehensive solutions for these marginalised settlements

Previous studies on urban culture and place identity by Dovey & King (2011) and Dovey & Wood (2015) highlight the importance of the transition between the public and private self since they present as productive of economic exchange and social identity. This transition facilitates social interaction between different groups of people where shop owners receive customers or residents passively observing their neighbourhood. Unpacking the complexity of spontaneous settlements hinges on a sophisticated understanding of context, visibility, and image – all things informed by knowledge of these transitions. It is here that the boundaries and thresholds that determine the relationship between the private and public realm emerge as important, providing a distinction between 'potential strangers' and 'inhabitant'. Within settings which are fluid and less demarcated, this distinction becomes blurred and ambiguous. Hunter (1985) suggests different forms of social order are defined while exploring mutually interacting and limiting mechanisms of social control specific to the respective social orders (Jabeen, 2019). Social orders are established as private, parochial, or public based on the different scales of intimacy experienced within them. Although an uncommon concept, parochial space signifies an area where individuals form interpersonal networks around a sense of commonality (Jabeen, 2019). The parochial can include the world of neighbourhood or workplace as opposed to the intimate network in the world of the household. Scales of intimacy are informed by the actors emblematic of the social bond but also correspond to the three social orders (Hunter, 1985). These social orders link to what have been described by Rapoport (1990) as activity systems, people's behaviour in the physical environment. Activity systems are derived from the field of environmental-behaviour relations that pursues an understanding of the extent to which built environments affect, guide, and constrain behaviour (Rapoport, 2000). Systems of activities start with actions as a cultural construct in relation to housing, although this is not to suggest that activities are looked at in isolation of others. This concept directly

links how and what people do to the spaces within which these activities are carried out and the relationship between the activity locations. Rapoport (2000) breaks down activity systems into four components:

1. The activity itself
2. How it is carried out
3. How it is associated with other activities and combined into activity systems
4. The meaning of the activity

Particular activities take on specific meanings in relation to other activity-types. The practice of dwelling, if viewed as a whole, is thus a system of both regularised and randomised activities that always occur in space, where that space is defined by the setting. From activity systems, social orders are derived.

Within spontaneous settlements an absence or neglect of formal building regulations and practices that govern the utilisation of domestic and public space results in spaces characterised by flexibility in accommodating multiple activities. Previous studies, such as Nguluma (2003), investigated this negotiation, while Kellet & Tipple (2000), Lirenza, et al. (2019) and Kamalipour (2020) looked specifically at home-based enterprises (HBEs). In HBEs the challenge of limited space meant a host of strategies were employed to negotiate space without dismantling spatial and social networks (Lirenza et al., 2019). People defined activities through allocating specific functions to space and utilising objects to demarcate functions. Social relations were also negotiated, for instance, interactions in the presence of work activities between the household or neighbours and customers impacted privacy. Jones (2021), aptly points out how micro-scale notions of distance and proximity in informal settlements become significant variables in determining how private and public circulation space is negotiated. For Jones (2021), the narrow alleyways reinforced a sense of enclosure and human scale, while in contrast, the porosity of building facades or plot extents in proximity to alleyways delineate public and private space.

Seeking to build an understanding of the organisational elements that define spontaneous settlements, this paper explores the spatial order of domestic space within a spontaneous settlement on the outskirts of Kampala, the largest city in Uganda. The purpose of the study is to investigate the extent of the domestic realm, often understood to exist within the confines of a building. However, as is the case in many rural and traditional dwellings across the world, this realm extends well beyond these physical boundaries. Beyond the indoor spaces that define spaces for sleeping and business ventures, evidence from informal walkthroughs of some spontaneous settlements suggests that communal spaces are inhabited through negotiation. Seeking to understand the processes and forms of informality in spontaneous settlements, Kamalipour (2017) proposed typological tools for the analysis and mapping of the public and private interfaces in such settlements. These were based on two variables, 'Proximity' and 'Connectivity', with the latter denoting the degree to which a private territory is connected to the public space and the former referring to the extent to which a private territory is close to the public space. Based on a range of examples from a number of different spontaneous settlements, this typology focuses on the materiality of the public/private interface from which interface types were developed (Figure 1). Instead of a dichotomy between connectivity and proximity, the figure illustrates a co-existing twofold condition that suggests a dynamic continuum (Kamalipour, 2017). An understanding of interface types increases with the use of

physical and socio-material layers that include functional mix, social activities and building density. For unregulated contexts, analysis of interface types promotes an improved understanding of urban transformation and adaptation where human agency/action are linked to space.

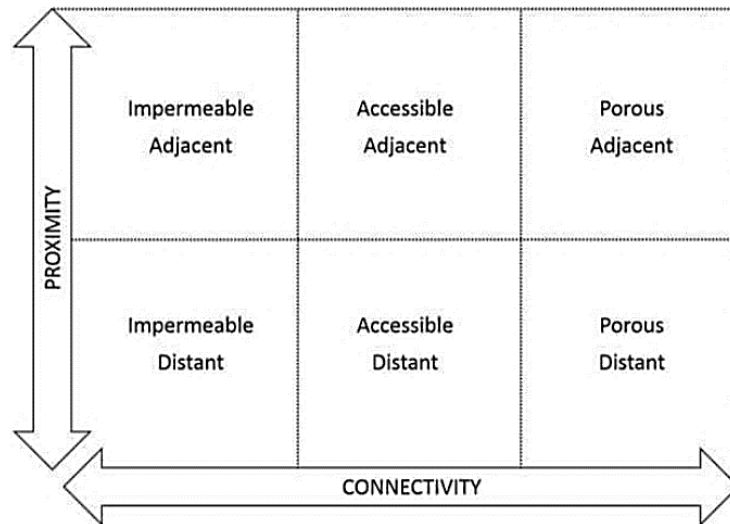


Figure 1: Interface types in informal settlements. Source: Kamalipour, 2017.

For Dovey et al. (2020), understanding the morphology of spontaneous settlements by necessity needs to include how they work or fail to work. Beyond highlighting how informal settlements emerge, morphology underlines informal morphogenesis as a form of production. Unpacking informal morphologies includes a study of the threshold interface between private and public space, or *urban interfaces* which play a key role in enabling different forms of social and economic exchange (Dovey & Wood, 2015). This is particularly important as the boundaries of the public and private space are often contested and appropriated in informal settlements (Kamalipour, 2017). These interfaces are the physical manifestation of Hunter's (1985) parochial social order, which form a transitional zone between the public and private territories. Based on two key variables, connectivity and proximity, one can assess the degree to which these realms co-exist. Dovey & Wood (2015) go on to note that mapping these interfaces reveals the often-hidden relationship between public activities and street-life intensity. Interfaces are sites where people exercise control over social, spatial and temporal boundaries to include or exclude others.

### Research Approach and Study Area

The area of study, Kasokoso, is located in Kira Municipality, on the eastern edge of the Kampala metropolitan area. It occupies an area of about 1.2 square kilometres (See Figure 2) with a population of approximately 30,000 inhabitants (NHCC, 2013). Much of the land in Kasokoso is dedicated to housing and commercial activities, with virtually no space dedicated to recreation or other public outdoor activities. Kasokoso was formed through what Dovey & King (2011) describe as inserting, one of the primary processes



spontaneous settlements grow, that is, emerging from uninhabited, abandoned and left over fragments of land owned by governments, or in this case, the National Housing and Construction Company (NHCC). Unique for Uganda, is the reality that some spontaneous settlements are not only found on land owned by parastatals like NHCC, but on land owned by private landowners including the Kabaka (King of Buganda Kingdom) and religious institutions. This is a consequence of a complicated land tenure regime enshrined in the Uganda Agreement that was the basis of the founding of the Uganda Protectorate in 1901.

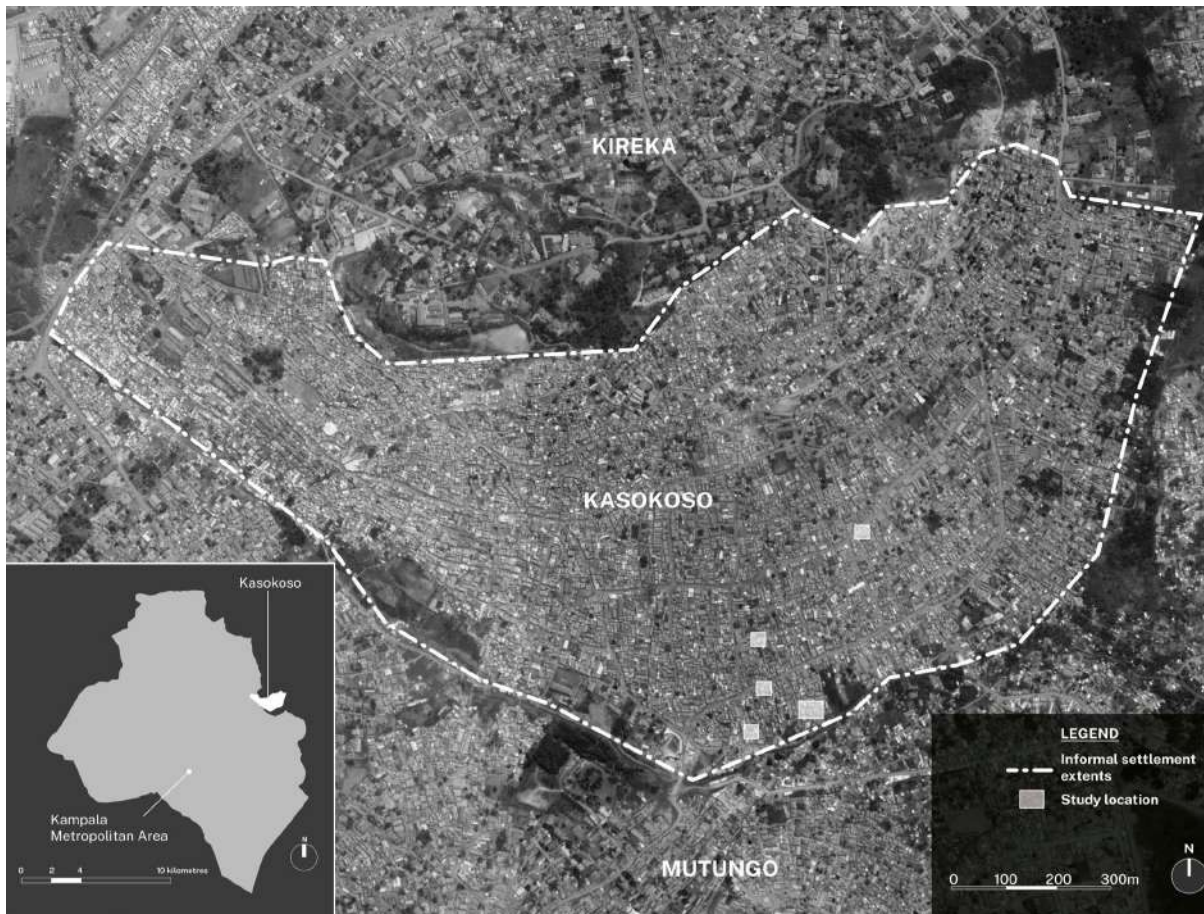


Figure 2: Extents of Kasokoso settlement. Source: Modified from Google Earth Pro.

Existing were three systems of land tenure (*Mailo* under the Kabaka's regents, leasehold under the state and freehold made out to religious institutions) determining access and use even after the country's independence in 1964. Formal planning schemes and guidelines in Kampala did not extend to African-areas largely located outside its boundaries (Nkurunziza, 2007; Southall & Gutkind, 1957). Consequently, African migrants into Kampala placed severe housing demands on the national and city authorities. Africans were driven into spontaneous settlements and inadvertently separated from infrastructural services. Irregularity regarding land tenure and construction are one of the ways through which the poor settle in and urbanise cities.

The conditions for irregularity include land invasions or disputes over tribal land as is the case for many areas in Kampala (Ernstson & Nilsson, 2022). Residents of spontaneous settlements are generally distrustful of outsiders inquiring after spatial issues. There are a multitude of reasons for this, most significant being the perilous land occupation, and ever-present threats of eviction. Consequently, residents of these settlements are often hostile towards researchers and other outsiders, who are considered as spies for the land owners. Planning the research activities thus took considerable time, seeking approvals and finding willing participants for this study, notwithstanding written backing from their Local Chairman (LC<sup>1</sup>). To add weight to the introductory letter from the LC, a resident of the area nominated by the LC was required to be present at all times while conducting the survey and when research activities were being conducted in the area. Interviewees were unwilling to have their private domain recorded through photographs, in part on account of the social climate surrounding land ownership in Kasokoso and its projected redevelopment by NHCC. As a response to the complex and contested nature of Kasokoso, observational sketches performed as a form of record keeping, locating and indicating the 'centrality of everyday objects' (Tayob, 2018). To guarantee privacy and anonymity, no personal details were collected, and no photographs were taken anywhere in the settlement. Documentation thus relied on conversations and detailed sketches of locations and activity scenarios, a particularly time-consuming task.

From thirteen cases visited between May and August 2021, five case study dwelling units were investigated. The study took into consideration who the key actors were and how they negotiated the interface across the different realms of public and private space. The spatial domains around the five dwelling units were mapped and categorised making use of the social order categorisation structure (private, parochial and public) developed by Hunter (1985). This took into account proximity of actors within their physical domains and the mutual dependence of human action (activities) and social structure (scales of intimacy). Through observation, activities and their location in space were recorded, making use of on-site sketching and field notes. Additionally, the use and layout of spaces, including the location of household items, within the home, the spatial location of activities, and temporal variations across the day. Accounts of activities and their location during the night were recorded through interviewee recollections and narrations as the settlement was inaccessible to the authors after dark for security reasons. Additional records and aerial photographs were derived from the Kampala City Council Authority planning unit for morphological analysis to map out built and unbuilt spaces.

## Findings

For each of the dwellings identified, discussions were held with the primary occupants. Given that these discussions were conducted during the day, discussants were mainly women, who were either at home at the time, or engaged in business activities in adjacent spaces. With the exception of the occupants from House 5, all others from

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<sup>1</sup> A village is the lowest political administrative unit. A village committee, which is headed by a village chairperson (LC), oversees the implementation of policies and decisions made by its council. The LC also serves as the main communication channel between the Government, district or higher local council and people in the area.

houses 1-3 & 4 rented their dwellings and are consequently dependent on their landlords for the delivery and maintenance of services (electricity and sanitation facilities). A number of occupants had illegal electricity connections that provided light and power televisions, DVD players and other entertainment devices. Water is generally only available at public stand taps and local wells scattered around the settlement, with all occupants having daily water collection tasks. Occupants rely on charcoal for cooking, although some households do occasionally use electric cookers, but this was a rare occurrence, due to the high cost of electricity relative to charcoal and LPG. Waste collection is managed privately with occupants often discarding their waste in a designated open space away from shared outdoor areas. Waste from latrines is also handled privately, with landlords and owner-occupiers paying for private waste disposal companies to have these facilities emptied on an irregular basis.



Figure 3: Mapping spatial domains of social order around houses 1 & 2.  
Source: Brenda Kirabo, 2021.

A close inspection of the dwellings revealed that physical spaces are negotiated between leisure, work, and domestic activities by designating activity spaces. This is achieved by making use of physical boundaries (household furniture/walls), and the



permeability and flexibility of the spaces based on time. It also becomes apparent that the activities and the actors define what space is public or otherwise. Looking at House 1 and House 2 (Figure 3) activities such as doing laundry and cooking were done outside – under the shelter of the eaves and defined by a concrete splash apron<sup>2</sup> that sets the building on a small plinth of sorts (shared courtyard, Figure 3).

The juxtaposition of the splash apron to the adjacent public footpath suggests potential for conflict within this shared courtyard. While the space is publicly accessible, gradual movement from public to more private space provides a greater feeling of security and sense of belonging to areas outside the private area (Gehl, 1987) and as such permitting domestic activities (laundry, child care and food preparation) to spill-over into this shared space (Figure 3). The social bond amongst neighbours also plays a role in this classification of the parochial. In their experience of everyday activities, discussants indicated being ‘used to’ their environment and people who lived near them. A familiarity built over ritualised activities such as daily fetching of water and maintenance of shared open spaces. By definition, the parochial social order is based on the physical proximity of structural positions (neighbours/co-habitants) of a shared common area (Hunter, 1985). Following Kamalipour’s (2017) matrix, House 3 is adjacent/accessible, a typology that presents no physical distance between the public and parochial domains (Figure 4). The pedestrian-accessible passageway into the parochial realm is off a public laneway (Figure 4). This characteristic is common in mono-functional areas within informal settlements (Kamalipour, 2017 and Jones, 2021). Houses 1 & 2 on the other hand present a distant/accessible typology where the dwellings are setback from the public realm (Figure 3). Here the parochial realm is the physical distance between the two realms, separating actors of different levels of familiarity/intimacy to the household. Social order instances reveal themselves differently when work and domestic activities share space. Domestic space as a Home-Based Enterprise (HBE) not only functions as a setting for social reproduction, but also a space of production (Kellet & Tipple, 2000). Through an allocation of space, time and labour, House 5 negotiates domestic and work activities, in this case hairdressing, within the same space. A hairdressing business was situated in the room fronting the street, giving the owner of the HBE the ability to spatially control work activities and workers movements between the different social orders. Control is established through an emphasis on the division between working and living space, where the position of the private space is negotiated so that it does not intersect with hairdressing activities. Marking the space for hairdressing are a display shelf for hair products, hair washing-sink and sitting place for customers. To maintain this division between work and private life, the door separating the business and living space is almost always shut during work hours), associating control to the time the business is operational and the labour (provided by the family) to operate the HBE. This negotiation has implications for what activities happen in proximity to others.

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<sup>2</sup> Splash apron is a concrete slab built around a building to prevent water from splashing onto the walls, especially rainwater from the roof.

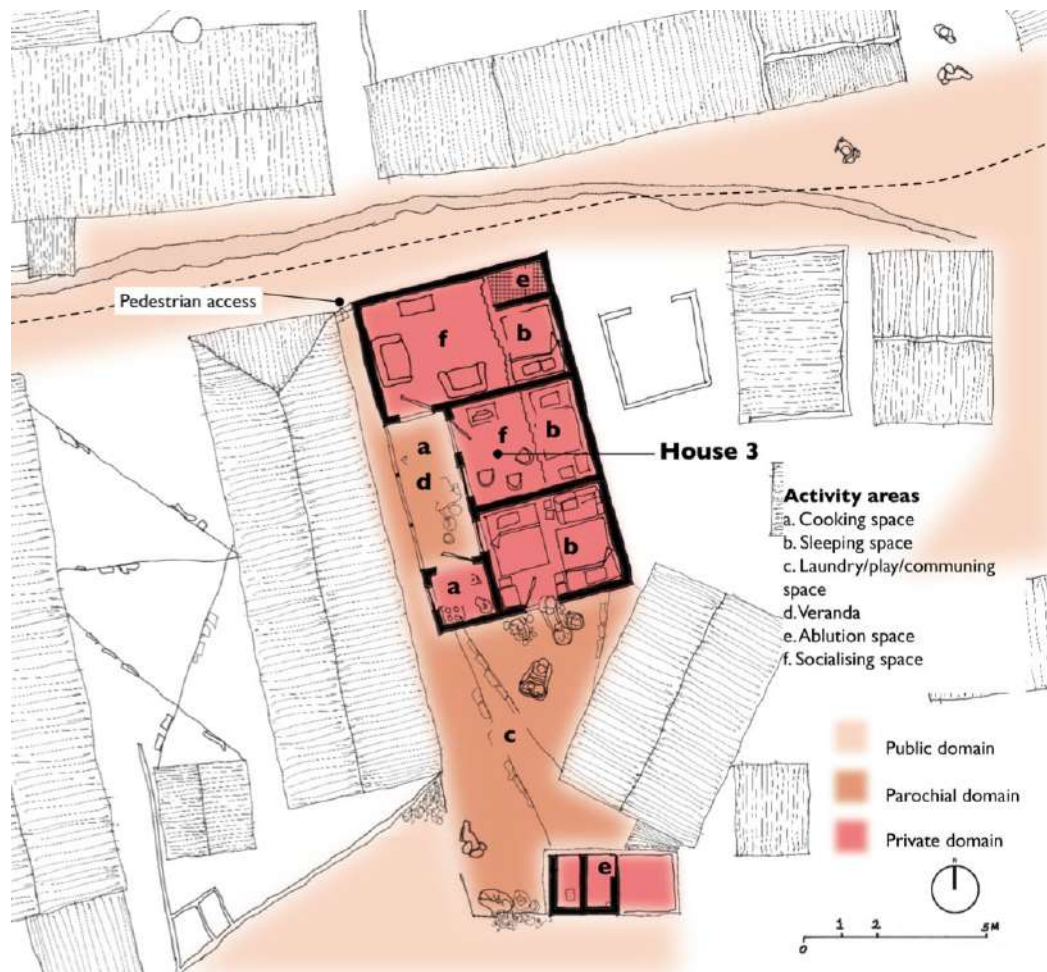


Figure 4: Pedestrian access to House 3's parochial domain (Source: Brenda Kirabo, 2021).

Preparing and cooking of meals happens between buildings in a space adjacent to the dwelling (south of House 5, see Figure 5) or on the veranda north of the business space. The latter location is utilised especially during the day as labour for the HBE shares her time between work and child care/food preparation, making this area parochial/semi-private. During the day, family members share meals within the business space, primarily a public realm, moving furniture around adapting it to suit this activity. Occasionally, the area between buildings also becomes a space for respite (south of House 5, Figure 5) for workers apart from the public realm, a space they withdraw to when tired and interact with neighbouring workers. House 4 similarly differentiates working from living space and as such the public and private realms. House 4's business space (beverage sales) is separated from the kitchen by a door in which part of the owner's workers split their time (Figure 5). As the use of the kitchen is generally gendered, it occasionally functions as the female's space of relaxation, socialising and eating separate from the living area in House 4. Different activities may render a space either private/public without necessarily corresponding to its location. For instance, occupants within houses 1-3 and 5 all mentioned brushing their teeth within the parochial domain despite having a designated ablution space located in the private domain.





Figure 5: Social orders for households with home-based businesses.  
Source: Brenda Kirabo, 2021.

This may be tied to where water-storage containers and personal hygiene items are stored (indoors but in close proximity to the splash apron, Figures 4, 5 and 7). This section identified spatial orders in five dwellings within the Kasokoso neighbourhood that are shaped by activity systems and the interface types of the public/private threshold. Tables 1-3 attempt to categorise the different spatial negotiations that occur within and around the studied cases. Spatial patterns that include dwelling location together with the arrangement and quality of shared open spaces allow residents to meet their needs and sustain viable livelihoods. The spatial orders derived from use-patterns reveal salient organisational patterns that impact and are impacted by people's behaviour. Policies that aim to regularise spontaneous settlements by erasing them or providing new (often alien) settlements fail to recognise why people have organised their built environment as the findings indicate. Viewing these settlements as a problem only frames 'solutions' that have harmful outcomes for the livelihoods of the already marginalised occupants.

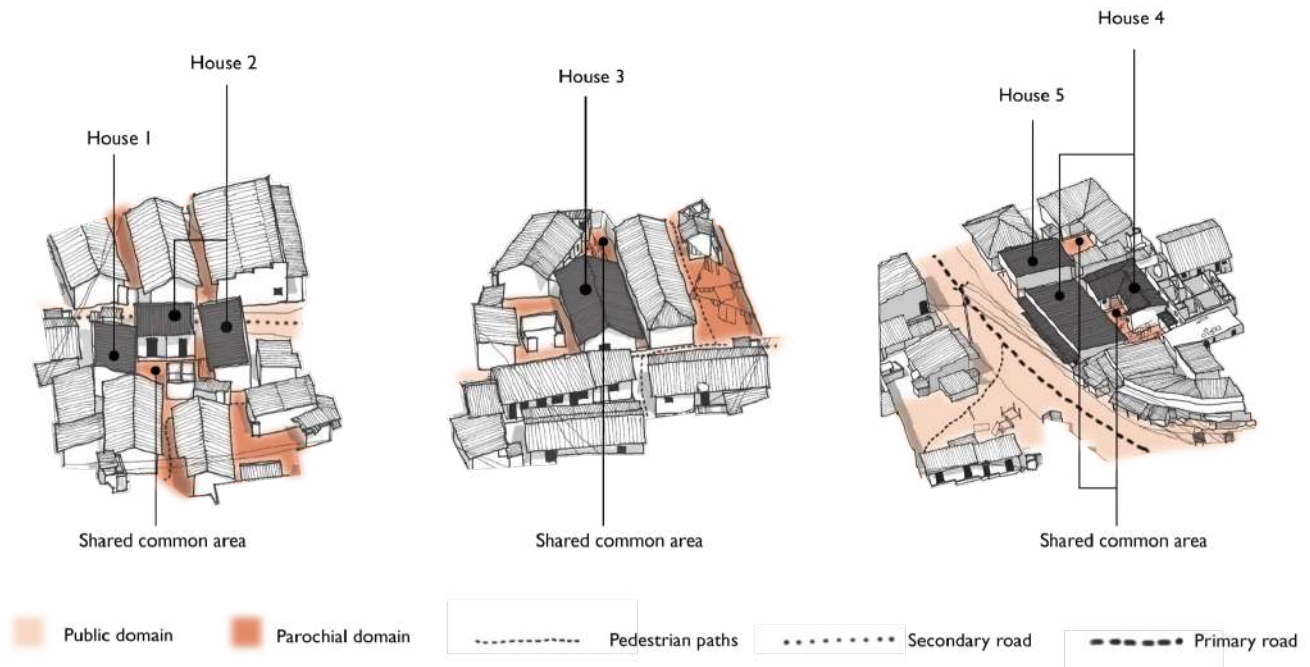


Figure 6: Public/private interface and its adjacencies (Source: Brenda Kirabo, 2021).

Table 1: Categorising spatial negotiations within and around domestic space.

Category of spatial negotiation	House 1	House 2	House 3	House 4	House 5
<b>Covered outdoor area (veranda and splash apron)</b>	Splash apron as laundry and meeting space.	Splash apron as laundry and storage space.	Splash apron as laundry and food preparation space.	Veranda as laundry and meeting space.	Veranda as laundry and cooking space.
<b>Space of ownership</b>	Basins and cooking apparatus placed on splash apron to indicate ownership.	Basins placed on splash apron to indicate ownership.	Personal belongings placed on footpath fronting splash apron to indicate ownership.	Specific spaces are assigned activities. Personal belongings placed on veranda to indicate ownership.	Cooking apparatus placed on veranda to indicate ownership.
<b>Working space</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	Serves as a meeting space – separate from domestic space. Affords male owner control over workers and domestic help.	As a space of conversation/interaction and extend domestic activities.

<b>Translation of immediate outdoor space</b>	As a space of conversation/ interaction and extend domestic activities.	As a space of conversation/ interaction and extend domestic activities.	As a space to extend domestic activities.	As a space of conversation/interaction and extend domestic activities.	As a space to extend domestic activities.
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Table 2: Categorising private/public interface

<b>Categorising variable for private/public interface</b>	<b>House 1</b>	<b>House 2</b>	<b>House 3</b>	<b>House 4</b>	<b>House 5</b>
Connectivity	Adjacent to a public footpath and accessible.	Houses are close together narrowing entry into shared outdoor space.	Narrow street entry to domestic space comes off a public laneway and is only pedestrian accessible.	Adjacent to and accessible from primary road.	Adjacent to and accessible from primary road.
Proximity	Adjacent to public laneway but impermeable.	Adjacent to public laneway but impermeable.	Entry adjacent to public laneway.	Entry adjacent to and accessible from secondary road.	Entry adjacent to and accessible from primary road.

Table 3: Categorising social order

<b>Categorising variable for social order</b>	<b>House 1</b>	<b>House 2</b>	<b>House 3</b>	<b>House 4</b>	<b>House 5</b>
Social bond	Shared common area cleaned by nearby residents.	Shared common area cleaned by nearby residents.	Shared common area cleaned by nearby residents.	Shared courtyard maintained by neighbours.	Shared courtyard maintained by neighbours.
Social control	Inward looking buildings support continuous surveillance.	Inward looking buildings support continuous surveillance.	Unfamiliar visitors and neighbours interact with house occupants on splash apron and immediate outdoor space.	Unfamiliar visitors interact with house owner on veranda and within business space.	Neighbours interact with house occupants in shared courtyard.

## Conclusion

The paper highlights the important aspects of the physical environment including dwelling location, private to public space thresholds, and arrangement of shared open spaces that are interwoven with the social environment of the settlement. The parochial mediates relative privacy of the dwelling and the more public nature of shared open spaces by directing a somewhat socio-spatial behaviour for socialising with neighbours and all other actors. Particularly for Houses 1 & 2 this domain also alleviates the small size of the dwellings seen through the activities that are extended to this space. The domain accommodates children's play and social interactions too. For Houses 4 and 5, the nature of this domain allows occupants to carry out social, domestic, and economic activities simultaneously. The overlapping nature of private and public activities justifies the extension of private activities into shared outdoor spaces and public activities into the indoors. This occurrence illustrates the fluidity of social relations in space unbound by physical or spatial settings. The definitions of spatial orders developed by Hunter (1985) appear insufficient in categorising strict spatial realms within these dwelling spaces. The parochial, the threshold of public and private space, is characterised as a *commoning* area based on the actors and activities carried out within it. There appears to be strict social distinctions that organise these dwelling spaces but they materialise as fluid/negotiated spatial areas. This is especially evident in House 5's business space that negotiates both work and domestic practice. The *commoning* areas, occasionally productive spaces, have social value to the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods and are able to adapt to changing circumstances. Recognising *commoning* areas as relevant in structuring use and social order is similar to sentiments shared by Dörmann & Mkhabela (2019) on urban compounding in Yeoville, South Africa. Dörmann & Mkhabela (2019) speculate on an urban process that integrates and supports existing work-and-live models relevant to established living situations. Generated from knowledge of how space is used and negotiated, positions like these disrupt the models of expertise (Roy, 2005) because they recognise the practices by residents of the intended spaces. An attitude that steps away from upgrading schemes whose agenda is stipulated by (non)governmental organisations.

Recognising and understanding the underlying processes that generate and give meaning to urban interfaces of spontaneous settlements is critical to improve resident's quality of life. Yet, with spontaneous settlements providing 60% of housing stock in Kampala, *informality* and spontaneous settlements will likely remain a fixture of the urban landscape of Kampala and indeed many cities across the globe (Jones, 2021). With the aim to unpack the complexity that is informality, this paper studied the connection between the built and social environment in Kasokoso, Kampala, raising awareness of the lived experiences of those inhabiting these environments.

The nature of the studied interfaces is tied to the arrangement of the built environment, actors living within domestic spaces and the activities they carry out. These findings suggest these might not be unplanned as is portrayed in previous discourse on informal settlements - as actors make intentional decisions on how these spaces are used.

Dwellings are arranged around shared open spaces to maintain social ties and provide a sense of security, while interfaces allow people to mediate public and private realms through their activities and controlled behaviour. A starting point for solutions that improve occupants' well-being could be policy regulations that emphasise the neighbourhood's spatial and social characteristics, built from an understanding of their

specific spatial negotiations. Solutions should include a combination of commoning, habitable and productive space to accommodate and maintain existing forms of living within spontaneous settlements.

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## Public Spaces and Urban Revitalization. Evidence and Insights from Luanda

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### Abstract

This paper aims to provide insight into the potential of urban revitalisation interventions for improved public space in the context of African cities. Based on a review and evidence of the history, perceptions, and use of public spaces in the capital city of Angola, Luanda, the paper sheds lights on some of the challenges that surround the access to and inclusivity of quality public spaces in planned and unplanned urban set ups of African cities. Examples of urban revitalization initiatives in Luanda in turn shed light on the importance of the role of citizen adaptations and agency to tackle urban decay and the need to create public spaces that are inclusive and responsive to local needs, culture, and individual perceptions. In doing so, the paper seeks to show that the successful transfer of urban policies depends on local government leadership and support as well as a better understanding of the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of local residents and their understandings of what public space means and who they serve.

**Keywords:** public spaces, urban revitalization, policy transfer, Luanda

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## **Introduction**

The importance of public space in cities as sites that are central to fostering community cohesion, culture and civic action has long been acknowledged. However, in a context of rapidly spreading policies and practices of urban neoliberalism, public spaces have increasingly come under threat in cities across the world, sparking calls for these spaces to be reclaimed. Hence, global development policies and agreements such as the New Urban Agenda (United Nations General Assembly, 2016) stress the importance of promoting access to safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces for all, as well as their importance for contributing to a range of areas, such as improved human health, social and economic development, urban resilience and climate change mitigation, the preservation of cultural heritage and the prevention of urban sprawl (art. 13; 36; 37; 53; 67; 97). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in turn include a target that is solely dedicated to the need to provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible, green, and public spaces particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities (SDG 11.7).

However, in practice public investments in the creation and maintenance of inclusive public spaces remain limited, and the transfer and importation of global urban revitalization policies and interventions often reinforce existing privatisation, commercialisation, and securitisation trends, especially in the global South. Moreover, truly little is known about who, why and how existing public spaces are managed and used, despite the importance of this kind of data to monitor and improve the effectiveness of urban interventions. This paper builds on research conducted in Luanda, a sub-Saharan African city with similar socio-spatial histories and legacies of conflict, rapid urbanization and informality and neoliberal urban policies and interventions with other African counterparts such as Maputo in Mozambique (Jorge and Viegas, 2021, pp. 324–338).

The methodology used combines bibliographic and case study analysis with data collected from a survey conducted by the Angolan Urban Laboratory (Laboratório Urbano de Angola - LURA). This study is part of the broader study of rural – urban dynamics research project. The objective here was to establish whether rural-urban dynamics were the major source for slum expansion and densification and understand the main challenges in the living conditions of slum dwellers. This information is presented to the municipal authorities to inform strategies in the provision of services and infrastructure that are priorities to the community. Furthermore, the case study analysis of public open spaces in Luanda's formal city centre to understand how public space intervention comes about in such a context in contrast with informal ones, the slums. Additionally, this analysis gives insight on how public spaces in the city centre can serve as inclusive platforms for socialisation and as #breathing spaces especially for those within the dense living conditions in slums.

## **Urban revitalization: a global perspective**

Urban redevelopments are the ultimate reflection of the attractiveness of cities, especially in the west, from mid-19<sup>th</sup> century due to industrialisation which led to large rural-urban migration movements into cities that were not prepared to receive this influx of population (Gehl and Svarre, 2013, p. 39). From a broad standpoint revitalisation refers to “the rebirth or revival in the conditions and the character of a

place that has endured a period of decline” (Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2016, p. 4). Interventions adopted different meanings depending on time, place and policies attached to them with first waves (1930s – 1960s best known as urban regeneration) with physical determinism and slum-clearance, second waves with a more social integration concern (the likes of “war on poverty” of the 1960s-1970s and best known as urban renewals), and third waves (from 1970s and 1980s onwards) more market oriented influenced by neoliberalist ideals and the governance participatory stance (Carmon, 1999, pp. 145 - 149; Gehl and Svarre, 2013, pp. 50-69; Hall, 2014, pp. 409-411). The 1960s stand out for the search for better public spaces and vibrant public life, focusing on the pedestrian rather than the car-oriented zoning design that characterised modern movements of urban planning. Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte were pioneers of the ideology of bringing life back to the streets to revitalising them (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 161-177; Gehl and Svarre, 2013, pp. 51-52).

During the 1970s and 1980s large cities of the west witnessed the exodus of the affluent classes and significant economic players from city centres and the influx of lower-income residents led to lowering prices in city centre land and property (Montgomery, 2014, pp. 67-69).

Two major groups are at the centre of the urban revitalisation movement in the 1970s throughout the 1980s and onwards. These groups are individual citizens and private companies that partner with administrative entities to promote interventions in the public space realm (Carmon, 1999, pp. 147-148). Frequently, the result of such interventions is reflected in infrastructure improvements such as streetlights, urban equipment, greeneries, cleanliness, improved sense of security and use of abandoned buildings, to mention a few (Carmon, 1999, p. 148; Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2016, p. 24). On the other hand, however, such improvements have adverse outcomes such as gentrification and the displacement of the poor to distant sites (Gale, 2021b, p. 174). Furthermore, in public-private partnerships, the projects aim for large-scale and high-income groups of society such as hotels, art galleries, and shopping centres. Well-referenced examples are Quincy Market in Boston, Pike Place Seattle and Horton Plaza in San Diego (Carmon, 1999, p. 148).

In this study, we investigate gentrification, a process that generally happens in inner-city centre neighbourhoods aiming to halt the deterioration of urban infrastructure and attract wealthier social groups who fled to suburbia during city centre decline back to the city centre (Gale, 2021b, p. 185, 2021c, p. 11). Generally seen as a segregator elitist strategy, gentry’s arrival tends to raise property values and scare away less economically fortunate families that arrived during decay. Gentrification is intrinsically part and parcel of urban interventions seeking to reverse or prevent urban decline. In *The Misunderstood History of Gentrification*, Denis Gale (Gale, 2021c, pp. 9-16) studies the birth of gentrification in the United States context and identifies three shades of the phenomena: embryonic gentrification (1915–1945); federal policies versus the gentrification paradigm stage (1945–1980s); and advanced gentrification (1980–2018). These studies cross with the historic background of urban interventions discussed above. In the embryonic stage, local administration officials believed that refreshing façades and revamping buildings interiors was the way to fend off city centre decline caused by economic depression, inter and post war urban decline and avoid the migration of middle- and high-income groups to suburbia and also to partially replace a portion of the residents (Gale, 2021c, pp. 11-13).

This phase happened just before the first wave of urban interventions discussed above. However, this strategy proved to be ineffective to remove stigmatizations of areas deemed socially precarious and unsafe (Gale, 2021a, pp. 132-133). Local administrations then adopted federal policies such as redevelopment policies aiming to obliterate completely blighted areas, and uprooting incumbent families, wiping off signs of social poverty within the city centre and sending have-nots to distant sites of social housing (Ibid).

However, early embryonic gentrification inspired a reverse strategy and urban renewals meddled with embryonic urban rehab strategy ignited by well off young couples, professionals, and private companies, that looked for underrun properties within the city centre to invest, live and work, repopulating so called blighted areas with higher end socio-economic gentry groups (Gale, 2021b, pp. 182-183). This last stage is what Gale (2021b, pp. 186 - 190) calls advanced gentrification and Carmon (1999, pp. 148-149) third generation of urban interventions.

The examples discussed further down on this paper reflect on gentrification resulting from young urban professionals (yuppies also called baby boomers) or private actors that invest their money in the revitalisation of central neighbourhoods (Carmon, 1999, p. 148), as is the Business Integrated District (BIDs) Model (Guimarães, 2021, p. 7). BIDs originated in North America (Canada) in the 1960s (Hoyt, 2006, pp. 228 - 229; Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, p. 116) with the model having spread across the western global North context and to the global South and Africa, particularly South Africa (Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, p. 116; Guimarães, 2021, p. 3). BIDs generally tackle the cleanliness and safety of the perimeter of influence (Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, p. 114).

Much criticism about gentrification is present in the literature (Carmon, 1999, p. 148; Uduku, 1999, p. 108; Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2016, p. 24) as a strategy to reverse movement of city centre exodus. The upgrading usually results in incumbent lower-class residents pushed outwards by the rise of property values and the arrival of higher-income groups. However, recent literature argues that the impacts of gentrification are exaggerated (Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2016, pp. 23 - 24; Gale, 2021b, pp. 185 - 187). In neighbourhoods that look forward to improving the social perception of crime and stigma, interventions without any degree of gentrification prove to have a null effect on improving the perceived image of the place and remain unattractive to higher-income clientele (Carmon, 1999, p. 148). Grodach and Ehrenfeucht (2016, pp. 23 - 24) explain that the displacement is manageable, and the surplus of income originated from building upgrades beneficial to the neighbourhood and the community. Gale (2021b, p. 186) discusses further on how the definition has changed over the years, questioning if iconic sites of gentrification should remain perceived as such and if incumbent residents, incapable of sustaining the increasing or decreasing standard of living should be considered displaced for moving out. The reality is that urban living is dynamic.

Although public policies must cater for the good of all socio-economic groups, in an age where strong neoliberal ideologies prevail, real estate market capital and the prosperity of incumbent families are vital to the fluidity of neighbourhood's comers and goers.

Urban dwellers' prosperity is the real problem.

Despite the success registered in the literature of the 1980s and 1990s revitalisations, they widened the gap between "the haves and have-nots" (Fainstein, 2001, pp. 228-229). Instead, cities grew divided and with aggravated social conflicts and "islands" of



revitalisation in “seas” of urban decay (Carmon, 1999, p. 149; Hall, 2014, p. 398). Nevertheless, policies and interventions aimed at urban revitalisation are still in place, taking many shapes and forms around the globe, as have other trends such as the “Night Economy” (Lovatt and O’Connor, 2010, pp. 130-133), a trend of the 1980s at a time of the rediscovery of city centre cultural and physical capital. “The Use of Festive Seasons” (Hughes, 1999, p. 124) is another trend which started during the 1990s as a strategy to improve urban safety during night hours apart in addition to economic objectives.

Neoliberalism influenced urban revitalisations from the 1980s onwards coupled with governance ideologies and policies, especially when happening in the city centre (Hughes, 1999, p. 123). Moreover, globalisation was the push for the wide transfer and circulation of such models across the world (Guimarães, 2021, p. 12), and less public investment in urban revitalisation called for neoliberal creative models to fend off city decay and urban unsafety (Hughes, 1999, pp. 120-123; Lovatt and O’Connor, 2010, p. 128; Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, p. 112).

In recent years, Western urban revitalisation policies and practices have rapidly transpired to cities in the global South and Africa particularly (Croese, 2021, pp. 114-116). In Africa, flagship national housing programs have supported their strategies in importing slum-clearance and urban expansion (Bekker, Croese and Pieterse, 2021, p. 53, 82, 143 -144), with neighbourhood upgrading and city centre revitalisation processes (Guimarães, 2021, pp. 1 - 2). Interventions in public spaces are rarely the sole initiative of individuals or communities, but rather influenced by urban planning models (Amado, 2019, p. 14). However, there is an increasing trend that citizen initiatives ignite public space revitalisation processes (Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, pp. 116-117). In the process of improving urban living through urban interventions and urban expansion to tackle urban decay and accommodate overpopulation, public spaces and public life were not carefully considered (Gehl and Svarre, 2013, p. 45). In the 1960s a new benchmark in urban design and urban planning started with Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander, and William H. Whyte, criticizing urban planning paradigms of the time, and establishing that traffic-oriented urban planning which derived from urban expansion, and the lack of liveability, walkability and pedestrian safety in street life was a problem and public spaces in general were necessary for healthy and vibrant urban life (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 161-177; Gehl and Svarre, 2013, pp. 50 - 61).

The importance of public space dates from the Middle Ages in western culture (Gehl and Svarre, 2013, p. 39) and from ancient African human settlements (Koutonin, 2016). It was in these spaces where knowledge and craftsmanship passed from generation to generation. These were also places of socialisation, debates and conflict resolutions happened at a time when mobility was mostly pedestrian.

The following discussion of policy transfer sheds light on current urban revitalisation initiatives in African cities such as Luanda. Nevertheless, apart from policy transfer, current revitalisation trends stress urban governance and public participation as vital paradigms to ensuring thriving, sustainable, and longstanding urban revitalisation (Cartwright et al., 2018, pp. 4-6; Amado, 2019, p. 28).

**Policy transfer: the importation/exportation of urban revitalization policies**

Policy transfer is part of urban planning history (Hoyt, 2006, p. 223). The literature describes policy agents that act in representation of the public sector, non-profit organizations, public and private organizations representatives as “policy entrepreneurs” that, by establishing knowledge networks, advocate for the spread of specific policies and information. “Urban policy entrepreneurs – like architects, planners, and other experts – have travelled to study other places, make contacts, attend lectures, and return to their homelands to report what they have learnt” (Hoyt, 2006, p. 223). For instance, French planners implemented housing projects schemes after visiting the United States and learning about New Deal projects (Carmon, 1999, pp. 146-147). Another example is the appearance of shopping centres in the United States in the early 1950s during suburbia sprawl), only to become a trend to which affluent nations with vacant land could afford the likes of Canada and Australia (Ibid).

It is vital to understand policy transfer because its practice is rising (Hoyt, 2006, p. 221). Furthermore, developments in technology such as the internet have facilitated policy entrepreneurs individually or in a professional network to “shop” and adopt “best-practices” strategies without an in-depth understanding of local legislative, economic, political and socio-cultural differences between exporting and importing realities (Hoyt, 2006, p. 224). Watson (2009, p. 151) emphasizes concerns about conventional wisdom that neoliberalist ideologies that “either the market or communities could solve urban issues appear to be increasingly unrealistic” and suggest governments’ decisive role through reformed instruments, especially in the global south, are needed. The result is, on some occasions, the worsening of urban problems intended to solve (Watson, 2009, p. 154; Watson and Agbola, 2013).

In the global South, and specifically in the sub-Saharan African context, cities under colonial rule were sites of experimentation, urban development policies and practices happening concurrently in the global north (Fainstein, 2020). Notwithstanding the proclamation of independence of those countries, Hoyt (2006, p. 9) alerts to the fact that simplistic importation/exportation of policies have perpetuated in colonized countries where urban policies and practices still date from pre-independence times (Watson, 2009 p. 154; Myers, 2011, p. 56). Furthermore, modernist urban planning ideologies used in colonial territories, such as Luanda and Maputo’s case, regard most public spaces as “leftovers” from built structures and often surrounded by road infrastructure with little attention given to social interaction (Carmona, 2021, pp. 4-5). In cities such as Luanda and Maputo for example, both ex-Portuguese colonies, the shopping and adoption of state led housing developments and gentrification/urban intervention strategies are visible in urban redevelopment programs adopted by governments (Ovadia and Croese, 2016, p. 285; Barros and Balsas, 2019, p. 33; Roque, Mucavele and Noronha, 2020, pp. 335-336; Maloa, 2021, p. 2). Post civil - wars city redevelopment ignited physical determinism, but the duality of formal and urban rural settlements remains a challenge. Real estate capital and/or state led slum clearance programs permanently harass and push the poor out of site from city centre to open way to high rise office and luxury apartment buildings and also in the peripheries to the construction of townhouse complexes. State led housing programs have not sufficiently catered for the needs of those who require it the most, favouring mostly middle- and high-income families (Barros and Balsas, 2019, p. 33; Jorge and Viegas, 2021; Maloa, 2021, p.8). The waves of urban interventions in these sub-Saharan African cities are an

iterative process and rarely progressive or sequential as in the western realities as discussed above. It is also worth mentioning that in the sub-Saharan context of Luanda and Maputo rural-urban migration did not happen due to an industrial revolution as in western counterparts (Castells, 1983, pp. 78–79). This revolution is yet to come about. On these contexts a history of colonisation coupled with regional inequalities, and asymmetries, long civil wars, unplanned urban growth strategies, unclear public housing policies and the lack of economic robustness, hinder equitable urban development (Roque, Mucavele and Noronha, 2020, pp. 338 - 339; Capitango et al., 2022, p. 14). In Luanda, the duality of *musseques* and the city of asphalt prevails (Barros and Balsas, 2019, p. 31), and in Maputo, the city of asphalt and the *bairros de caniços* are also strikingly so (Roque, Mucavele and Noronha, 2020, p. 332 - 333).

### **Public paces in Luanda**

The Constitution of the Republic of Angola of 2010 regards public spaces as public domain, and article 95 identifies beaches and coastal areas, zones subjected to environmental protection such as parks and natural reserves for fauna and flora preservation, including infrastructure, as well as classified monuments and buildings of national interest as public spaces. In terms of land management, article 217<sup>th</sup> and 219<sup>th</sup> of the Angolan constitution indicate local municipal governments to be the government administrative bodies that implement urban development and correct social inequalities. Municipal governments have the power to deliberate over public urban structures destined for entertainment, sports, green areas, classified buildings, and overall town planning matters.

However, the historical context of the urban development of Luanda intertwines formal and informal areas (Real, 2011, p. 22; Maia, 2019, p. 94; Mingas, 2011, p. 38) explains that most of the old informal settlements in Luanda, locally referred to as *musseques*, served as transit sites for Angolans brought from the inlands shipped to the Americas as enslaved people. The term “*Mussequé*”, also written *Muceque*”, comes from one of Angola’s national languages, Kimbundu, and means sandy soil, which in Luanda designates the red soil land of the highlands and as an extension refers to the human settlements established on such lands (Amaral, 1983; Amaral, 1983, p. 296). The term now refers to any spontaneous settlements beyond state approval or recognition. After the abolition of slavery, these areas evolved into labour sites and, after independence, permanent though (in)formal residential settlements for the native Angolan in Luanda (Mingas, 2011, p. 38). However, such areas were deprived of urban basic services and infrastructures such as water, electricity, sewage, and a paved road network connected to the established urban centre.

The colonial and post-independence public administration invested in infrastructure in some *musseques*, such as Marçal, which benefited from domiciliary connections of water and electricity. Such infrastructures have been expanded and improved in some cases but not throughout all informal settlements in the city. Furthermore, with the population growth in Luanda, new *musseques* have emerged in the city centre and outskirts. Lack of sewage and rainwater drainage is common among *mussequé* dwellers’ concerns, especially during the rainy season (Real, 2011, pp. 39 - 40; LURA, 2021, p. 23). As such, *musseques* are sites of persistent social and urban impoverishment despite the time elapse from colonial administration to independence. Informality in Luanda

stems from the colonial administration; however independent Angola remains challenged to address slums' precarious conditions effectively.

Efforts to improve Luanda's housing, infrastructure, and public spaces are visible. In 2014, the government of Angola invested in a metropolitan inter-municipal master plan for Luanda (Portuguese acronym PDGML) (GPL, Universidade Nova de Lisboa and Geotpu, 2015).

The plan envisages giving Luanda compact, multifunctional, metropolitan, and inclusive city qualities (GPL, Universidade Nova de Lisboa and Geotpu, 2015). The plan proposes participation in the design and implementation processes within government structures and ordinary citizens. It also includes integrated strategies to revive and upgrade existing public spaces and create new ones, emphasizing slum upgrading with and without forced removals. Slums classification used the occupation's nature, such as density and site locations, that may pose a risk for the communities (Ibid).

However, nearly a decade since the adoption of the plan, very little evidence exists regarding its implementation. Since then, the most iconic public investment into the betterment of public space has been the renewal of Luanda's waterfront (Croese, 2021, p. 114), and government investments in public housing and infrastructure upgrading projects have not been sufficiently accompanied with the creation of green and public spaces or the maintenance of existing public spaces, resulting in limited use and low levels of satisfaction. The survey conducted in the neighbourhood of Marçal, in Luanda, give evidence to such perceptions.

On the other hand, from the analysis of the results from a survey conducted by the author in 2022 in public open spaces within the city centre gives evidence that such sites remain attractive and usable by urban the initial residents and newcomers. This phenomenon demonstrates that the urban design approach remains valid to Luanda's urban dwellers which in turn translates the cultural importance of the public spaces inherited from the colonial administration urban fabric to sub – Saharan cities.

### **Marçal neighbourhood**

Marçal dates from colonial administration as a temporary settlement for the native Angolans. In interviews conducted in 2021 (LURA, 2021, p. 4), senior residents explained that initial houses were built with wood, and the site had minimal infrastructure (water and electricity). After independence and with the city's growth, Marçal is no longer a peripheral settlement, and its location attracts people living in distant areas but working in the city centre. More than 70% of the influx of residents comes from nearby neighbourhoods, and distant ones and the remaining residents come essentially from the country's northern provinces.

The survey in Marçal took place in 2021. Here, existing public space was a sports court, and the community used the street for fraternizing amongst themselves. The community's level of satisfaction is reflected on the following indicators:

- 70% indicates flooding as a critical negative environmental issue an inhibitor for the use of public spaces
- 17% indicates cleanness as another negative factor to the use of public spaces
- 55 % never use public spaces
- 70% unsatisfied with public spaces

- Most pressing matters for the betterment of public spaces and the neighbourhood, in general, are road improvement (23%), sewage discharge infrastructure improvement (21%), increment of public spaces in the neighbourhood (14%) and better safety and public lighting combined (16%). Another critical remark is that the city's centre was populated primarily by European residents during colonial administration, and natives resided mainly in the peripheries (Real, 2011, p. 37) and public spaces in the city centre did not serve all of Luanda's citizens.



Figure 1. Marçal Neighbourhood, Mercado da Chapada.

The survey in Marçal gave insight about Mercado da Chapada, the neighbourhood's traditional market. During the 1970s, this space which once served as a soccer field began to be used as an informal community market and its periphery encroached by spontaneous housing constructions by the residents. These constructions reduced the area of the market. In the 2000s government fenced what remained of the place, and by the 2010s, the physical structure was erected. However, the market administration charges a fee from traders to use the space and requires that they purchase their tables and seats. These requirements and fees led to the abandonment of the building. Furthermore, remaining traders complain that low visible access of the interior of the building by passers-by result in low sales revenues.

The historic trajectory of the land where the market "Mercado da Chapada" stands, informs the nature, typology, and mutations of public spaces within slums in Luanda. Although it is now a confined building managed by the municipality, Mercado da Chapada preserves its iconic meaning for the community as a place of socialisation, where residents and visitors still meet, buy and as a cultural reference.



Figure 2. Interior of Mercado da Chapada. Source: LURA, 2021.



## Discussion

Public spaces are a challenge in informal settlements. In Luanda's informal context, public spaces such as parks and squares are scarce. Most *musseque*'s implementation do not follow an urban plan which would envisage such breathing spaces. Moreover, in the struggle for space *musseque* dwellers eagerly cease the first opportunity to occupy any 'empty' land for building or for vending, resulting in narrow streets and flooded houses during the rainy season (71% of Marçal dweller indicate flooding as their main environmental concern).

Perceived forms of public spaces are sports venues, informal markets, streets, and even private yards since all serve as shared public spaces for the informal dweller in Luanda. In addition, these spaces serve for entertainment and mourning, such as children's playgrounds, funeral ceremonies, and commercial activities (LURA, 2021, p. 22).

In *musseques* roads can be mere paths which constitute a hindrance for fire brigade vehicles and ambulances in case of emergencies. The lack of public lightning is severe favouring high rates of criminality, essentially to females. In the case of Marçal access to transportation means is not a concern to residents (65% of residents take 5 to 15 minutes walking distance to the nearest collective transport access point). Additionally, about 88% of the households have water and electricity connections to public providing companies regardless of their tenancy status.

The survey conducted in Luanda indicate willingness from informal dwellers for better public spaces and pleasant public life experiences and dissatisfaction about the general living conditions and delivery of essential services. Most common complaints about public spaces are safety-related issues, poor roads, lack of surface water and drainage and proper sewage drainage infrastructure, and lack of variety of public spaces.

Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to encourage social cohesion and spark better public life within the formal urban fabric for lower and higher social extracts of the society with bottom-up approaches, and Rua dos Mercadores is an example.

Additionally, public administration leadership, dialogue-based urban design methods, including participatory processes and co-creation, may be the starting point for creating public spaces in the informal context and improving those in the formal city.

It is essential to note that the city dwellers also struggle to preserve and enjoy public spaces. Within the formal fabric in the city centre, dwellers continually lose their public spaces such as leisure spaces, football camps, parking spaces, sidewalks, public gardens, cinemas, either to privatisation or for the sake of markets, bars, restaurants and reckless parking of day workers and visitors.

There are reasons to explain that situation:

1. The increase of informality.
2. Occupation of roads, streets, and sidewalks for trade
3. The growth of car parks due to insufficient parking within the city centre.
4. Slum clearance strategies that push away the poor into far distant areas while the remaining areas are used for the construction of condominiums. Moreover, this poor population comes back to the city centre as informal traders because the market is "profitable".
5. The Public-Private Partnership also has transformed public gardens into a mix of gardens and restaurants, bars, and craft markets.

6. The occupation of spaces reserved for the expansion of urban infrastructure that sooner rather than later result in a movement of evictions and demolitions of any house built in these areas.

In face of these challenges, the SDG goal of guaranteeing affordable houses, inclusiveness, resilient and sustainable cities seem an unachievable target to meet. The year 2030 was defined as the mark of reaching SDG 11 is on our doorstep, and many issues are still unsolved.

There is a need to deepen the study of local interventions promoted by citizen agency to improve public spaces. The example of Rua dos Mercadores sheds light on bottom-up approaches and lessons that can inform similar interventions across cities in Angola and the sub-Saharan region.

### **Urban revitalization initiatives in Luanda**

Recently, based on Luanda's Master Plan (GPL, Universidade Nova de Lisboa and Geotpu, 2015), the city has benefitted from Third Generation revitalization projects, as is the case of Rua dos Mercadores in the city centre. This revitalization resembles what Carmon (1999, p. 148) considers the public-individual partnerships where young architects with local administration support and incumbent residents improved public space conditions primarily, and owners refurbished and rented abandoned properties to bring about positive change. As a result, this project is accepted mainly by the middle-income community and higher as a success story despite portraying the gentrification previously discussed in advanced gentrification (Gale, 2021b, p. 179) and third generation urban interventions (Carmon, 1999, p. 148). However, informal traders are present and are welcomed in the precinct.

Rua dos Mercadores (Merchants' Street) is an historical patrimony urban site activated by commercial activities such as bars, restaurants and shops, improved street lighting and graffiti animating the old façades with local artistic expression.

The street is one of the oldest in Luanda, dating from the 1600s, and residents were merchants mainly of European descent and many of them slave merchants (Jacob, 2011, p. 48; Caldeira, 2014, p. 20). Houses were predominantly double storey with shops in the lower ground and living above. The yards served as transit venues for enslaved people transported overseas paid in exchange for gold or "escudos", the Portuguese currency at the time; however, enslaved people also served as domestic help in the military and commercial businesses of landlords (Caldeira, 2014, pp. 20 - 22). The street was classified as an "Imóvel de Interesse Público" (heritage urban site) by ordinance no. 9689, published in the Official Bulletin n.º. 7 of February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1957, (INPC - Instituto Nacional do Património Cultural, 2007).

Academics and non-profit organisations, namely the Centre for Architectural Studies and Scientific Research – (CEICA from the Portuguese acronym) of the Universidade Lusíada of Angola and Associação Kalu, are pioneers in recognising the historical and touristic value of Rua dos Mercadores. Both entities mobilised graffiti, open-air public exhibitions, and cultural gatherings on the street. More recently, a private initiative further improved the street, attracted new businesses, and improved the cleanness and safety of the street. The initiative took place to commemorate 442 years of the city of Luanda.

Local administration leadership and commitment to improving the image of public spaces of the municipality, Ingombota, played an important role. The administrator at the time, architect Rui Duarte, got involved in the process, and micro revitalisation actions were made possible with the participation of architects, the collaboration of residents, vacant building owners and private companies.



Figure 3-4. Rua dos Mercadores.

During an interview conducted in August 2021, the owners of architectural firms that worked on the project, Júlio Rafael, and Graciela Mendonça, confirm the importance of benefaction from private companies for implementing the project. The strip of the road intervened that was grimy, lacking proper street lighting and perceived as dangerous became the destination of tourists for site visiting, the youth for entertainment and the stage for art exhibitions and public holiday celebrations open air. The intervention only happened in part of the length of the street.

Looking at the historical background of BIDs, Rua dos Mercadores integrates similarities worth mentioning though unintentionally applied. The first important aspect to note is the similarity of the scale of intervention. BIDs generally happen in small areas such as urban blocks or streets. Another similarity worth noting was the need to improve public space appearance and cleanness and preserve the built fabric that incorporated, refurbishing the façades, improving public lights, remaking the pavement, and giving light to new businesses. These interventions promoted the area's safety, attracted the desired clientele for businesses and improved the market value for the precinct buildings.

Contrary to the typical BID initiatives, Rua dos Mercadores does not have private patrolling for enhanced security and is not a BID registered project. In Luanda's context, the closest to BID in land management are gated communities that are generally private

land and dedicated to housing. Despite no legal framework support, the project was initiated by young professionals living in the vicinities that studied abroad and contributed to Luanda's cityscape with fresh ideas.

The Municipal Administrator's participation was paramount to attract private investments to implement the project. However, only time will tell if the new tenant of the municipality will stand faithful to its predecessors' ideals. Without local public administrative leadership, neither the market nor the community would access the place and implement the project.

Despite being an island of revitalisation (Carmon, 1999, p.149), the intervention in Rua dos Mercadores gives valuable lessons, and the strategy could inform projects across the country and the region.

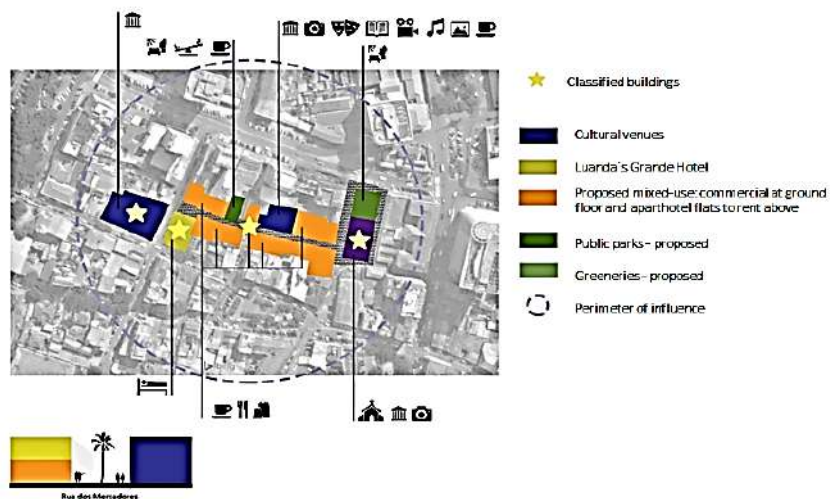
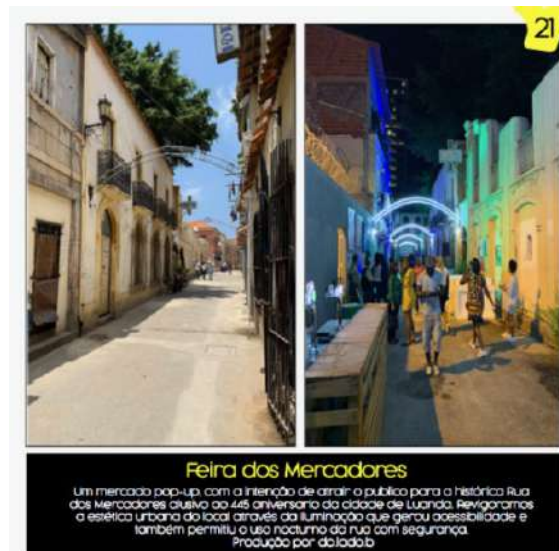


Figure 5-6-7. Intervention in Rua dos Mercadores.



The intervention of Rua dos Mercadores does not stand alone around the formal urban fabric of Luanda. There are other initiatives such as Naxixi Street and pop-up flea market events in shopping centres' parking lots. Micro revitalization interventions are on the rise in Luanda.

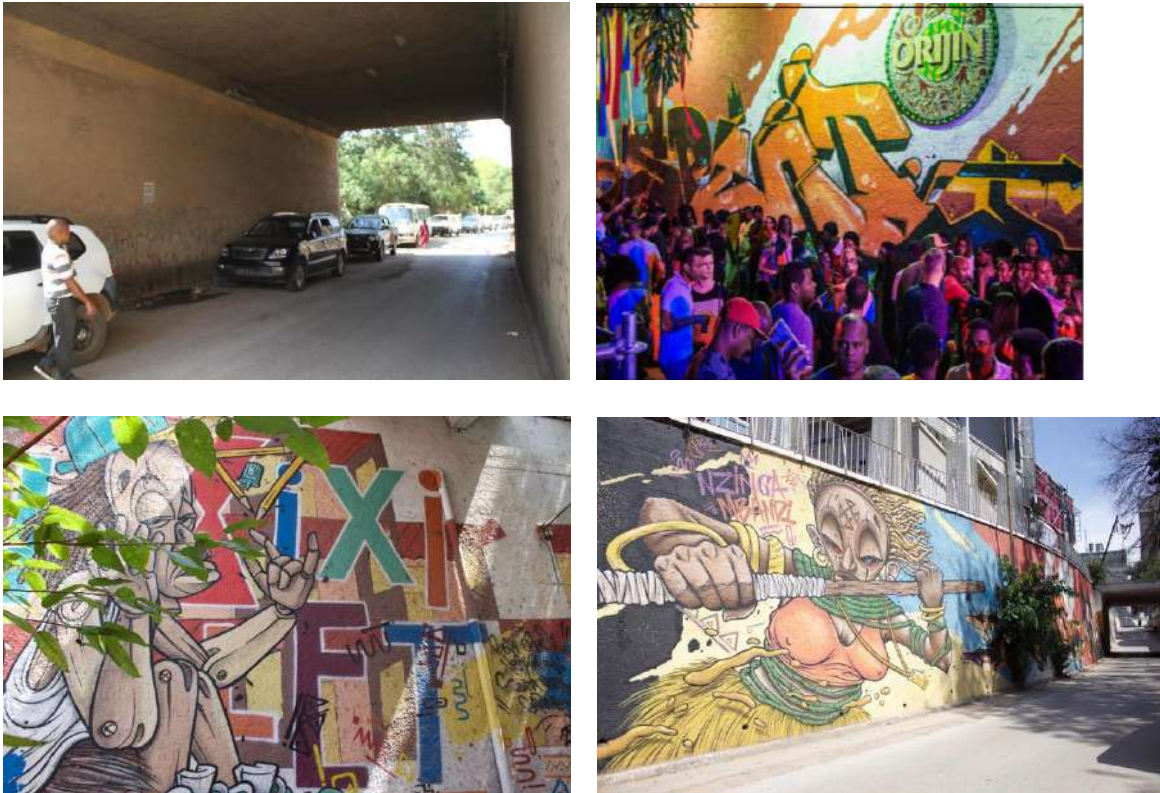


Figure 8-9-10-11. Micro revitalization interventions in Luanda.

## Conclusion

To summarise the findings in both cities, it is possible to state the following:

- Urban design intention to create inclusive public spaces alone, in practice, may not resolve the negative impacts of gentrification in revitalisation processes nor surpass the need for participatory processes and cultural and socio-economic knowledge of the community around but provides a significant opportunity for social interaction and promotes a platform for social inclusivity.
- Administrative leadership and citizen agency played an important role despite some gentrification in the outcome of Rua dos Mercadores. Nevertheless, the positive note here is the initiative of professionals and building owners to revitalise streets, recapture the rich historical architectural characteristics of city centres and provide open-air venues to the city for cultural and public celebrations.
- Density poses a challenge in informal set ups, and street pavement and the multi-functionality of public equipment such as schools, sports fields, and markets present opportunities to provide spaces for social interaction and entertainment that also serve commercial and educational purposes.



- The lack of maintenance and safety conditions in the use of spaces in the city centre. Therefore, public spaces require functional structures/mechanisms for their management.
- The monitoring of public spaces needs to include indicators on their adequate access and use, especially by the most vulnerable, to assist local authorities and organisations of the civil society to improve the provision of better, inclusive, and accessible public spaces.

To conclude, processes of public spaces interventions from globally known cities are abundant in the literature, but there is a scarcity of information about middle-income towns such as Luanda; this is the primary contribution this article intends to make. Despite the centralised autocratic nature of the Angolan governing context, the examples of Rua dos Mercadores show some bottom-up approaches from the community and the private sector to step-up and contribute to the creation of public spaces and public life. Inclusive public spaces and co-creation may assist in reducing adverse gentrification effects.

Moreover, successful examples may lead to intra-city “importation of policies” and a broader improvement of public spaces and public life in Angola, as happened in western countries in the global north. Nevertheless, investments in public open spaces in informal areas are needed amounting to the overall need to improve the basic infrastructure and the quality housing units. Public spaces in the informal context play an important role in social interaction and commercial and agricultural activities in areas where unemployment rates and family units are high.

Another critical point is the perception of what public spaces are and what they serve. In the case of Maputo, for instance, the use of university lawns for agricultural purposes displays the need to reconcile cultural backgrounds with legislation definitions and community needs.

Luanda is the capital city of Angola and share the same urban problems as other sub-Saharan African counterparts, namely high population density, poverty growth, lack of infrastructures that could serve the entire population, and, most importantly, the fact of high levels of socio-economic inequalities.

With a dual urban structure formed by *Musseques* and the city of the asphalt, where there is a tiny number of wealthy people and many people living in underserved infrastructure, the social tension is observable in public spaces. The city is fighting to meet SDG 11 in the context of the sole eight years to reach 2030. Water, lighting, transport, hospitals, roads, gardens, schools, sports fields all constitute what city dwellers are fighting for and depend on how public policies are designed, implemented, and monitored.

The economic component of public spaces interventions is not the focus of this paper. However, it would be an oversight not to mention that cityscapes design, intervention, and maintenance with public or private funding in middle-income countries correlates intrinsically with economic issues. Castells (1983, p. 79) discusses the challenges of investing in null tax revenue areas that are densely populated with high rates of unemployment (*Musseques* or *Bairros de Caniços*) because they are unable to self-sustain themselves. The struggle to convert informal settlements into decent living settlements relates to the state’s economic dependence on exporting raw materials and an underdeveloped industrial local sector.

This article does not explore the approachability of government officials to implement such projects nor the bureaucratic procedures that underlie the process of urban interventions such as Rua dos Mercadores. Understanding such dynamics from project conception to implementation is not explored in this article and would further contribute to this work.

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## Transforming Streets into Public Spaces Using Menged Le Sew as a Driver. From Traditional to Sustainable Planning

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### Abstract

Addis Ababa, the traffic-choked capital of Ethiopia with an ever-growing population, faces an urban crisis regarding road safety and mobility in recent years. To tackle these challenges, the government of Ethiopia and collaborative stakeholders launched a movement called Menged Le Sew (Streets for People), which takes place once a month since December 2018 in Addis Ababa and a few other cities in Ethiopia. The government's strategy to restrict cars once a month gives people an opportunity to reclaim public spaces. Residents of the cities use the open streets for different activities such as, participating in various sports, exercising, health campaigns, active mobility, and serving as a playground for children. To further promote the campaign nationwide and increase its longevity and aimed at serving as a guidebook for stakeholders organizing similar Menged Le Sew events, a toolkit was recently developed and launched by the Addis Ababa Traffic Management Agency and the World Resources Institute, Africa. However, the complexity of urban mobility, rising urbanization, and cross-sectoral interdependence necessitate a management strategy that blends new forms of governance and cooperation while emphasizing public participation to find and execute strategies to promote systemic change. Even though the movement has already started bearing fruit, to make the gains more sustainable and to race with the extremely growing mobility and urbanization challenges, this paper suggests a new framework and strategies of street experiments, taking the already existing and widely accepted movement (Menged Le Sew) as a potential ground. The study introduces the urbanization and mobility crisis in the country, then discusses the context of car-free days as a pathway for the sociotechnical transition towards sustainable mobility and proposes a framework for the actualization of this transition.

**Keywords:** active mobility, public spaces, road safety, street experiments, sustainable cities, vehicular restrictions

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## 1. Background

Africa is the world's fastest-growing region, with a population that expanded by 2.6 percent each year between 2010 and 2015, according to the United Nations' World Population Prospects 2017 report. Sub-Saharan African countries' population growth is above the continental average. Sub-Saharan Africa is predicted to account for more than half of the world's population growth between now and 2050, accounting for 1.3 billion of the world's additional 2.2 billion people (UN, 2017). The region's population will nearly double, from 1 billion in 2010 to approximately 2 billion in 2040 and may exceed 3 billion by 2070. Figure 1 presents regional population growth estimates

Our world is changing rapidly due to urbanization, and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is commonly regarded as the most rapidly urbanizing region in the World (Saghir, 2018). This growth is mainly concentrated in the urban centres, and creates direct and indirect pressures on the ecosystem. Ethiopia has the second-largest population in Africa, just behind Nigeria. According to Ethiopian Central Statistics Agency data, the country's urban population is expected to nearly triple from 15.2 million in 2012 to 42.3 million in 2037, expanding at a rate of 3.8 percent each year (Central Statistics Agency, 2013). Per the World Bank urbanization assessment report on Ethiopia, the rate of urbanization will be considerably quicker at around 5.4 percent each year. This would result in a tripling of the urban population even sooner, by 2034, with 30 percent of the country's population living in cities by 2028 (World Bank Group, 2015).

Much of this expansion will occur in the centre of urban areas, which are already straining to provide the necessary infrastructure and services, including transport and mobility. Figure 2 presents the percentages of annual population growth in SSA including Ethiopia.

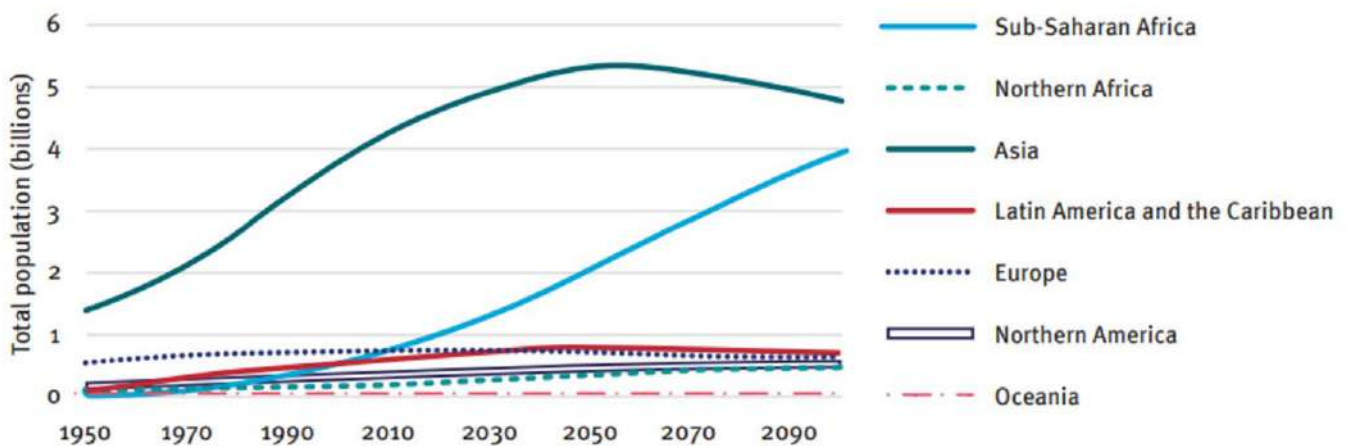


Figure 1: Population growth estimation by region (UN 2017)

Ethiopia's motorization is growing at an alarming rate in tandem with the population growth, causing a huge burden on transportation infrastructure. Since car users occupy 3.5 times more space than non-car users, reducing car use in cities is particularly crucial to promoting equity in the context of constrained urban space (Creutzig et al, 2020).

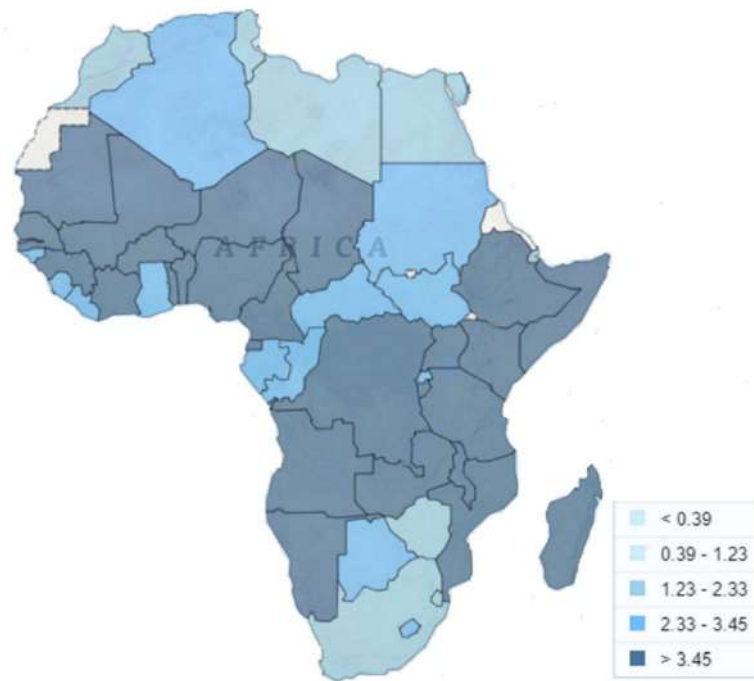


Figure 2: Annual urban population growth in Sub-Saharan Africa in percentage. (World Bank 2020)

Due to high import taxes on brand new cars in Ethiopia, the market is therefore dominated by used cars. According to Africa Business Pages (2019), almost 90% of the cars are used imports, with Toyotas making up about 85% of the total. Using a journey time technique, Taddesse (2011) calculated the amount of traffic congestion in Addis Ababa city's most congested East-West corridor and found out that the congestion is costing the city between 5-8 million Birr per intersection each year. Kuss and Nicholas (2022) also made a comprehensive study and provided a dozen effective interventions to reduce car use in the context of European cities. Apart from the burden on transportation infrastructure mentioned above, transportation activities produce several byproducts that may have unanticipated repercussions. These externalities have a negative impact on public health, quality of life, and national economy. So, a variety of mechanisms should be devised to limit these concomitant consequences. Congestion, crashes, air pollution, noise, and geographical segregation are examples of these externalities (Nash, 2015). According to the 2018 World Health Organization (WHO) global status report on road safety, 1.35million people were killed and 50million were injured due to traffic accidents globally and the road traffic fatalities in Ethiopia in 2016 were estimated to be 26.7 per 100,000 population (World Health Organization, 2018). Traffic crashes are the biggest threats for vulnerable road users who are using a shared infrastructure in an urban built environment (Sipos et al, 2021). According to another WHO report, 4.2 million people are killed worldwide due to ambient air pollution, in which transport has a major share (World Health Organization, 2016). Kebede et al (2022) examined the relationship between motorized vehicles and air pollution in the city of Addis Ababa, finding that 243 (67.9%) of the 358 diesel-powered vehicles they collected at random locations throughout the city had emission levels above the

standard limit and smoke opacities greater than or equal to 41%. 45 of them (18.52%) had smoke opacity readings of 100%.

Multiple interventions including system and infrastructural improvements can bring a very gradual solution. One of the most effective ways of limiting or eliminating these transport externalities like traffic crashes (Mekonnen, Sipos and Krizsik, 2023) is regulating the access of cars to urban streets and opening such streets for people. The overarching goal of automobile usage management is to make it possible for people to go about their everyday lives without a car and without having to rely on them exclusively for transportation. This of course will require that citizens are guaranteed an appropriate level of accessibility without a car through the promotion and improvement of other modes of transportation, such as walking, public transportation, cycling, and shared micro mobility (International Transport Forum, 2021).

Making streets car-free gives the maximum benefits of being protected from the impact of the transport externalities. Nearly three decades ago, an idea of making streets car-free emerged and a global movement called "car-free day" was declared and started to be celebrated on September 22 of every year globally. It invites car owners to give up their cars for the day. Some cities and countries have organized events since then (Yamiche, 2009). Due to the growing population and associated transport challenges, a movement that started with only a few cities and towns has gained huge popularity globally, with support from government and transport authorities.

This study explores the car-free day movement in Ethiopia, otherwise known as Menged Le Sew, as an intervention to aid the reallocation of public space to foster safety and sustainable mobility. This initiative, which has not been widely studied in academic discourses, is contextualized, and subsequently assessed as a transition experiment to accelerate the transformation of public spaces. Based on the findings, the authors propose a framework to further improve the initiative and concretize the opportunities and impacts derived from its implementation.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The following section describes the study area, the methods used in the study, and the nature of the study. The third section gives a historical perspective and justifies the new sustainable mobility paradigm; introduces car-free days from a global and local context while elaborating its impacts as identified in the scientific literature; elaborates on the role of transition management and experiments in achieving sustainability and concludes with an assessment of the Menged Le Sew initiative. The fourth section proposes a framework to reposition the initiative and strategically harness the potentials and benefits. The final section gives the conclusion and reflections from the study.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### *2.1 Description of the study area*

Between 3° and 15° latitude and 33° and 48° longitude, Ethiopia is located in Eastern Africa (Horn of Africa). As depicted on the map below in Figure 3, Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, is situated in 9°01'29" latitude and 38°44'48" longitude with 2405 m (7890 ft) elevation above sea level. Ethiopia is strategically situated as a launching pad in the Horn of Africa, near to the markets of the Middle East. It is the seat of the African Union and many other international organizations. Its population is expanding at an alarming rate, the second largest population in Africa following Nigeria, which

contributes to the rapid urbanization and transportation needs. The study primarily examines the Menged Le Sew movement of Addis Ababa, even though the Menged Le Sew campaign has spread to other cities beyond the country's capital.

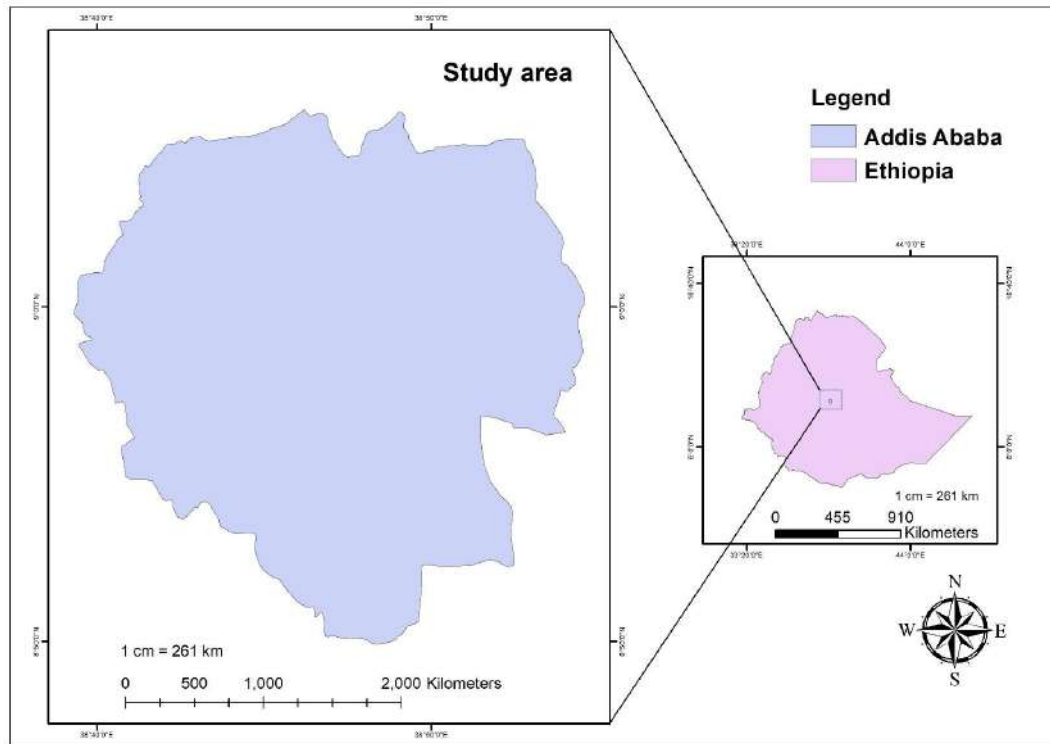


Figure 3: Study area. Source: Authors.

## 2.2 Data sources and nature of the study

The study's methodology consists primarily of a literature and policy review on the global and local contexts of the car-free day movement and street experiments, from inception to the present day. Using lessons drawn from this review and documents created by local authorities for the implementation of the street experiment, the authors then assessed the Menged Le Sew as a transition experiment and a potential tool for sociotechnical transition to sustainable mobility. Building on the finding of this assessment, a framework to further develop the Menged Le Sew and other street experiments to attain the desired systemic change for sustainable mobility in urban areas, based on the European SUMP cycle and co-creation principles, was conceptualized. The flowchart below in Figure 4 depicts the overall procedure of the methodology in this study.

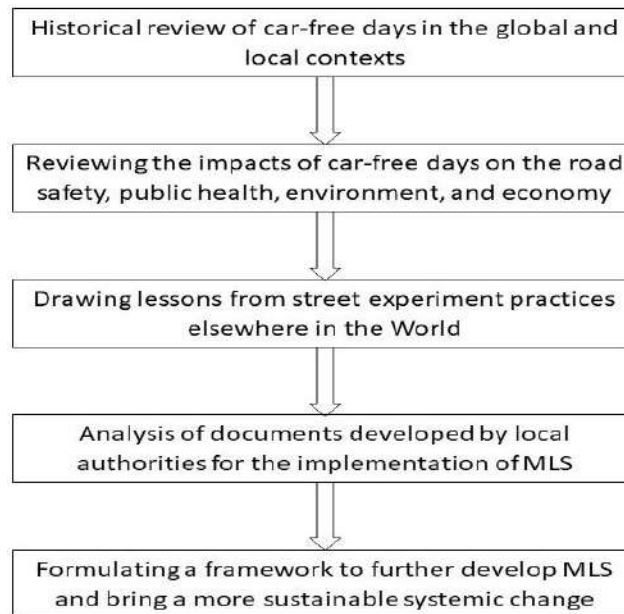


Figure 4: Flow chart of the methodology. Source: Authors.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### a. From traditional planning to sustainable planning

Since the advancement in automobile manufacturing technology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the street has been often conveyed as a conduit for vehicular traffic. The central aim of urban planning and transport engineers has been to maximize the flow of vehicles along this channel. This goal has been responsible for many measures and interventions to increase capacity and minimize obstructions limiting street traffic. Consequently, we see in our urban area-wide arterials, boulevards, elevated roadways, pedestrians' underpass and overfly bridges, and many other facilities developed for the fruition of this purpose. However, while highway capacities have constantly been improving, the situation in no time reverts to the status quo ante due to induced demand and increased vehicle ownership, leaving traffic engineers and planners in the constant loop of improving capacities. While this poses a challenge on the one hand to urban planning, on the other hand, the problem of negative transport externalities, including air pollution, noise pollution, congestions, accidents, land degradation, community severance, and the risk of climate change, have even compounded the problem. Coupled with the negative externalities, the inequitable usage of the street, primarily for the flow of cars, has recently received a lot of attention from organizations, communities, advocacy groups, and individual residents, who are calling for a fairer distribution of the street space (Farhad, 2020; Carmona, 2019; UN-Habitat, 2013; De Gruyter, Zahraee and Young, 2022; Li, Dang and Song, 2022; Creutzig *et al*, 2020). These threats have necessitated the call for a shift in transport planning from the traditional transport planning that is fixated on predicting and providing infrastructural capacities for automobiles to a new sustainable mobility paradigm (Banister, 2008). This new people-centric paradigm and urban planning approach aim to minimize the negative externalities of transport drastically, while simultaneously restoring other functions of the street and other public



spaces, including play, commerce, conversation, socialization, discovery, political and artistic expression, and mobility (von Schönfeld and Bertolini, 2017).

*b. Car restrictions*

The concept of restricting cars in streetscapes to reallocate for other purposes started in Bogotá, Colombia in 1974 and they call this practice "Ciclovía", a Spanish term for "Cycleway" or "Cycle path". An event called "the great pedal demonstration" was organized by Pro-Cicla, a bicycle association formed by three cycle enthusiasts named Jaime Ortiz Mario, Rodrigo Castao Valencia, and Fernando Caro Restrepo. They sought to act in response to the city's sprawling and rapid growth at that time. They were able to obtain approval from Bogotá's transportation and planning authorities to close 80 blocks of the city's two main arteries, to motorized traffic, and open them to pedestrians and cyclists. Approximately 5,000 people participated in this inaugural event (Figure 5) (Ortiz, 1985). Year after year, the event exhibits increasing participation and recognition by stakeholders (Figure 6), and the participation is now estimated at half a million (Ciclosphere, 2014).



Figure 5: The great pedal demonstration, December 15, 1974, Bogotá, Colombia. Photo by Jaime Ortiz (Montero 2017).



Figure 6: Ciclovía celebrating its 40 years, December 15, 2014, Bogotá, Colombia. Photo by Ciclosfera (Ciclosphere 2014).

However, car restrictions and opening streets to people gained global popularity upon the declaration of September 22 as World Car-free Day. The theme of the initial announcement for a world car-free day collaboration endeavor was, "Every day is a great day to take a few cars off the road and think about it", presented by Eric Britton in Toledo, Spain, in October 1994 at the International Accessible Cities Conference. This declaration became an on-street reality within months with the first three towns to start their car-free days being Reykjavik (Iceland), Bath (United Kingdom), and La Rochelle (France) (Eric Britton, 2016). Since then, a few cities and towns implement it once a year while others raise the frequency to a few times a year, once a month, once a week, etc. with a different schedule at different locations. Cities like Bogota even upgraded their car-free day to a car-free week (Zachary, 2021). The European Commission has also since adopted a flagship awareness-raising campaign called European mobility week, September

16-22, every year. The campaign promotes behavioral change in favor of active transportation, public transportation, and other clean, intelligent transportation solutions. Considering the variability in car-free days implementation approaches worldwide, we proposed a new scheme of categorizing the levels of implementation to understand the interventions, as shown in Figure 7. Those cities and towns implementing car-free day schemes are categorized as: Level I if they restrict entire traffic for entire streets e.g., Paris (Adele, 2018); Level II when they limit part of the traffic and entire streets or vice versa, e.g., New Delhi ('Delhi restricts cars in attempt to lessen pollution' 2019) and Jakarta (Rachman, 2019), respectively (selected traffic can have different forms such as even and odd plate cars, a certain type of vehicles like freight vehicles, or private and public transport separation, etc.); Level III when selected traffic is restricted on selected streets example, Addis Ababa (Aleiya, 2018). This new classification only considers the scope and level of implementation of car-free days regardless of the frequency of the implementation across the year globally.

	<b>Level II</b> E.g., New Delhi, India	<b>Level I</b> E.g., Paris, France
Entire streets		
	<b>Level III</b> E.g., Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	<b>Level II</b> E.g., Jakarta, Indonesia
Selected streets		
	Selected traffic	Entire traffic

Figure 7: Categorization of the level of car-free days implementation approaches. Source (Authors)

Menged Le Sew is a movement for the restriction of cars once a month to open streets for people in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Like "Raahgiri day", India's first prolonged car-free citizen initiative, which was launched on November 17, 2013, in Gurgaon. The phrase "መንገድ ለሰው - Menged Le Sew" is an Amharic phrase which means "streets for people". The movement was launched on Dec 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018 with a coordinated effort by the Addis Ababa Traffic Management Agency (TMA, 2021), district heads, health bureau, youth and sports bureau, Addis Ababa Administration Transport Bureau, and local non-governmental organizations. The World Resources Institute Africa (WRI Africa) together with the TMA recently launched a toolkit emphasizing the following four objectives of the Menged Le Sew campaign i) promote walking, cycling, and use of public transportation, ii) create awareness about road safety, iii) reduce pollution, iv) fair usage of space by all.

There is no longitudinal study conducted so far in Ethiopia on the impact of the car-free days event, but the Toolkit developed by TMA (2021) and WRI Africa, designed feedback survey tools that can be used to assess the perceptions of the participants at the event. The Toolkit also categorized the nature of the impacts into primary and

secondary impacts. Under primary impacts, there are four broad classifications of indicators that are directly correlated to the campaign's objectives: impacts on road safety, public health, environment, and local economy. Under the secondary impacts, there are three broad classifications of the indicators: social impacts, public transport, and non-motorized transport usage and impacts on infrastructure development. Based on the primary indicators, we tried to assess studies conducted in other cities abroad that have been practicing a similar or related campaign on the impacts of the events, which can be extrapolated to Ethiopia.

The Toolkit in its 'way forward' section emphasized the need to scale the event from grass roots level to countrywide, which the authors strongly recommend and endorse. However, the Toolkit does not indicate how to make the objectives of the movement long-lasting beyond just closing streets for cars occasionally. This is the gap this paper intends to fill using the existing movement as a foundation to introduce short to long-term street experiments. One of the challenges cities face with the car-free days is that they are mostly driven by the top-down approach, and their longevity is not guaranteed. A study conducted by Torres (2012) investigated the relationship between the Ciclovía and public health outcomes such as physical activity, safety perception, social capital, and equity. The result of the study shows participants of the event have a considerably high safety perception. They have also documented the event's positive impact on social capital and physical activity. Another study by (Kabakambira *et al*, 2019) presented shreds of evidence on how the Kigali car-free day event plays an integral role in fighting non-communicable diseases. Zieff and Chaudhuri (2013) analysed the economic impacts of the Sunday Street event in San Francisco in 2012 and found out that during Sunday Streets, 44% of businesses reported an increase in customer activity and sales. James (2018) made a health impact assessment of Cardiff's car-free day in 2016. The finding shows the number of bus passengers increased on the car-free day event compared to the non-car-free days. 28% increase in pedestrian footfall; air quality was improved significantly (up to 86.52% reduction in nitrogen dioxide); and noise was 1.7dB lower during the car-free day. Though car-free days and events might be an appealing and progressive policy alternative, the genesis and longevity of such programs are highly complex and must be well understood (Glazener *et al*, 2022). The benefits of car-free days are apparent. However, to address the ever-increasing issues posed by the growing population and concomitant transportation demands, which encourage automobile ownership, the built environment must undergo a profound paradigm shift. A strong top-down approach distinguishes car-free days and, on rare occasions, are primarily motivated by political considerations. A drastic move to a more structured, bottom-up approach to sustainable planning that includes the community as a key component is necessary. Jane Jacobs, in her most famous book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities", argues that cities cannot be planned from the top-down, the only thing officials can do is encourage innovations from the bottom up (Jane, 1992). The next section introduces the recently popular tactical urbanism strategy through street experiments. Though the Menged Le Sew campaign appears to have been successful so far, the fact that it has achieved widespread support, together with the insights gathered post-pandemic lockdowns, would be a useful opportunity to make a more rapid and drastic shift to a more sustainable planning approach.

*c. Street experiments as tools for sociotechnical transitions*

While the goal of transforming public spaces from "streets for cars" to "streets for people" to achieve sustainability agenda – climate goals and Vision Zero inclusive – is clearly defined, the process and approaches vary. The approach depends on geographic, socio-economic, demographic, technological, and political factors. These various approaches have become necessary due to the different lock-in and path dependencies that promote the continual existence of unsustainable structures and practices (Geels, 2011). Yet considering the complexity of transitioning from the status quo to sustainability vis-à-vis the extremely short window of time required for impacts, a systemic approach becomes necessary. The urgency for this effective transformation has been responsible for developing and adopting transition management by the government and other stakeholders within the policymaking framework (Geerlings and Avelino, 2015). Transition management, which promotes local innovation and policy experimenting in a build-measure-learn sequence, is a management strategy to overcome barriers and support public decision-makers and private actors. It influences complex social transformation processes towards the desired sustainability while enabling the transition of societal systems and sectors. As identified by Loorbach et al (2015); Roorda et al (2012) and Rotmans et al (2001), through a build-measure-learn sequence (otherwise referred to as learning-by-doing and doing-by-learning) and broad stakeholder participation and interaction, new initiatives are inspired and introduced experimentally. These new initiatives address specific transition challenges and complement existing policies by introducing new governance activities. The concept of transition experiments arises from transition management as tools to provide a pragmatic framework to drive, promote, and accelerate transition beyond the incremental change associated with traditional policymaking for an overall systemic change (Roorda et al, 2012). Transition experiments are disruptive actions to accelerate a transformation that represents achieving a long-term goal within a short-term or medium-term horizon. Within the context of the goal of the sustainable mobility paradigm as conceptualized by (Banister, 2008), transition experiments will encompass short-term community-based actions, measures, or projects ranging from easy to deploy people-centric initiatives like streets remarking to more difficult ones like open streets through a participatory process (Bertolini, 2020). While these transition experiments have been conducted at many scales, experimenting at a street level remains vital as streets with the urban block form the basic unit of urban fabric through which people experience the city. In addition, streets create dynamic spaces which adapt through time to support all forms of functions and activities it is subjected to (Global Designing Cities Initiative, 2016). Therefore, the streets serve as a testing ground for transition experiments helping to handle irreducible uncertainties. They allow radical solutions that otherwise are often difficult to implement at a larger scale to be implemented. For example, some push measures considered "policy taboos" and unimplementable, e.g. urban vehicle access regulations (UVAR), are often excluded from the measure packages of urban mobility transition approaches at the city level due to acceptability concerns (Ogunkunbi and Mészáros, 2019; Gössling and Cohen, 2014). However, building blocks of these UVAR measures, including parklets, car-free school streets, traffic filters, and traffic calming, are often successfully implemented at the streets and neighborhood planning level (ReVeAI, 2019). Streets may therefore be used as the levers for urban transformation. Cities are thus leveraging transformations to reduce the urban heat island effect,

improve microclimates, reduce air and noise pollution, support social cohesion, encourage public participation through different street experiments (Lorenz and Grigsby, 2020).

The many European Union-funded projects have further emphasised the importance of the street for sustainable mobility transition. For example, through the CIVITAS initiative, four projects were coordinated concurrently between 2017 and 2021, including MUV (CIVITAS, 2017), Cities4People (Cities4People Consortium, 2017), METAMORPHOSIS (Metamorphosis Consortium, 2020), and SUNRISE (CIVITAS, 2021) projects. The projects aimed at developing, implementing, and facilitating co-learning about initiatives to address urban mobility challenges at the street level through the development of neighbourhood mobility labs, encouraging the participatory practice of social innovation and governance, implementing children-friendly mobility solutions, and leveraging behavioural change in local communities. These projects have added to the portfolio of streets experiments through their activities in Bremen, Budapest, Malmo, Jerusalem, Southend-On-Sea, Thessaloniki, Southampton, Munich, Tilburg, Zurich, Merano, Oxfordshire, Hamburg, Trikala, Istanbul, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Ghent, Helsinki, Palermo, Fundão and Alba Iulia.

Across these different projects in many cities, Bertolini (2020) categorized the many different approaches and initiatives in accordance to their order of increasing functional complexity into:

- Remarking streets: experiments involving marking city streets to dedicate and regulate the usage of street spaces to different types of traffic, pedestrian crossings, and parking spaces
- Repurposing parking spaces: experiments temporarily transforming an on-street parking space into a public space by installing structures for other social uses
- Repurposing street sections: experiments involving temporarily furnishing and using areas of a street or square as public space while making it inaccessible to motorized traffic.
- Opening entire streets: experiments entirely reallocating the use of whole streets from private car usage to non-motorized traffic and for non-mobility-related uses.

Table 1: Impacts of Street Experiments

	Active Mobility	Sense of place and well-being	Business and retail sales	Safety	Public Transport Service Quality and Ridership	Duration and level of physical activity	Social interaction	Air quality and noise reduction
Street re-markings		√		√			√	
Re-purposing parking spaces		√	√	√			√	
Repurposing street sections	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
Open Streets	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Note: Compiled by authors from Cariello et al, 2021; Senger et al, 2021; Bertolini, 2020; Kuss and Nicholas, 2022.



These experiments have recorded many positive impacts and benefits toward sustainability and equitable reallocation of street space. The impacts as documented in the scientific literature from experiments done in Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Colombia, Chile, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, and the United States were aggregated and presented in Table I (Cariello et al, 2021); (Senger et al, 2021); (Bertolini, 2020); and (Kuss and Nicholas, 2022). Pictorial evidence from the implementation of the different categories of street experiments are presented for street remarking (Figures 8 & 9), open street (Figure 10), and a combination of repurposed parking spaces and street section (Figure 11).



Figure 8: Porto Alegre, Brazil.  
Photo: Daniel Kneto.

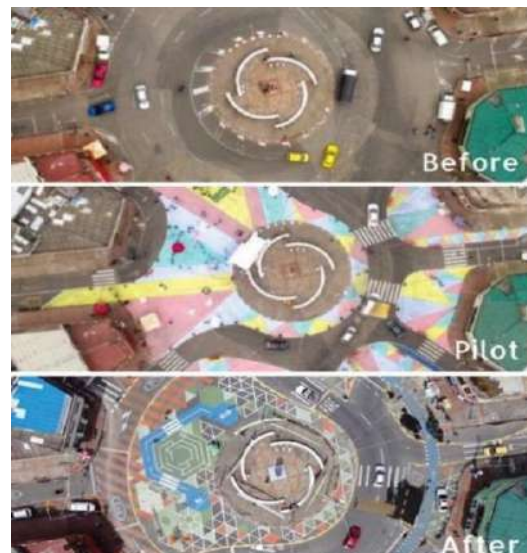


Figure 9: Bogotá, Columbia.  
Photo: Secretaría de Movilidad.



Figure 10: Denver, United States. Photo: Jennifer Koskinen & Jamie Rogers.



Figure 11: Paris, France. Photo: Joséphine Brueder, Christophe Belin.

In light of the abundant street experiments, how can we assess whether they fulfil their functions as enablers of sociotechnical transitions, particularly concerning the urgency for impact and effectiveness? In Bertolini (2020)'s extensive literature review of street experiments as transition experiments towards sustainable urban mobility, identified five criteria to adjudge the capability of street experiments as tools for sociotechnical transition based on Roorda et al (2012)'s work on Urban Transition Management:

- Radical: experiments should foreground innovative practices different from existing practices.
- Challenge-driven: experiments should aim at addressing a long-term vision of systemic change.
- Feasible: the experiment and goals should be realizable in the short-term within the limits of available resources.
- Strategic: experiments should generate lessons on achieving the envisioned systemic change.
- Communicative: experiments should have clear impacts capable of mobilizing the broader public to further action.

Glaser and Krizek (2021) used the criteria as dimensions for comparing street experiments implemented across 30 cities in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic. They clustered the cities based on salient patterns and characteristics, as shown in Table 2. The Menged Le Sew enjoys good support from government officials, civil societies, non-governmental organizations, and the residents (BBC, 2018), (Addis Ababa Traffic Management Agency (TMA), 2021), and is particularly remarkable for being radical, challenge-driven, feasible, and communicative.

Table 2: Classification of Cities Based on Pattern and Characteristics of Street Experiment

Group	Description
Innovators	Cities that exhibited efforts to embed street programs into existing policy efforts
Early adopters	Cities with strong evidence of support from elected officials, residents, or community groups
Early majority	Cities with largely volunteer-based programs with fair aspirations to scale-up experiments but rarely embedded into existing policy efforts
Late majority	Cities with programs with isolated activities exhibit little evidence of support and benefits outside the scope of the program

Source: Glaser and Krizek 2021.

Through its radicality, the initiative has provided evidence that the street can be functional for other purposes beyond serving as a conduit for traffic in an environment where public spaces like parks are largely limited at the neighbourhood or district level. Residents, young and old, now enthusiastically participate in the event, which builds social cohesion and allows them to engage in activities like football matches, skating, aerobics, street art, casual walking, and cycling. This is in turn raising the consciousness

of the populace on the car dominance and the car-centric model through which the city's transport developed over time.

On being challenge-driven, the vision of Menged Le Sew was clear from the outset to be a movement to foster safer streets while promoting ecological and environmental sustainability. However, while it enjoyed the government's support which further attests to its feasibility, it was not embedded into the existing policies or programs of the government to promote a change in paradigm at inception. Nevertheless, due to the movement's success, car-free days were essential communication and outreach activities to realize the city's Non-Motorized Transport Strategy for 2019-2028 (Addis Ababa Road and Transport Bureau (AARTB), 2018). However, the initiative is lacking in the strategic front, as earlier identified. The recently published Toolkit identified indicators and instruments for conducting, monitoring, and evaluation. Nonetheless, without clearly assigning responsibilities and frequency, these instruments might not be helpful in holistically identifying the impacts of the scheme towards long-term policy goals and generating lessons for transferability.

Menged Le Sew's success can also be attributed to its communicative character. The initiative utilized widespread communication across different mass media platforms to raise awareness on its purpose, modality, and impact to build public awareness before implementation. However, beyond the pilot event and the subsequent decentralization of its coordination, the initiative proved it could mobilize people. The movement witnessed instances of residents of streets not included in the scheme self-organizing vehicle restrictions on the event days with little resistance from other road users. It has also enjoyed media attention up to the international scale.

Our assessment of the Menged Le Sew further re-affirms the observation of Bertolini (2020) with Glaser and Krizek (2021). Most cities scored low in the strategic criterion with limited evidence of the interventions anchored on reflexive learning and evaluation processes. Hence, creating a gap in the build-measure-learn sequence of the street experiments. While many of the experiments exhibit potential in redefining the allocation and usage of the streetscape with further testing, the weakness of the strategic aspects of the street experiments indicates that most of the initiatives will never grow beyond the experimental phase despite the societal impacts attributed to them.

#### **4. Framework towards achieving systemic change**

The Menged Le Sew transition experiment has shown the potential to be upscaled into a policy measure that could be used to drive systemic change, particularly sustainable behavioural changes, safety, and environmental sustainability. Taking a cue from the hypothesized relationship between, the four dimensions of system change and the five characteristics of city street experiments by VanHoose et al (2022) and the European SUMP Topic Guide on Sustainable Neighbourhood Mobility Planning (Rupprecht Consult and Koucky & Partners, 2021), we propose a framework to transform Menged Le Sew to achieve this and substantively add open streets and vehicle regulations into the repertoire of measures for sustainable planning. The proposed framework is presented in Figure 12. Since the knowledge of SUMP development is well grounded (Rupprecht Consult (editor), 2019), this study elaborates only on the specific actions through which Menged Le Sew could be transformed from its impermanent state into

spatial interventions for regulating vehicle access, increasing road safety, reducing pollution, and promoting walking, cycling, and use of public transportation. The preparation and analysis phase allows for the foundation for the planning process. The phase begins with critically assessing the effects and impacts of the existing Menged Le Sew to identify the critical success factors, challenges, and opportunities. The identified problems and opportunities from the assessment will help set the planning context and identify potential streets where the more permanent open streets could be implemented. In addition, new stakeholders, including citizen representatives, should be included in the existing decentralized task force of the Menged Le Sew. While the strategy development phase aims to co-define the strategic vision and roadmap for the city's sustainable development, in Menged Le Sew's context, it ensures that the initiative has the required regulatory and legal framework for proper implementation as a policy measure. This provides a basis for building the transition towards the long-term goal and repositioning the Menged Le Sew from a temporary arrangement to one that is capable of influencing permanent changes (as it becomes difficult to discontinue the measures in the face of political change).

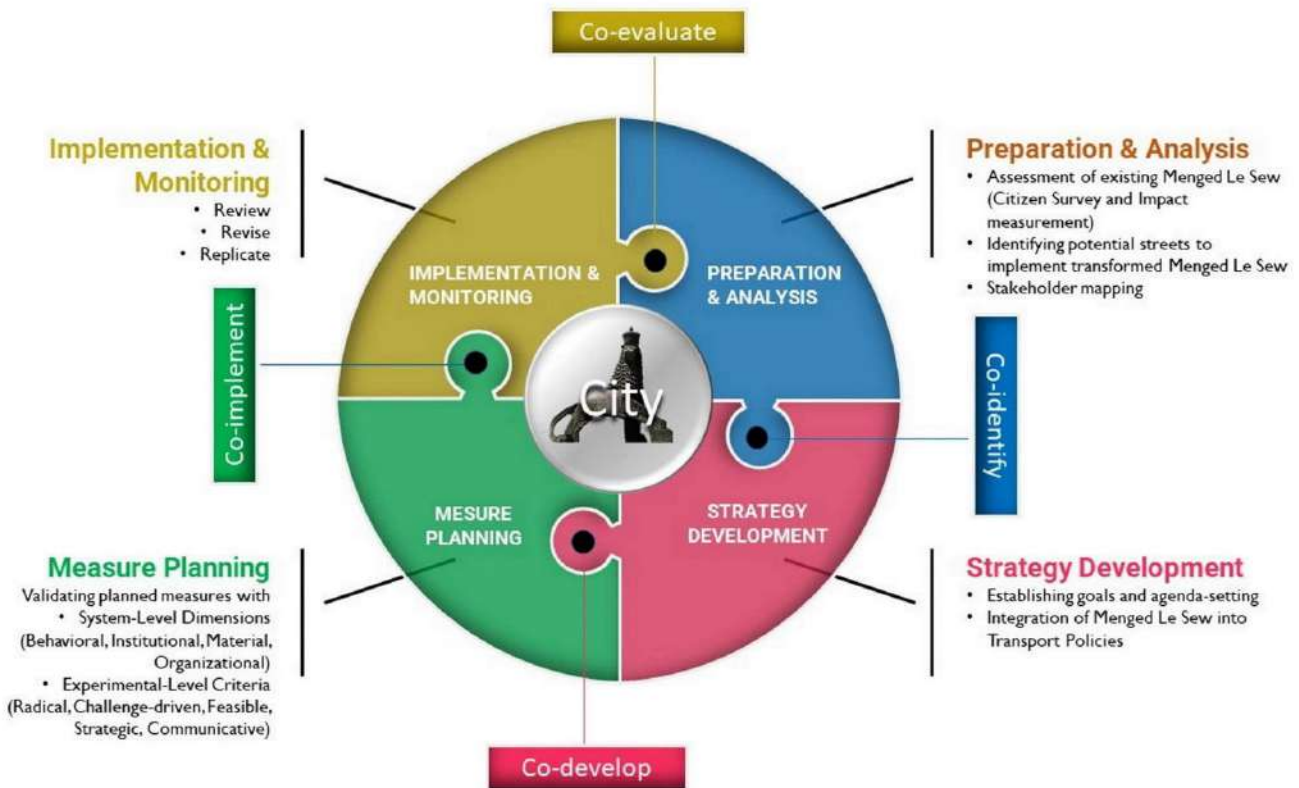


Figure 12: A framework for transforming streets to public spaces: from traditional to sustainable planning. Source: Authors.

The different measures to achieve the agreed objectives and targets will be planned in the measure planning phase. The Menged Le Sew and complementary measures will be operationalized and tested to ascertain their effectiveness and capability to contribute

to the city's strategic vision. With different challenges in different streets, the initial design is expected to be done on a case-by-case basis. It should also be analysed for effectiveness as such. Apart from ensuring the different measure designs remain radical, challenge-driven, feasible, strategic, and communicative, it is equally important to assess their potential in fostering a positive behavioural change amongst citizens while considering the institutional, material, and organizational changes required for successful implementation. Achieving this will require a formative evaluation of the planned measures. A useful approach will be the multicriteria decision analysis, particularly as it allows a combination of quantitative and qualitative input for the assessment. The assessment should be conducted in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders through surveys, town hall meetings, or other engagement approaches to boost the legitimacy and guarantee that it is tailored to the needs of the citizens. While there are many analysis structures proposed in scientific literature, that of Arguello (2020)'s could be of practical use within this context in combination with the TMA's Toolkit, as it was developed specifically for emerging cities, with several criteria clustered into different dimensions of sustainability.

Finally, indicators for continuous monitoring and the frequency of monitoring and evaluation activities should be identified at the implementation and monitoring phase. Furthermore, clear responsibilities for monitoring should be assigned while mechanisms to revise the initiative in the case of deviations from objectives or unintended consequences. At the same time, structures for replication and upscaling are set in place.

## **5. Conclusions**

The negative impacts of the overdependence of urban mobility on passenger cars on the environment, public health, economy, road safety, and public space allocation call for an urgent transformation. The transformation requires a shift in paradigm in transport planning from car-centricity to people-centricity. However, the complexity of urban mobility, rapid urbanization, and cross-sectoral interdependencies necessitates a management approach that combines new forms of governance and collaboration and emphasizes citizen engagement to identify and implement measures to drive systemic change. Therefore, cities have become living labs undertaking different experiments to achieve sociotechnical transitions towards their long-term vision either deliberately or in response to stimuli from citizens or civil societies. This study situates the Ethiopian Menged Le Sew as one of such social transition experiments aimed at instilling in the minds of citizens a vision of the city streets without passenger cars. The car-free day initiative, which started in December 2018 and has been occurring monthly ever since, has been well received by citizens and supported by the government. However, examining the initiative through the lens of the criteria for effective transition experiments, the authors contend that despite being strong on the radical, feasibility, and communicative characteristics, its weakness on the challenge-driven and strategic fronts could limit its effectiveness in driving the desired systemic change. In a bid to reposition Menged Le Sew to amplify its impact further and to become a measure capable of stimulating sustainable behavioural change, the authors proposed an integrated planning framework. The proposed framework inspired by the European integrated SUMP phases emphasizes the elements of co-creation owing to the



importance of participation for effective and efficient transition experiments, particularly at the interface of the phases. While the proposed framework was elaborated specifically for Menged Le Sew, the approach is transferable to other cases. It can be applied to assessing, developing, and upscaling transition experiments geared towards making streets and cities more liveable and sustainable.

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## Urban Infrastructure Redevelopments and the Loss of Public Commons.

### The case of Freedom Park and Zoo in Kitwe, Zambia

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#### Abstract

The city of Kitwe experienced a surge in the construction of shopping malls between 2010 and 2020. Government's deliberate efforts for city making and restructuring policy in the built environment has resulted in increased commercial and tourism infrastructure and amenities in the previous decade. These have replaced the city's public spaces such as Kitwe Zoo and Freedom Park, while small community playing fields dotted around the city are continuously under threat of redevelopment. This paper seeks to explain the physical transformation of Kitwe and the failure by government and local authorities to conserve and protect urban public space in their bid to hasten the redevelopment of the city. Through qualitative case study research approach and purposive sampling, the study will illuminate on the emergence of large-scale shopping malls in Kitwe and their influence in and around the Parklands neighbourhoods and the city of Kitwe. Results indicate that there has been phenomenal urban growth in Kitwe following the construction of the malls. Private housing surrounding the malls have been replaced by high-end office parks and apartments, restaurants and coffee shops, private clinics and other commercial establishments as homeowners cashed an offer they couldn't refuse. Both Mukuba and Edgar Chagwa Lungu Malls are a result of a process systematically accelerated and facilitated by the state and its institutions. Inevitably, the construction of these spaces is not only changing the urban landscape but it is also changing the social dynamics, the history of the city and remaking the city as a whole.

**Keywords:** Kitwe, competitive infrastructure, shopping malls, circulating policy

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## I Introduction

The shopping centre concept has become popular in African cities including Zambia. Lusaka's shopping mall success is considered the best in Africa outside South Africa (Frank Knight, 2009). It has been replicated in towns in the Copperbelt, such as Ndola and Kitwe as well as in Chipata due to the growing middle class (UN-Habitat, 2014). Shopping malls in Africa are a new phenomenon and a result of a range of factors that include population growth, increased urbanisation, a growing middle class, improved infrastructure and a desire to provide more convenience shopping experience to the people. Shopping malls are also seen as a means by which governments can attract investment and create jobs. Shopping malls naturally require large area of land to be developed and access roads, water and power supplies and communication networks to be available before they are constructed to enable their linkages with surrounding communities and to their global value chains. The emergence of shopping malls is expected to boost economic activities of an area and providing access to goods and services and also to stimulate economic growth, and attract new businesses while providing a platform for existing businesses to expand and modernise.

The Kitwe City Council Strategic Plan (KCCSP 2012-2016) was designed to guide development in Kitwe (KCC, 2011). As part of its aspirations for world city-ness, the KCC lined up various projects for investment and modernisation of the city<sup>1</sup>. The city of Kitwe and the Copperbelt have been in long-term economic decline since the late 1980s. The city's infrastructure had deteriorated and an infiltration of informal activities had taken over the city. The developmental aspirations were part of the larger National Vision 2030 that Zambia sought to become 'a prosperous middle-income economy by the year 2030' (Ministry of Commerce Trade and Industry, 2006). Following the privatisation of mines, Zambia launched a National Development and Budgetary Framework that would guide sectoral development in the country. At national and local level, Zambia aimed at accelerated infrastructure development. This involved priority development of certain infrastructure and creating spaces that would attract investments into the country and also promote its own integration into the Africa region. Such a 'fit' of redevelopments would be guided by systematic five-year National Development Plans (NDPs), City strategies/plans as well as Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) at district level. Furthermore, urban regeneration and infrastructural development was key to delivering well planned and organised cities in Zambia (MNDP, 2017).

This paper seeks to investigate the emergence of shopping malls and consequent urban transformation experienced in Kitwe following the launch of the Zambia National Vision 2030 (Vision 2030). Qualitative case study research (CSR) approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of urban redevelopment in Kitwe and its impacts on urban public commons. Freedom Park and Kitwe Zoo are being used as the research case studies as they have been replaced with commercial shopping malls. Archival research, in-depth interviews, both face-to-face and virtual, google forms and Facebook and WhatsApp conversations were used to inform the study.

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<sup>1</sup> These projects included the development of shopping malls, re-development of modern office buildings, re-planning of urban markets, redesigning an ultra-modern bus station, construction of a sanitary landfill site, development of a housing project, facilitating and identifying land for the process of upgrading of informal settlements, upgrading of the city of Kitwe, as well as the maintenance of dilapidated road infrastructure (KCC, 2011).

## 2 Review of literature

Cities in developing countries, especially in Africa, have been redeveloping quite rapidly in the past couple of decades. Studies in Tanzania (Ondrusek-Roy, 2020) Zambia (Lane, 2012 in Datta & Shaban, 2016; Dittgen, 2015), Rwanda (Goodfellow, 2012) attributes these redevelopments to the role of the state and replications of circulating global and neoliberal urban policies as well as the rise in financialisation. Schindler and Kanai argue that the world has entered an infrastructure-led development era where nation states are creating competitive infrastructure that can be plugged into global infrastructure (Schindler and Kanai, 2019). Cities are expected to be engines of growth that stimulate the urban economy and raise investment capital. However, as African cities enter the urban age they are increasingly, under pressure to meet the needs of their citizens while facing the crisis of rapid urbanisation, uncontrolled migration and severe discrepancies in job creation, basic services such as power and water and sanitation. At the same time, they are expected to improve their physical attributes so that they can accommodate segments of the population with a high ability to pay. This entails building safe and pleasant environments for corporate employees – thus shifting the emphasis of cities from regulation and welfare issues (Sager, 2011).

The development of infrastructure has become complex and is being shaped by embedded, hidden and seemingly mundane and complex power dynamics which are beyond the state (Cirolia and Rode, 2019). Cities are, increasingly, at the centre of radical political and economic and planning solutions to crises they face (Datta & Shaban, 2016). Consequently, the development of urban infrastructure is being driven by circulating global urban strategies and the need to connect competitive space with global value chains (Schindler and Kanai, 2019). Connecting competitive space advocates for privatising infrastructure investments where they can have the most impact on growth and economic development, for example, where there is already agglomeration potential (Cirolia and Rode, 2019). Emphasis is on infrastructural alignment geared towards economic productivity; strengthening and prioritising high-density growth poles, accelerating economic growth and societal well-being in territorially more confined areas (Ibid). Thus creating intentional and temporal inequalities of infrastructure access for others, assuming that these will be mitigated over time. Graham and Marvin, in *Splintering urbanism*, indicate that new, highly polarised urban landscapes are emerging where 'premium' infrastructure networks, high speed telecommunications, 'smart' highways, global airline networks, selectively connect together the most favoured users and places, both within and between cities (Graham and Marvin, 2001). Due to the need to create competitive space, urban initiatives of all kinds are being implicated in the city. According to Ong (2011) these are experiments with metropolitan futures that draw upon disparate styles, actors and forms that circulate in and throughout the global south metropolitan centres. These experiments are driven by increasing mobility of capital which are leading states to pursue increasingly similar policies along the neo-liberal model or globalising policies (Brahm, 2002; Ong, 2011). As cities urbanise and modernise, neoliberal urban policies create a need for enormous investment in cities worldwide (Sager, 2011). Cities will continue to aim to become economic hubs and seek to build safe and pleasant environment for the corporate world, and construct shopping precincts for the sophisticated public (Iravabal and Chakravarty, 2007; Boyle McWilliams and Rice, 2008 cited in Sager, 2011). Schindler and Kanai add that there is a global coalition of multinational finance,

commercial concerns and strong countries are exercising their power on developing nations, directing them in financial and other economic policies (Schindler and Kanai, 2019). The result is the state acting strategically and using its power to intervene in order to secure and expand the influence of the market (Van Gent, 2013).

Zambia and its cities are no exception to these circulating global strategies. The cities' transformations and emergence of shopping malls can be attributed to policy circulation and the drive to create competitive space. This is accelerated by the availability of devaloured land that has lay unused and unmaintained; and has become attractive to such ventures. Government policy has been promoting the financing, organising and constructing of business districts as private solutions to urban problems of lack of employment, rising population and inadequate urban services.

### *2.1 History of public amenities on the Zambian Copperbelt*

Zambia's historical development and prolonged economic decline created conditions of urban decay that have attracted the development of new infrastructure and transformation of the urban areas. Zambia is a copper-dependent country that inherited a dual economy from colonial past. The country was a middle-income economy by 1969 and a darling of the West from the 1960s to the 1970s (Simson, 1985). Urban planning on the Zambian Copperbelt and Nkana-Kitwe can be traced to the 1930s up to the 1950s when Africans in the mining towns were beginning to acknowledge their role in Northern Rhodesia's copper mining industry

The African mine workers were housed in mine compounds and providing cyclical labour meaning that they could only be in the mines for a limited time and then go back to the villages. The compound system, imported from the Rand mines was a system used to control recruitment and maintain steady labour supply while controlling the whole production process as well (Rönnbäck and Broberg, 2019). Bole (2012) indicates that during the economic boom periods the miner worked, ate, lived and socialised in the mining compound. The 1930s to 1940s were a period of social instability in the Copperbelt mines as the African miners sought to be integrated into the mines and urban centres as a permanent population.

The African disturbances and rolling strikes motivated by the need for higher wages for native labour were key to Northern Rhodesia's housing policy and improving urban facilities on the Copperbelt. These disturbances paved way for improved housing, wages, living conditions and general welfare such as education and amenities for African mine workers and their families (Fraser and Larmer, 2010). The April 1940 strike at Nkana was a turning point to native housing policy, urban infrastructure and amenities development on the Copperbelt<sup>2</sup>. The strike-initiated conversation on the need for equality and better conditions of service and stabilisation of the African population. Protracted debates between government and mining companies resulted in on the responsibility of native welfare, companies agreed to increase wages and also offer recreational facilities on condition that government complied with provision of the

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<sup>2</sup> (ZCCM Archive File 10.1.4B), Northern Rhodesia: Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Copperbelt in 1940, Summary findings).

Native Beer Ordinance<sup>3</sup>. The agreement was to allocate a certain percentage of beerhalls/canteen profits to the welfare committee for welfare services<sup>4</sup>. Also known as the Durban systems, it was a commercial liquor system developed in South Africa as a source of income/finance for African townships in the apartheid era (Rodgerson, 2001). The Durban liquor system was therefore introduced in the Copperbelt in 1945 and funded housing and all forms of urban infrastructure (Young, 1949). The beerhall system was run by the municipalities (Local Township management boards) with proceeds allocated to the native welfare department. Proceeds from brewing and sale of African traditional beer (made from sorghum and millet), was used to finance urban services for Africans. Following the agreements between government and mining companies, the beer hall system was also applied in financing infrastructural development on the Copperbelt towns from the 1950s until the 1970s. Housing, infrastructure and social services in all Copperbelt towns adopted this format of development with proceeds financing the construction and maintenance of infrastructure such as sports clubs, stadiums, public swimming pools, golf courses, children's playing fields among others. Rodgerson argued that through this liquor undertaking, traditional drinking practices were incorporated into urban administration and became one of the cornerstones of ruling class domination and urban control (Rodgerson, 2001).

While mining companies provided thousands of houses for their workers, much of the housing was also built by municipalities through this model and mining companies were able to lease for their staff (MacMillan, 2012). The liquor system contributed to stabilisation of labour and better housing because it enabled the city to fund services and infrastructure for the African workers (Mutale, 2004). In essence, the liquor system was a response to the needs of the large numbers of Africans and a means to provide them with public services. Eventually, the Copperbelt towns, Kitwe included grew quite rapidly in the 1950s resulting in the Copperbelt region being one of the most developed regions in central Africa. The mines and their services were central to people's lives and the Copperbelt became one of the most developed regions in Central Africa, during and after the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Phimister compares the Copperbelt's state of infrastructure and modernisation, and the lives miners lived to 'a paradise of the proletariat' (Phimister, 2011). The Optima magazine indicates that Kitwe was considered the 'shopping mecca of the Copperbelt and Northern Rhodesia, with shopping complexes, motorways and linkages to Johannesburg and the world (Phimister, 2011; Optima, 1961). According to Thus, the country was once the most urbanised country in the central Africa, with social welfare services provided by the mining companies between the 1920s and 1970s, and the most organised institutional housing systems (Mususa, 2010) The region had the most developed and organised road, housing and entertainment systems in Africa outside South Africa.

However, nationalisation and the global oil/economic crisis of the 1970s affected commodity prices including copper resource which Zambia was so heavily depended upon. Zambia's domestic political economy, poor policy choices – such as the 1970s nationalisation, poor copper prices and debt-servicing, regional wars and political

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<sup>3</sup> (ZCCM Archives File 10.1.4B ZCCM 10.1.4B, Report of African Disturbances in the Copperbelt, 1940-1955, R.M. Peterson, Luanshya RST (Letter No. NLT 763; 20 November 1940).

<sup>4</sup> (ZCCM Archives File 10.1.4B ZCCM 10.1.4B, Report of African Disturbances in the Copperbelt, 1940-1955, R.M. Peterson, Luanshya RST (Letter No. NLT 763; 20 November 1940).

instability in Southern Rhodesia and economic sanctions from South Africa, reversed all the economic gains (Simson, 1985). The 1990s signalled the end of the Kaunda era and the beginning of the multiparty democracy. It ushered in structural adjustment programme in order to end over a decade of economic downturn. Government institutions mainly Mining Development Corporation (Mindeco) and the Industry Development Corporation (Indeco)<sup>5</sup> were privatised. Privatisation of mining and industry was followed by reforms in the Land Act and Investment policy as well as the sale of housing. The privatisation of mines, being the most significant, saw the subdivision of Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) into individual mines. The sale of the mines was considered the fastest ever sale in history of privatisation. State institutions and the local currency was also deregulated.

The implementation of structural adjustment policies in the 1990s attracted investments into the mines. However, the new mine owners mostly from the East, were not interested in employee welfare and corporate social responsibility. As a result, the mines withdrew welfare provisions from the mine workers and from the mining towns. The withdrawal of social services and fiscal budget cuts radically changed people's well-being and the character of urban areas. Mususa (2010)'s article "Getting By" gives grim a picture of life in the Copperbelt after the privatisation of the mines in 1997. Mususa observed that towns became like 'villages' in the sense that people lost their jobs (as the new mines employed less workers), informality grew rapidly, and life became a struggle for many, while infrastructure deteriorated (Mususa, 2010). Due to a lack of public financing, lack of maintenance of public infrastructure and housing, urban decay ensued. The Copperbelt province and its cities including the city of Kitwe which had been riding on the goodwill of the ZCCM spiralled down. Public commons like children's parks, which were part of the amenities provided by the mining companies for their employees' wellbeing and financed through the colonial and post-colonial liquor system, also suffered. They were left unmaintained and disregarded. An example of this is the grass at Freedom Park which was overgrown, while the pedestrian bridges on both the Park and Kitwe Zoo collapsed. Kitwe Stream running through these two commons also became a smelly dump due to pollution.

### **3 Methodology**

Kitwe district has a population of 661 901 according to the latest (2020) census report (Zambia Statistics Agency [ZSA], 2022). While the district posted the highest population in the province, the Copperbelt province in general, experienced the lowest growth nationally at 39.8% below the national average in the past decade (ZSA, 2022).

However, city managers estimate the daily population, to be over 800 000, taking into consideration daily exchanges and commuting from neighbouring towns. This research concentrated on the development of Mukuba and ECL malls are located in the residential suburb of Parklands. These two have replaced simultaneously, a greenbelt of over 3kms of the Kitwe Stream valley which was formerly made up of a zoo and a children's park.

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<sup>5</sup> Mining Development Corporation (Mindeco) and the Industry Development Corporation (Indeco) were the major parastatals in the country, formed through the nationalisation of mining and industry respectively in the early 1970s.



### 3.1 Research design

This study used a qualitative Case Study Research (CSR) Approach. Merriam and Tisdell (2006) state that case study research provides an intensive, holistic description and analysis of single or multiple instances, phenomenon and social units. Creswell describes CSR as the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (ie a setting or context) ... for *developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases*” (Creswell, 2006, 73). Sauro’s description of CSR aligns with this argument that CSR provides a deeper understanding of the research problem through multiple data sources (Sauro, 2017). The paper aimed to bring information from various sources through people’s experiences with redevelopment in the city. Since this research was carried out during the covid-19 pandemic, it benefitted from using diverse qualitative data sources which included in-depth interviews (both face-to-face and virtual), archival material, observational data using photographs, local social media contribution through WhatsApp and Facebook conversation, as well as use of google forms. Use of social media and virtual tools enabled the researcher to reach a dispersed sample while providing contributions, discussions, memories and files from over five to six decades ago.

### 3.2 Sampling techniques

The population of interest was purposefully selected through deductive and inductive approaches. A purposive sample is a sample of interest that is deliberately selected by the researcher on the basis that it will be typical and representative and will yield favourable results (Kothari and Garg, 2017). Deductive approaches relied on information from existing literature in Kitwe such as the Kitwe City Strategy (KCCSP 2012-2016) and Yearly plans which indicated a selection of stakeholders who took part in replanning the city of Kitwe. Inductive approaches were a result of snowballing. The research participants were recruited based on their work experience or involvement in redeveloping the city of Kitwe. Such stakeholders included a former mayor and deputy mayor, town planner civil and software engineers, real estate developers, mall management, civil servants and civic organisation representatives, former business owners, and various local residents.

### 3.3 Data collection and analysis

In total 31 respondents were interviewed through face-to-face in-depth interviews, virtual interviews, google forms, and social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook messenger.

Interviews were aided by an interview guide. Comments were also sought from Kitwe Past and Present Facebook group on the state of infrastructure and the people’s perceptions of the urban redevelopments. Two Facebook posts were used and they elicited 42 comments. Data was obtained through user-generated textual data e.g. posts, comments and messages. Interviews were recorded using an android device and uploaded to Otter.ai tool for transcription and further exported to Atlas.ti v9 for qualitative analysis i.e. thematic content analysis (TCA). Anderson (2007) refers to TCA as a descriptive presentation of qualitative data. Atlas.ti a digital tool for managing, analysing and presenting qualitative data. Using deductive and inductive codes, transcripts were analysed using TCA, grouping the data into potential themes, categories and code. The codes were defined and used to design a code framework.

Data from Facebook comments and posts was analysed manually (Franz, Marsh, Chen, & Teo; 2019) to supplement information obtained from interviews especially of the historical state of infrastructure and the impacts of the shopping.

## **4 Discussion of findings**

### *4.1 Regenerating the city of Kitwe*

Zambia has now, as a result of economic restructuring, taken a neoliberal turn in urban policy at both national and local level. Individual cities are repackaging the cities into ideas, dreams and possibilities to remake the cities. In 2006, President Levy Mwanawasa launched the National Vision 2030 together with subsequent national development plans (NDPs) that would guide both infrastructure and economic development in the country. Government also came up with national, regional and local level priority areas whose development will be facilitated and stimulated by the government through various neoliberal urban policies implementation. Those implied in policy include accelerated development of infrastructure and services, diversification from copper mining and the development of priority sectors that are key to growth of the economy and poverty reduction such as manufacturing, agriculture, mining and tourism. Government would utilise Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), deliberate state involvement (or state-led development), infrastructure economic development, refurbishment and new built projects, as well as venturing into multi-facility economic zones and corridor developments that would enable the country integration into the African region. Gentrification, an increasing phenomenon in the global south, though not explicit in policy, is also occurring as an outcome of the process. By 2017, the Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP 2017-2021) indicated that Zambia aspires to be "...a modern country with cities and towns and provincial areas that are secure, well-planned, providing basic amenities and linked by good roads and accessible by other road transport systems" (Ministry of National Planning and Development [MNDP], 2017 p. 67). This would be achieved through accelerated development without leaving anyone behind.

The city of Kitwe City Strategy (KCCSP 2012-2016) referencing Lusaka stated that the city aspired for urban regeneration like that of Lusaka. This is because of the successes of Lusaka's shopping centres in the continent (Frank Knight, 2009; UN-Habitat, 2014;). Lusaka's regeneration is attributed to city making policy (Lane, 2012). During the reintroduction of national development planning in 2006, the FNDP (2006-2010) emphasized the role of Lusaka as a capital city that should be renewed to international standards. Such infrastructure developments would enable Lusaka to compete for and attract headquarters of companies, foreign and non-governmental missions as well as embassies, high commissions and consulates. As a result, between 2010 and 2020, Kitwe had to play catch up and today is busy and continuously evolving. The city cannot afford to stand still due to the global processes taking place. Change is ongoing in the city, and with change there are bound to be losers in the system. The whole cycle of urban redevelopments has been completed and the highs and lows are being experienced. Already, there has been an influx of gentrified places, foreign food retailers, and global multinational businesses and shopping centres. Affluent spaces of consumption have also developed, with some around race and class identification, while it is too early to see whether and how Kitwe's cultures will be affected.

The KCC promoted the regeneration of the city centre for various reasons which included decongesting the city by attracting people to shopping malls, office and business parks such as Lyness House (Former Adriatic Court), Saturnia and Mudzi Houses among others. The city also aimed to improve the outlook of Kitwe (appeal and aesthetics) and bring in diverse services such as international retail outlets which were previously only available in Ndola and Lusaka. Furthermore, new infrastructure created new forms of recreation for family and youth. Mukuba Mall a stone's throw from the city centre was built on land which was previously Kitwe Zoo while Edgar Chagwa Lungu (ECL) Mall is sitting on what was formerly Freedom Park, a piece of green belt which was a public and children's park stretching a couple of kilometres. Freedom Park also served as a public gathering place for political rallies, public holidays celebrations like International Women's Day, Independence Day and Labour Day related commemorations. Both these new spaces are symbols of accumulation by displacement of public commons and unnoticeably lost to the people of Kitwe who are still relishing the modernization brought into the city.

The area surrounding the shopping malls has since experienced rapid transformation residential homes have been renovated into smaller shopping complexes, offices, gated upscale apartments and retail enterprises. A variety of policies are being implicated in the city and are articulated in various forms around the city and also in the midst of high informalisation of the economy and unemployment. The KCC is convinced that urban renewal and regeneration makes sense for various reasons which include Kitwe's old façade that requires a makeover so that it becomes eye catching and modern in order to change the outlook of Kitwe and also attract retail and tourism business to cater for the new middle and creative class taste. The change is not only a facelift and appearance but the need to migrate infrastructure of the colonial and postcolonial period like art décor cinemas, markets, general dealers and department stores to the present and be compatible with today's global value chains.

#### 4.2 *The state of infrastructure in Kitwe*

Kitwe is an old mining town whose mines historically provided some of the best urban infrastructure, housing and services to mine workers including advanced Africans. A local engineer stated that the first mine owners that invested in the first mining industry in Zambia (Northern Rhodesia) wanted to create a haven in which they could bring employees from Europe to come and live comfortably in Zambia. Hence infrastructure *'like swimming pools or education facilities, the cricket clubs, flying clubs were all meant for someone that was young and looking forward to starting a life... there was a whole system set up from the moment they arrived to retirement.'* (Interview with Engineer, Virtual Storyteller, 4 November 2021).

He together with the former mayor, SC Nyirenda further expressed that Kitwe's developmental trajectory was disturbed by nationalisation and the economic downturn. Their assumptions were that had it continued on the same track that the colonialists left, the country would have gone far, in terms of development in the city, the country and general well-being and infrastructure. The local engineer criticised nationalisation as being a drawback and that after nationalisation, many amenities and apprenticeship programmes were put off without looking at the social implications. As a result, Kitwe was riding on ZCCM's goodwill, eventually spiralling down from 1991 following Zambia's democratic election and the sale of the mines (Interview with Local Engineer,

Virtual Storyteller, 4 November, 2021). Kitwe's infrastructure decayed and was inadequate for its growing population (Informal conversation with Former Mopani Copper Mines Engineer, 28 October, 2022). Zambia's cities suffered much urban decay as council resources were withdrawn and housing was sold (Ndeke, Chitembo and Dauskardt, 1999). Today, Kitwe's dependence on the mines is still felt as the survival of the new infrastructure still requires a viable and active copper mining sector. Another respondent, a former deputy mayor describes the state of infrastructure in Kitwe follows:

*“From independence up to 2011, as a nation, we still depended on infrastructure from the [the pre] Independence era, built in the colonial days. [Now], ...we have hospitals, the road network, schools, universities, and everything that is dilapidated. Hence the new government that came in 2011, their main mandate was to improve infrastructure.”*  
(Interview with Former Deputy Mayor – 11 November, 2021)

The former deputy mayor explained that when the government of Michael Chilufya Sata came into power in 2011, they had the mandate to improve the country's infrastructure. The PF government had come into power with an election manifesto of 'more money in your pocket'. With foreign reserves and projects already secure by the Mwanawasa government, the PF government replaced the existing Sixth National Development Plan (SNDP) with the Revised Sixth National Development Plan (R-SNDP) to enable its developmental agenda to steam forward. This way, President Sata and his government were able to rapidly rollout large scale infrastructure developments, road infrastructure refurbishments linking various corners of Zambia. Large scale shopping malls, housing complexes, hotels, as well as multi-facility economic zones also surfaced as government promoted PPPs and private sector participation, with a new relationship with Chinese developers sprouting.

The former deputy mayor further explained that Colonial urban planning of the 1930s to the 1950s in the city of Kitwe had left aside much land as public parks (Interview with Former Deputy Mayor of Kitwe, 11 November, 2021). As a result, this old planning was perfect for the times then, giving an example of these many parks in one area in Riverside, a suburb in Kitwe:

*... You know Zambezi Way, when you branch off Freedom Way, there is a big park there. Then as you come down to Valley View School, you turn into Congo Way; there's a big park. As you come to join Jambo from Congo Way, there is a big park. You are getting it. So if you look at the distances, they are just too close. They may have played the role at that time. However, now, if we maintain the Zambezi Way Park, someone in Congo will walk five minutes to Zambezi Way. So those are now the things that people are looking at. This is the planning of 100 years ago, but then dynamics have changed.*

The former deputy mayor explained how the planning of the 1930s and 1940s is being affected as the dynamics and priorities of urban areas change today. Colonial planning left aside vast pieces of land for public commons such as public parks, playgrounds and other public amenities, which the council has not been able to maintain for the past few decades. Following privatisation and the withdrawal of council resources, these have

become desolate eyesores in the communities as indicated by the various network of quotations in the diagram below.

Therefore, in their state, they are attractive to developers as affordable prime land to construct shopping complexes and housing. An interview with an employee of Habitat for Humanity, also revealed that most infrastructure was built in the colonial era.

However, there is a push now to upgrade these pieces of land as they are seen as 'passive space' harbouring crime and vice. On the other hand, as city councils deal with the rising urban population and demand for land for commercial purposes, they are relocating these commons to other uses. An architect involved in the development of ECL Mall on Freedom Avenue Children's Park echoed the same sentiments. He said that Freedom Park was in a dilapidated state and neglected; it was now overgrown and harbouring thieves. He argued that the city could not manage to have such public parks in such decay. In their decayed and un-kept status, public commons attract developers looking for prime land suitable for regeneration into large attractive infrastructure in the inner city, where there is a ready market. He reiterated that these parks are an asset to the town, and the perception would be to put up something substantially better than keeping them in a dilapidated state.

A retired high court judge who moved into Kitwe in 1989 and took up residence across Kitwe Zoo gives this description of the state of public infrastructure then,

*"I moved to Kitwe when it was the third largest city in the country, the Zoo was a bush, the roads were bad, they were very few hotels, notably Edinburgh Hotel, but now many lodges have opened up, people are buying houses and building lodges, clinic. Of late private clinics have mushroomed everywhere, private hospitals...and it is turning the place into a city". (Interview, 4 November, 2021)*

A decade later, another family moved into the same street as the judge, and opened up a membership pub. They also indicated that their neighbourhood, located next to the zoo was in dilapidated state, and the roads were impassable (Interview with former Pub owner, 04 November, 2021). However, they needed a house to start a pub.

Unfortunately, these vast urban spaces left unmaintained have now been transformed into large shopping complexes as international capital landed into the city, preferring degenerated built-up areas that could be renewed or regenerated into world-class malls, hotels and industries that offer a one-stop shop in prime locations. These parks left in close proximity, such as the Freedom Park, Kitwe Zoo, and so many parks in Riverside and Parklands, are subjected to a cost-benefit analysis where commercial developments supersede sentimental value.

#### 4.3 Kitwe city transformation

Most respondents indicated that the most visible developments had been the shopping malls, road infrastructure, and the renovations of residential homes into commercial and retail enterprises like shops, offices and office apartments, restaurants and clinics and the rise in industries and active participation of the private sector. One particular resident expressed that everyone has been motivated somehow to improve their homes or sell, especially around shopping malls and newly refurbished roads (Interview with local resident, 3 November 2021). She noted that Kitwe had experienced a rise in artsy infrastructure like Saturday markets, which have started appearing and are upscale



and encouraging small-scales entrepreneurship. She observed that people have been coming up with these initiatives independently and not waiting for council but instead finding ways to make things work for themselves. She further indicated that the most visible infrastructure had been shopping malls, and road infrastructure. However, she believes that because accessibility has improved so does the houses located along the newly tarred roads, the value attached to the properties and increase in attention that such properties get (Interview with local resident, 3 November 2021).

The Kitwe town planner, revealed that the city of Kitwe was modernising and wanted to make a reality of its vision and aspiration, to be a smart city, a city that is inclusive, sustainable, and adopting technology in the running of the city, managing itself, the needs of its people, its health and education integration in line with the city's integrated plan (Interview with the Town planner, 18 January 2020). He also stated that the country had experienced rapid population, in general, owing to infrastructure disparities that cannot adequately cater to the increasing population needs. Furthermore, he said that the then mayor, Mr Christopher Kang'ombe, had spearheaded many developments that included cleaning up the city (Interview with the Town planner, 18 January 2020). An interview with a former deputy mayor of Kitwe also affirms the mega infrastructure developments that the city of Kitwe and Zambia at large has experienced in the past decade as he noted that, *'Zambia and Kitwe have changed drastically, such that someone last in the country in 2010 will get lost'* (Interview with Former Deputy Mayor, 11 November, 2021) To support this, the city of Kitwe has seen an explosion of infrastructure over the years as the city reacted in various ways to this call for redevelopment.

The cityscape experienced a significant urban transformation between 2010-2020. A local engineer and virtual story teller commenting on the rapid transformation of Kitwe, a city he spent much of his formative years, expressed that *'in the village where one grows nothing remains the same'* (Interview, with local engineer and virtual storyteller, 4 November 2021). Further discussion with a local property developer and engineer revealed that besides the large infrastructure projects most visible in the city, the government, has been involved in targeted infrastructure development like road construction and rehabilitation in high-density areas [townships and compounds] (Interview with software engineer turned - real estate developer, 9 December 2021). This has helped open townships like Chimwemwe and Kawama for further development, creating enough traffic required to generate business opportunities and demand for services like fuel stations. He added that such initiatives are pushing people to build further away, attracted by the amenities and the opportunity to build new styled-homes and leaving the old Soweto-style colonial houses in areas like Chimwemwe and going further away from the city, causing sprawling settlements as many of them can afford cars, and good roads enable them to commute.

The former high court judge who moved to Kitwe in 1989 and settled across Kitwe Zoo also attests to this phenomenal growth. He stated that the city had grown significantly as compared to the late 1980s when it was the third largest city and going through the economic downturn and the 1990s when it offered so few amenities; when he narrates the state of infrastructure then:

*"Most of the areas [here] were bush, but today we are seeing mushrooming lodges, hospitals everywhere, private clinics, malls, restaurants, and this place is turning into a city. The roads were bad in the 1990s. Kitwe's residential areas have now expanded*

*along Ndola Kitwe Dual Carriageway; the city has expanded in terms of residential areas going over the Kafue River, to New Kitwe [Kafue Park] ..., and as far west as Kalulushi [Kitwe West]. The place has expanded, which is a great improvement compared to what it was" (Interview with retired High Court Judge, 4 November 2021).*

Growth around the country is phenomenal too as people are building beyond their usual spaces, along the highways and city periphery, according to State Counsel William Nyirenda (Interview 3 November 2021). Former Kitwe mayor, lawyer and property developer, State Counsel (SC) William Nyirenda, indicated that the economy was buoyed and boosted by mining activities of the previous couple of decades but is now on the wane (Interview with SC Nyirenda, 03 November 2021). At the turn of the century, Kitwe homeowners invested in physical infrastructure following the replanning of Kitwe in the 1990s and heeded the call for residential and commercial business district (CBD) development; hence development is phenomenal within the city, in suburbia and spreading in all directions, consuming previous bushland going in all directions along Ndola road, Chingola road merging Chimwemwe and Garneton, Ndeke into Presidential guest house, Riverside crossing over the Kafue River into Kafue Park, spreading west to Kalulushi, into what is now Kitwe West – leaving the whole place interlinked for the first time in the history of the city (Interview with SC Nyirenda, 03 November 2021). Chingola and Ndola highways have experienced significant developments. The former mayor also added that there is phenomenal growth, too, as industries and commercial spaces have come and are growing, which indicates a good local economy.

Secondly, is the emergence of large scales shopping complexes commonly referred to as shopping malls. Every town in Zambia today has a mall, while more prominent cities like Lusaka, Kitwe and Ndola would have multiple mega-shopping malls. Research participants indicated that Zambians have been travelling to neighbouring countries like South Africa and abroad to other countries like Dubai and China to shop and have been exposed to these facilities which offer recreation and safety for families and businesses<sup>6</sup>. A retired high court judge further added that Zambians want the same amenities when they come home.

Within the city of Kitwe, there are five large shopping malls: Copperhill, Mukuba, Edgar Chagwa Lungu (ECL), Nkana (which is yet to open) and Westlands, a newly opened shopping mall in Nkana West (Fig 4.1). At the same time, Riverside and Parklands shopping centres have also seen some significant renovations, while the China Mall, a new kind of stand-alone massive shop owned by Chinese nationals has also emerged and posing an economic threat to the shopping complex business and all other traders. Many people have followed suit and invested in the city's physical infrastructure by building houses, factories and warehouses. According to SC Nyirenda, all these developments in the city show that the local economy is doing well, but this is only the private sector, and not government investments. Thus, indicating the disconnect between the thrust by the private sector in contributing to infrastructure development in Kitwe, vis-a-vis government's failure to provide public services.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with representative of Herriott Properties, a company which specialises in building shopping malls (17 November 2021); Interview with former deputy mayor of Kitwe (4 November 2021)

A local engineer expressed that bringing these developments to Zambia and Kitwe was like bringing a product to a ready market (Interview, 3 November 2021) while an employee of the UN-Habitat also uttered the same sentiments, stating that stakeholders have been actually crying for such developments (Interview with Employee – UN-Habitat, 11 November 2021). Most stakeholder respondents indicated they were happy with what happened in Kitwe, with the local engineer indicating that in terms of physical aesthetics, it is worth giving credit where it is due because there has been a considerable transformation of the physical landscape. Other stakeholders also indicated a variety of shopping spaces with ample parking and family recreational services. These developments are welcome as the availability of shopping malls and good roads have decongested the city centre and brought shopping spaces near and in residential areas. The availability of banking facilities and government services is also decentralised everywhere (Interview with local engineer and Virtual Storyteller, 3 November 2021). A few respondents applauded the availability of shopping malls for minimum impact on smaller businesses as they have continued to thrive. However not everyone agreed to this as the former pub owner had to closed shop when the mall opened and brought in foreign franchises which attracted her customers and was not able to complete with (Interview with former pub owner, 4 November, 2021). Local engineer was of the idea '...Africans have a tendency of falling in love with something new and do not maintain that momentum and soon go back to their ways and their usual retailers' (Interview with local engineer and Virtual Storyteller, 3 November 2021). Thus, indicating that the shopping malls are a fad that people rushed too at first and then eventually reverting to their traditional ways of shopping and not offering as much competition to local businesses as was anticipated.

#### *4.4 Kitwe's Shopping malls*

Kitwe has five big shopping malls: Mukuba, Edgar Chagwa Lungu (ECL), Nkana, Copper Hill and Westlands in Nkana west (Figure 4.1). Of these only two Mukuba and ECL Mall, will be covered extensively as they are located on what was previously a zoo and children's park, respectively and also because of the significant physical impact they have had on the Parklands suburb and the whole of Kitwe in general. A retired judge who also sold his home for over 30years after the opening of Mukuba mall, (for an unrelated reason) indicates that these two malls have increased properties values in the area attracting developers who are looking for prime area in the commercial zone where they can convert their houses to industrial activity (Interview with retired Judge, 4 November, 2011). A local engineer also shared that a relative of his old his house in the Martinsdale area in exchange for two houses in Nkana East because it is a prime zone near ECL mall (Interview with Local Engineer and Virtual Storyteller, 03 November 2021). The former green belt in Parklands has turned out to be a lucrative prime area for homeowners, where developers are hunting for residential housing that they tear down and plant new commercial buildings. This area as an old suburb offers big pieces of land that are easily converted to upscale apartments, office parks, lodges, restaurants and clinics. Below is a description of the selected mini-cases of Mukuba mall and ECL mall.

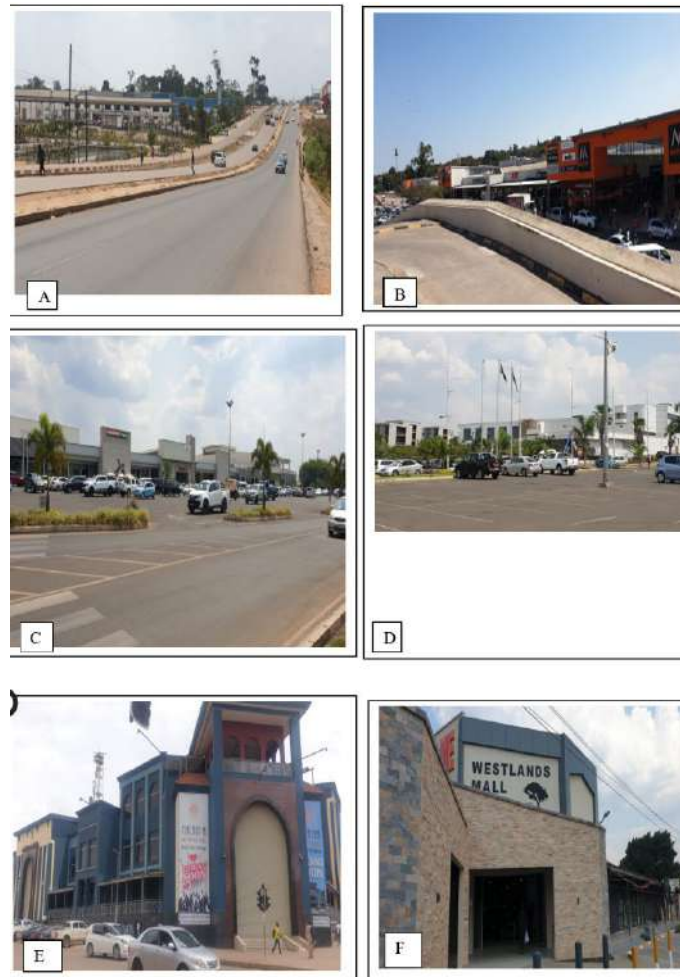


Figure 4.1. Kitwe Mall - A-Copperhill, B- Mukuba, C-ECL, D ECL-Garden Court and Office Park view, E Nkana, F-Westlands

#### 4.4.1 From Kitwe Zoo to Mukuba Mall

Kitwe Zoo was a public zoo located in the heart of Kitwe's Parklands suburb, bordered by Chiwala Avenue on the right and Freedom Avenue on the left (Figure 4.2). The zoo was run by the municipality and fully functional in the 1980s and early 1990s. It was home to a diverse species that included lions, vervet monkeys, a crocodile pit, monitor lizards, snakes/ reptiles and bird species, included Marabou Stocks and, according to a local engineering professional. A local engineer said he saw his first ever Marabou Stock (Interview with Local Engineer and Virtual Storyteller, 03 November 2021).

Respondents on my Facebook post (Kitwe Past and Present [Status update], 21 January 2022) expressed that they grew up in the surrounding neighbourhood of Parklands and did confirm hearing lions roar in the mornings and evenings. During my interview with Paul Gee he gave a mental re-enactment of Kitwe Zoo (Virtual Interview, 3 February, 2022). The zoo was a big part of his life and he spent most of his childhood there. Hence, he gave me a walk-through the zoo recalling memories of the place and how he interacted with it. Figure 4.3 below is an Artistic impression of our virtual tour of the zoo. Most of them were also regulars at the zoo, while others served as boy scouts

helping with abattoir runs, collecting meat for animals and collecting fruit in season from the neighbourhood for the primates etc. (Interview with Paul Gee, 3 February 2022; Comments from Kitwe Past and Present [Status update], 21 January 2022).

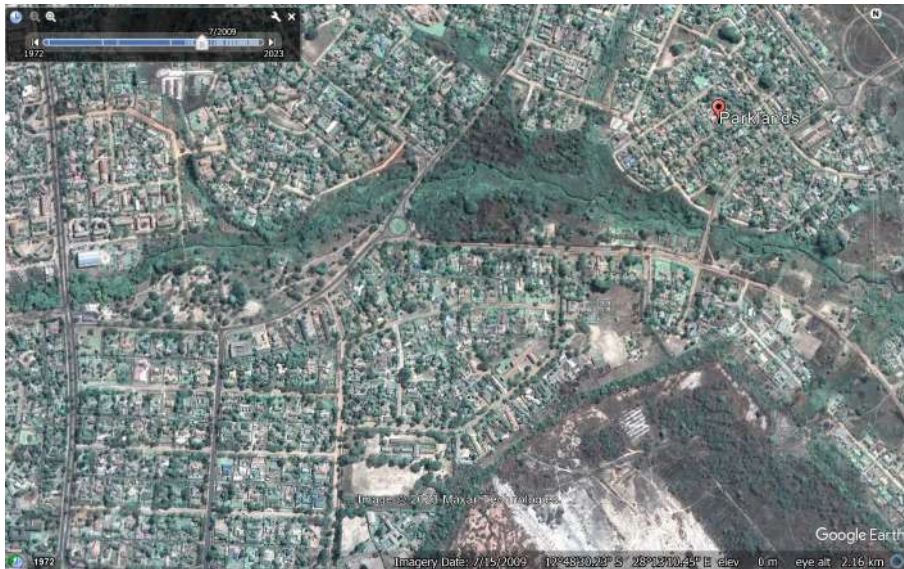


Figure 4.2. Freedom Park and Kitwe Zoo before 2010. Source: Google Earth, 2023.

However, the city council failed to maintain the zoo and the animals like baboons were escaping and harassing dogs in the neighbourhood, while on various occasions lions' cubs would escape too posing a threat to the residential areas. The community tried to help but eventually the zoo was sold and the animals were moved to Monkey Fountain in Ndola and Munda Wanga in Lusaka as the new owner also failed to maintain them (Interview with Paul Gee, 3 February 2022).



Figure 4.3. Artistic Impression of the Zoo by Tariro Melisa Maguwudze.

During the interim period, after animals were removed the zoo also became an entertainment place hosting weddings and other conference area as the community tried to keep the remaining animals and the place afloat. Today, Kitwe Zoo has been replaced by Mukuba Mall, one of the five big shopping malls built in Kitwe in the last decade. It is located a stone's throw from another colossal shopping mall, ECL Mall, on Freedom way (Figure 4.3).

Mukuba Mall is the second mall to be opened in Kitwe after Copper Hill, in Mindolo, on Chingola road. Copper Hill Mall flourished for a while until the opening of Mukuba, which turned it into a ghost mall as tenants like the Keg and Coppersmith left and anchor tenants like Pick n Pay closed down. According to SC Nyirenda, Mukuba Mall should have been built in the 1990s as the first mall in Zambia. He said that the city had signed an agreement with Stocks and Stocks (Stefanutti and Stocks) to build a shopping complex with a nine-hole golf course. Unfortunately, the then President, Mr Chiluba, requested that the mall be moved to Manda Hill (as Lusaka did not have a shopping mall), availing land for its construction. Two decades later, Mukuba Mall was built and became one of the iconic features of the city of Kitwe. Mukuba Mall is owned by Heriot Properties<sup>7</sup>. The company has investment portfolio for shopping malls in the country at an estimated US\$ 105 million, with Mukuba Mall at US\$ 38 million alone (Anonymous email content, 17 August 2022).

Most of the land that Herriott Properties has developed into shopping malls around the country and on the line of rail on repurposed land (Virtual Interview with Herriot Properties Country representative, 17 November, 2021). Hence, this is an organisation with vast experience investing in brownfield opportunities, regenerating some of the urban areas' de-valorised sites. De-valorised or disinvested sites in urban areas are sites that have fallen into disrepair and become undesirable places to live. These sites can include abandoned buildings, vacant lots, and other areas that have become blighted over time. These sites often experience higher crime levels, poverty, and social problems, creating a cycle of disinvestment and neglect.

Thus, Mukuba Mall has been built on a former public space, Kitwe Zoo. Formerly owned by the city council, this land was sold to Pridwin properties and, in partnership/shareholding agreement with Heriot Properties was developed into a mall (Virtual Interview with Herriot Properties Representative, 17 November 2021).

Following privatisation of state enterprises in the 1990s and the withdrawal of funding to city councils, the SINPA paper, advised the Kitwe City Council to do away with areas which are not core business encouraging the sale of public commons to reduce public spending (Ndeke et al., 1999). Kitwe zoo fell into disrepair and animals were relocated, leaving only the tuckshop functioning for a while (Ndeke et al., 1999; Virtual interview with Paul, 3 February 2022).

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<sup>7</sup> Heriot Properties, is a South African property holding and investment company with a diversified portfolio of retail, industrial, commercial and specialised properties in South Africa valued at R4,155 billion (Heriotreit.com). In South Africa, Herriott Properties owns shopping malls and warehouses. At the same time, the company has invested in five shopping malls in Zambia, Kafubu Mall in Ndola, Mukuba Mall in Kitwe, and Cosmopolitan Mall in Lusaka, Kabwe and Solwezi malls since they arrived in the country in 2012 (Virtual Interview with Herriott Properties country representative, 17 November 2021; Anonymous email contents received 17 August 2022).





Figure 4.4 Mukuba Mall. Source Google Earth.

The Heriot Properties respondent added that the investment company was attracted to develop Mukuba Mall due to the availability of prime land and an existing gap in shopping malls in the Copperbelt. The construction of Mukuba Mall, a one-stop shopping mall in Kitwe, started in 2014 and it was opened in 2015. Mukuba Mall benefits from its prime location near residential areas and the Kitwe Central Business District (CBD) as well as being the first mall to be built, with strong South African influence in terms of the shops and merchandise available.

Mukuba mall came in as a bigger mall with a wide variety of retail shops, some of which are well-established regional chain shops like Game, Shoprite, Pick 'n Pay, Truworths, Edgars etc... that had been attracting customers to Lusaka and South Africa. While Copperhill, on the hand, being of moderate size and having a limited number of shops, and far from the market, in terms of residential areas like Riverside, Parklands, Nkana East and West and the city centre, was greatly affected by the new mall. Today, Kitwe Zoo is a much flourishing Mukuba Mall, and attracting custom from the Copperbelt region, Western Province, and across the border into the Democratic Republic of Congo.

#### 4.4.2 From Freedom Avenue Children's Park to ECL Mall

Originally known as Kent Avenue Park, Freedom Avenue Children's Park, or Freedom Park, was a public children's park located at the heart of the city of Kitwe. Its history goes back to the early 1950s and possibly beyond. Its original length was about 2.43 kilometres, and below are two maps of the original park (Figure 4.2). The park gets its name from Freedom Avenue, a road that runs from Independence Road/Chingola Road to the deep Nationalist Avenue in Parklands (by Kitwe Zoo). It continues for several kilometres into the suburbs of Parklands, Riverside and Riverside Extension. Social media accounts noted that it was a park where kids could swim in Kitwe Stream from the 1950s to 1980s, or play on swings. It was family-friendly park where families went

for walks, and to have picnics. During the festive season, Christmas carols could be enjoyed from a huge C-shaped podium while children enjoyed playing on 'one of the largest and scariest slides' as one contributor indicated (Kitwe Past and Present (04 November 2019 [Video] Facebook).

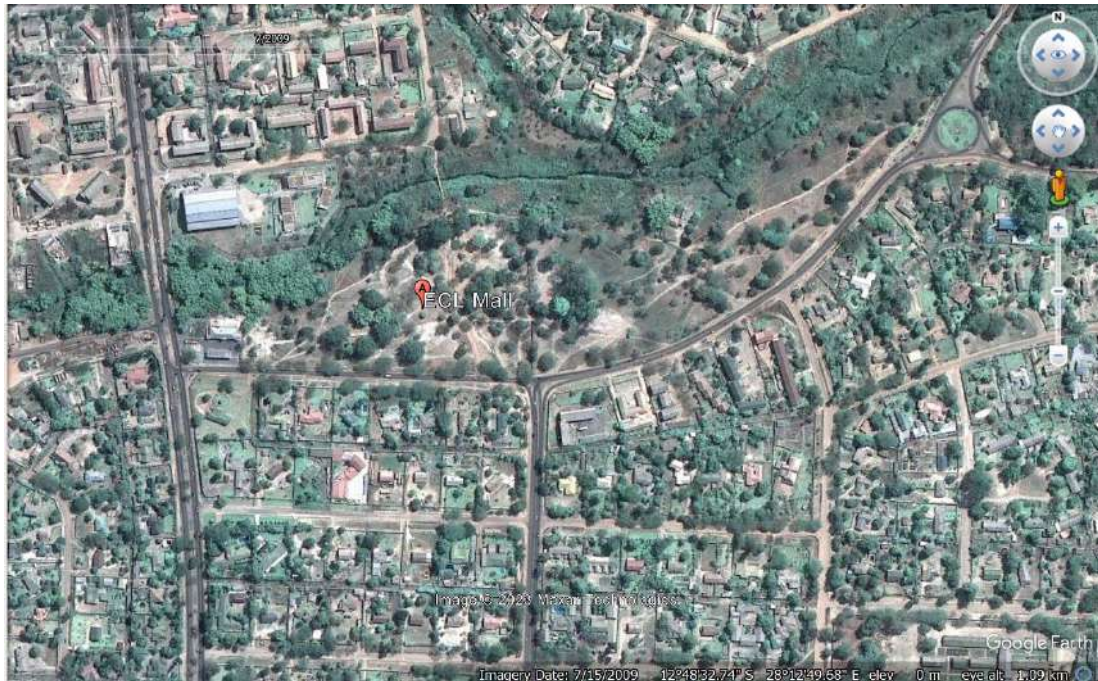


Figure 4.5. Freedom Park 2009. Source: Google earth, 2023.

#### 4.4.2.1 The Development of ECL/Ownership

Edgar Chagwa Lungu Mall (ECL) is a mall that now stands where Freedom Park stood for over seven decades (Fig 4-3 below). It is owned by the National Pension Scheme Authority of Zambia (NAPSA)<sup>8</sup>. The Authority has built malls, hotels and business Parks around the country under its subsidiary, the NAPSA Hospitality Investment Limited (NHIL). In Kitwe, NAPSA took over Freedom Park after the first development failed. An architect who worked with NAPSA indicated that the pension fund used independent realtors, Pam Golding, and through a market study, they opted to do the mall. NAPSA has invested in shopping mall, Garden Court Hotel and Office Park and conference centre at Freedom Park and also a residential complex outside Kitwe in Kalulushi. This way they are using *patient funds* to invest in real estate in response to market demands.

<sup>8</sup> NAPSA was established in 2000 by the National Pension Scheme Act no. 40 of 1996, which repealed the Zambia National Provident Fund (NAPSA, 2023). It was formed to provide income security against the risk arising from retirement, death and invalidity, ensuring that members get adequate benefits and monthly receipts of their pension (ibid.). Following the revision of its investment guideline in 2017, (by the Investment Guidelines Statutory Investments (SI) Number 19 of 2017), NAPSA is allowed to invest funds that are not immediately required for payment of benefits into its investment portfolios which consists of ten asset classes among which are infrastructure, real estate, green field investments etc...



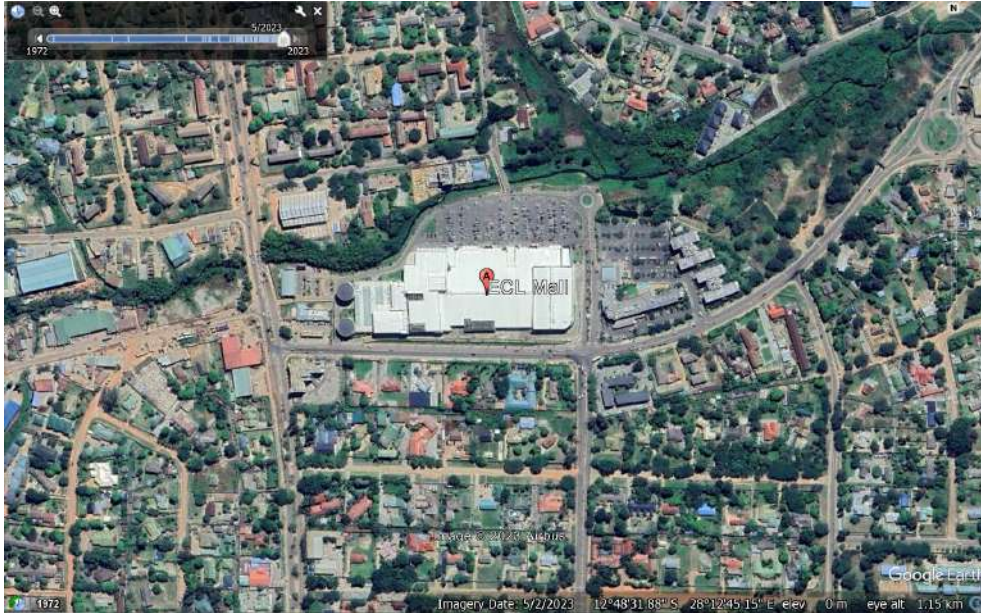


Figure 4.6. ECL mall now. Source: Google Earth 2023.

The Freedom Park mall as it was originally called was supposed to be the first mall in Kitwe in the mid-2000s. However, construction stalled as the promoters ran out of capital (Interview with Former Deputy Mayor, 23 November 2021). Therefore, it took too long to have a mall in Kitwe. The former deputy mayor stated that the initial construction of Freedom Park Mall had a restrictive clause, which restricted any mall developments within a 300-400m radius of the park (according to the former mayor). He explained how the city council found itself in a situation where the next piece of land they could build a mall was the zoo, but it was 200m away from Freedom Park and within the area covered by the restrictive clause. This legal wrangle slowed the development, while the promoters of Freedom Park mall went bankrupt and could not continue with the development. Construction stalled for more than a decade. Whatever had been built could neither be completed nor sold. Once the legal aspects of the development were sorted, Mukuba mall was built, and became the main centre of attraction and brought powerful anchor tenants, attracting even tenants from Copperhill. It was the best mall in Kitwe, and everyone rushed in and Copperhill became a ghost mall (Interview with Former Deputy Mayor, 23 November 2021). Commenting on the first development at ECL that failed, the architect who worked on ECL Mall does not know exactly where they went wrong as they could not progress much in the project. They could not complete the project in time and had to sell to NAPSA and his organisation were the construction architects and responsible for redesigning the mall into what it is today, with a hotel and office park. The architect directed that due to the time taken with the previous developer, it was important that with the new developer, the redesign was imminent because market trends had moved and/or changed as he noted that, “Quite several things had changed. So, a fresh design needed to be done and a new layout done to conform with the new trends.” (Interview with Architect, 18 May, 2021).

#### 4.4.2.2 *Impact of the malls*

The city of Kitwe has experienced rapid transformation and a replacement of its public spaces in the past decade. In-depth interviews, google forms, social media and observation all collectively and evidently support that Kitwe has experienced massive transformation and expanded rapidly in the past decade. While the google forms had a low response rate, 91.7% of the responses did indicate that Kitwe's infrastructure had changed in general while 58.3% felt that their neighbourhoods had significantly changed in the last 10 years. A further 66.7% of the respondents expressed that this was good for the city and the people.

#### 4.4.2.3 *Social impacts*

Respondents indicated that there were more options available for shopping as well as places to go with children over weekends and school holidays and the city in general was growing. Others noted that driving had become easier (with the road rehabilitation) and there was a wider range of medical facilities as well. The former pub owner provided a different insight into living within the inner radius of such a commercial entity. She states that a mall is a nice place, but it's shops, restaurants, and other activities it attracts produce a lot of noise pollution. She classified the noise as boy races, promotion activities from the shops, night noise from music in the restaurants and bars, music from activities in the car park, and fireworks associated with events like New Year's Day and other celebrations. The former pub owner also felt that accidents had become more prevalent around the Mukuba mall area, sometimes twice or three times a week before the speed humps and traffic lights were installed on Chandamali and Chiwala Avenue. There were complaints on social media of people being followed from the bank, isolated cases of break-ins into the car and valuables like stolen laptops and interactions with con-men. The Heriot Properties representative indicated that there had been isolated cases and complaints.

#### 4.4.2.4 *Economic impacts*

In Kitwe, the development of the shopping mall concept has brought some economic opportunities for some businesses and the community. A local architect expressed that for a mall to be successful, it should achieve many things in terms of design and aesthetics and, secondly, leasing and finding good tenants for the establishments (Interview with Architect). However, the challenge has been shops, especially international chains, downscaling before and during the covid-19 pandemic and the job losses associated. The Heriot Properties representative stated that malls increase neighbourhood values, attracting other developers and businesses into an area. She echoed that when you put up malls, you add value to the neighbourhood. This attracts other businesses and increases demand for land and properties resulting in people selling off to developers who convert these properties into commercial entities. Areas surrounding Mukuba and ECL have since become prime areas and lured in developers of all sorts to buy out almost all homeowners on Freedom Way and Chiwala Avenue leaving a few if any original homeowners. Interview respondents showed that the shopping malls have also increased revenues for public and private utilities and businesses for example, the city council, power companies, water utilities and waste management companies as the demand for these services increases. The increased land values also translate into increased rates, ground rent collection, trading,

and fire licences, among others. The town planner specified that the city council benefits from various taxes being charged before and after developing a parcel of land, such as the business levies and occupancy licences.

While most stakeholders indicated that the shopping mall infrastructure had not affected local businesses and markets, one respondent refutes this. For the pub owner who bought her house in 1998-1999 and is now a retired senior citizen, Mukuba mall killed her business and other small restaurants and drinking places. Due to the international chain shops brought by the mall, she lost her clientele, and business slowed and suffered losses, eventually closing down and letting go of her staff who had been with her for 15-16 years. Dirty Dickies or DD's as it was affectionately known, was a pub located across Kitwe Zoo, now Mukuba Mall.

The respondents revealed how the community and stakeholders have been viewing the job opportunities created by the urban redevelopment process. One of the city's mall centre managers indicated that the malls had created jobs and, in a way, have helped the government in its drive to create employment. Concerning the retailers like Shoprite and Pick n Pay, he believed that they have pushed the numbers up a bit. Furthermore, he believes that the Zambian people have high expectations for the malls; and expect their children to be employed in the shopping malls. Thus, the shops are employing Zambians and have contributed to employment, in their own way, and as mall management, he noted that they have created an avenue for the employment of local people (Interview with Mukuba mall centre manager

Responding to the contribution of malls to employment creation, the former deputy mayor specified that infrastructure development had created opportunities for locals through road and construction tenders as well as the supply of materials used in the roads and in turn these create employment opportunities. While there are some positive gains of malls, albeit infinitesimal to the layperson, malls have created jobs and increased revenues for the service providers. However, there are negatives as well, and from an operating point of view, it is sourcing materials for maintenance, as malls are not built from local materials; hence the replacement of products is a challenge (Interview with Heriot Properties Rep).

Another local resident felt that the construction jobs created were for a short period as construction *'happens and ends'* – meaning it has a fixed time and space and now has died down (Interview with local resident). Some people may gain experience and move to other fields, but these jobs come and go. In terms of jobs within the malls, she does not believe they are that labour-intensive to require the employment of large numbers of people; as these are shop attendants and cleaners. However, she brings out one crucial aspect, that; *'...In malls, women feel safer and happier working there than your other usual places. The jobs are the most basic, but at least at the end of the day, this is a job which wasn't there at first.'*

While this research identified a lower representation of women in infrastructure developments, she indicated that the malls are creating jobs that are female oriented and in a physical environment that is safe for them to work. However, still on employment a local architect explains that *'with the current employment deficit, I will definitely go with a plus for such developments.'* He believes that the development of malls has probably brought into the economy another 500-600 people within the city of Kitwe alone, people who would otherwise be on the streets and unemployed. Apart from direct employment, the architect argues that these developments create indirect

employment, the businesses that supply the malls, farms and other supplies. The architect also added that in terms of the quality of the jobs vis-à-vis the urban space and the infrastructure decay.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper aimed at explaining the transformation of the city of Kitwe and loss of public commons as the country redevelops and modernise its urban centres. The city of Kitwe has had challenges maintaining and rehabilitating these spaces and parks, and as long as they looked unkempt, they have attracted prying investors. Accelerated development and the demand for commercial establishments have threatened the existence of public commons. The rapid growth of urban centres indicates that such areas are experiencing increasing naturally and otherwise, and subsequent population demand is also resulting in the loss of public space. As more and more people come into urban areas to pursue socio-economic opportunities and several urgent needs in certain areas have been ignored, parks become targets as they are seen as passive open spaces that attract crime and vice and, therefore, should be developed into affluent areas.

While both shopping malls have not contributed any meaningful employment as was envisaged through the political rhetoric preceding their construction developments, they have resulted in convenient and diverse shopping for the city. The new city formations have stimulated the gentrification of the surrounding areas. Freedom Way and Chiwala Avenue Road frontage have experienced significant gentrification and land use changes that have replaced residential houses and apartments into office parks, upmarket residential apartments, offices, lodges, clinics, to mention a few. Similarly, the stretch of Kitwe Stream from the back of Freedom Park to the former Zoo were once upon a time stood residential houses and the park greenery, has been replaced by an array of new developments and land use. Many homeowners including some respondents have sold out their homes responding to the high demand for land and the increased land values.

Zambia's urbanisation phenomenon, coupled with natural population increase on the backdrop of municipality infrastructure mostly inherited from the colonial era, has city councils quite rightly trying to push in some new agendas. Available passive land will continue to be under threat for as long as local authorities do not see past the best value for money and into sentimental value for urban communities and the environment. Zambia's redevelopments are evolving and will require further understanding of this phenomenon and its impacts and the role of various actors, including mapping of the city.



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## Containment from Within.

### Women Entrepreneurs' Strategies for Accessing Public Space and Securing Livelihoods in Nairobi during COVID-19 Pandemic

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#### Abstract

The restrictions limiting social interaction and use of public space in Nairobi during the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected residents in poor urban communities, who are dependent on using streets, alleyways, and communal areas as extensions of their household spaces to secure livelihoods. This research focuses on how this situation has been handled by women entrepreneurs living in these communities, a group that literature suggests are among those most vulnerable. Kenyans are not unfamiliar with severe limitations and control. Restrictive and punitive measures have been regularly meted out by authorities in times of crisis. While we did find evidence of restrictions being highly detrimental to the livelihoods and incomes of the women, women were able to reorganise their income generation and expenditures in attempts to cope with the situation. They were, however, unable to come together to communally address grievances and challenges; they were barred from spaces of public, important platforms that aided group interests for the women pre-COVID-19 and allowed them to take part in placemaking. The women's abilities to cope were largely determined by the neighbourhoods they lived in, showing the need to understand and respond differently to the respective historical, social, and economic realities of these communities.

**Keywords:** women headed households, covid-19 restrictions, public space, livelihoods, women's organisations

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## **Introduction**

With the onset of COVID-19 in Kenya, Nairobi quickly went into lockdown. Curfews, social distancing, bans on gatherings, and limitations on mobility were meant to stop the spread of the virus. But these limitations on social interaction and access to public space quickly became an inordinate burden on the urban poor. Most urban poor in Kenya work in the informal economy and are dependent on daily social interactions in public spaces in order to maintain their livelihoods (Kinyanjui, 2019). In the poor settlements and neighbourhoods of Nairobi, trade in the informal sector is estimated to make up a significant proportion of the economy (Corburn et al., 2017). To women entrepreneurs especially, this 'home market' in local public spaces is of vital importance (Kinyanjui, 2014). In the informal economy in Sub-Saharan Africa, the largest 'group' is women (Bonnet et al., 2019). Through interviews with women entrepreneurs in Pumwani and Mukuru kwa Reuben, two poor neighbourhoods a few kilometres from the city centre, we found that the restrictions had not only severely affected their incomes, but also that bans on gathering and limited access to public spaces bereaved the women of the ability to organise and claim their place in their communities. The women thus attempted to find workarounds to regain both incomes and standing.

Leaning on a reading of public space as a workplace and democratic space, this research compares women entrepreneurs' responses to COVID-19 restrictions with historical research on women's place in Nairobi, their organisation and use of space, and the history of public control in Kenya. It examines the potentials and limitations of women entrepreneurs' organising during the pandemic and looks at the historical strategies the women employ in attempts to regain societal positions lost during the pandemic.

### *Uses and framing of public space*

Families living in poor urban neighbourhoods in Nairobi have access to limited amenities in the rooms they rent. Their private spheres thus extend into public spaces. In Pumwani and Mukuru kwa Reuben – the two neighbourhoods in this research – many daily chores like cooking, washing, and socialising are carried out outside. In such neighbourhoods, streets, alleyways, setbacks, washing facilities, roadsides, and marketplaces are all important spaces of interaction. Like all public spaces they are of social and political significance, and hold democratic potential (Madanipour, 2020, p. 7). But public space needs to be understood within the specific and prevailing social and cultural order in which they are situated (Brown, 2006, p. 20). In poor neighbourhoods, public spaces are also workplaces, and "a key element in the livelihoods of the urban poor" (Brown, 2006, p. 17), where produce, wares, and services are sold to passers-by. Hence, public spaces in Nairobi are not only spaces of social interaction or leisure. They are also important spaces of economy. This mix of use of public space is overlooked to privilege parks and sports grounds that are driven by western ideas of leisure and socialisation. (Myers, 2020, p. 152). To counter this, Roji (2020) suggests a reframing of public spaces as spaces of publics; shifting focus from physical to social contexts. In Nairobi, this concept would also need to be framed in relation to the historical and structural specificities of settlements. While settlements in Nairobi often are considered to have similar physical conditions and socio-economic makeups, spaces of public mean different things in Pumwani and Mukuru kwa Reuben. Pumwani is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Nairobi, still imbued in Swahili culture, with social networks going back decades. Mukuru is a relatively new settlement, but because of its growth, also one of the largest and densest in Nairobi. A comparative study of Pumwani and Mukuru shows clear differences in socio-economic markers between the neighbourhoods, with Pumwani residents scoring better on e.g. education levels and average incomes, while also having



longer durations of residency (Ese et al., 2021). Based on previous research on the historical diversity of African neighbourhoods in colonial Nairobi (Ese and Ese 2020), we suggest in this study that the specific organisational structures of neighbourhoods greatly influence women's relation to and use of public space. Women in Pumwani have been central in forming networks and relations that make up the socio-economic backbone of their communities. This goes back some 100 years, not only built around the daily interactions and activities of its residents, but also governed by very specific historical institutions and is intrinsically connected to its streets as public spaces (Hake, 1977). In Mukuru, the same forms of socio-economic networks and relations are important, but with a much shorter history, governed by new forms of community organisation. These different forms of organisation can in both instances be seen as ways for the Government to control communities and their spatial developments; control mechanisms that were rendered more visible by COVID-19 containment efforts.

#### *Limiting access to public space in Kenya*

Kenyan governments, both colonial and post-colonial, have a history of politically motivated containments, affecting people's access to public spaces. Curfews have mainly been implemented due to political unrest, as was the case after the coup attempt in 1982 (Hornsby, p. 379), and to control the public in Kisumu in the aftermath of the 2007 election (Gettleman, 2007). However, no place in the country has been more affected by state-sanctioned curfews, lockdowns, and policing than northern Kenya (Halakhe and Kochore, 2020). Currently, curfews have been reintroduced in areas attacked by Al Shabab in Lamu, Mandera, Garissa, and Tana (Praxides and Gari, 2020). The legacy of curfews springs out of the colonial control measures that made lives increasingly difficult for Nairobi's citizens towards the end of the colonial era (Ese and Ese, 2020). Recent decades show an increasing use of restrictions, brutality, and abuse, particularly against people working in the informal economy, with police violence escalating after the multiparty state was implemented in 1992. NGOs reports and news coverage document how police round ups, beatings, shootings, forced evictions, harassment, and fees or fines are common (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Restrictive measures, meant to hinder the spread of COVID-19, were ushered in at an early stage in the pandemic in Kenya. Hotels and restaurants were ordered to close their businesses, curfew was in effect from 8pm to 4am and later adjusted from 10pm to 4am, masks and one metre social distancing were required, and social gatherings were initially banned. Public transport buses and matatus (minibuses) were forced to halve their number of passengers. Sources highlight how the upholding of restrictions entailed police brutality. Several deaths and beatings were reported (Namu and Riley, 2020), as was people having to pay bribes to get home from work (Kiruga, 2020). COVID-19 and a fear of authorities turned Nairobi into a "city on edge, as its 4.4 million residents try to avoid getting infected from coronavirus during the day, during the dusk-to-dawn curfew, they try to avoid police brutality." (Kiruga, 2020).

The restrictions on social behaviour from the Government, coupled with the realities of living in poor urban neighbourhoods, led to untenable situations for many. In Gikomba market traders reported that it was impossible to maintain social distancing (Apollo and Njau, 2020), which was also the case elsewhere in densely populated settlements in the eastern parts of the city. While physical contacts decreased by around 60% in informal settlements in the early stages of the pandemic, people in the poorest socio-economic groups had more physical contacts than people in wealthier segments (Qaife et al, 2020). Negative economic effects were reported – especially among the urban poor. In markets,

an import ban crippled informal traders in need of goods, while customers were few (Apollo and Njau, 2020). Statistics from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) suggest that the pandemic hurt women in the informal economy more than men (KNBS, 2020). Such statistics are backed by others who conclude that poor women-led households are more likely to suffer adversely from the socio-economic losses incurred as a result of curbing measures (SPAU, 2020; Pinchoff, 2021).

#### *Women entrepreneurs*

For the purpose of this research, it is useful to understand how women use public space for their livelihoods. “Women constitute an important constituency of the urban population and the majority are in the informal economy,” states Kinyanjui: “One cannot speak of the informal economy in Africa without thinking about women. Urban markets in Nairobi, Lagos and Accra are dominated by women” (2014, p. 1). In sub-Saharan Africa, in 2016, over 95% of women workers and 89% of men workers were employed in the informal sector (Bonnet et al., 2019, p. 11). While women comprised 20% of Nairobi’s population in 1948, this was closer to 50% in 2009 (Kinyanjui, 2014, p. 43). Women dominate food vending, but also work in other trades, selling mitumba (second-hand) clothes and shoes, brewing beer, running dukas (kiosks), and hairdressing. Since many women are the only breadwinners in households with several dependents, women traders are less mobile and choose to have their business closer to home to do housework and look after children. The latter is important due to the lack of security in many slum areas (Agevi and Mbatha, 2011, pp. 33-46). Running a small business closer to home can create stronger relations with customers and may entail reduced levels of harassment by local authorities, as compared to vending in town (Mitullah, 2010). Women are also less likely to access jobs, and on average have a lower education (Gulyani et al, 2006, p. 21). But in contrast to male headed households, “female-headed households appear to have devised coping strategies that are helping them offset some of the liabilities associated with poor access to jobs and education” (2006, p. 22). Compared to male-headed households, women-headed households have lower expenditures, they are less likely to be sending remittances, they have a higher proportion of adult females in the household, they are more likely to be operating a household micro-enterprise, and less likely to have family members who are unemployed. Women headed households also have, on average, longer durations of stay in their neighbourhoods, negatively correlated with poverty. They also have a higher percentage of home ownership (pp. 21-21).

To understand why women headed households seem to have devised such coping strategies, we need to look at the history of marginalisation of women in Nairobi. While men were sought by colonial (and post-colonial) employers, women had to actively carve out a place for themselves in urban society. Women have undergone formidable struggles in the search for space and opportunity in Nairobi. Long-term strategizing became important to claiming their place. (Bujra, 1975; White, 1990; Ngesa, 1996; Robertson, 1997).

Historically, women coming to Nairobi played an important part in providing food to the city’s residents. But women who migrated to Nairobi were often defined as sex workers and repatriated to their rural communities (Robertson, 1997). Through colonial laws, police harassment, arrests and bribes, women were prohibited from taking part in urban developments. “Women’s movement in the city was controlled on the grounds of morality and colonial labor policies that preferred men over women” says Kinyanjui (2014, p. 63). In 1935 hawking was totally forbidden in Central Nairobi (Ngesa, 1996, p. 90). The city proper was thus off-limits to women traders who were criminalised as a result. Instead, women increasingly focused on the settlements in which they lived, surrounding the city centre. In

the 1930s and 1940s over 40% of house owners were women in the two legal African settlements of Pangani and Pumwani (Carter, 1934, p. 1129; Bujra, 1975, p. 130). Both trade and sex work were the foundations for this structural change in women's positions (White, 1990). A study from 1972-74 shows how women in Mathare (another large slum area in Nairobi) strategically created alliances and possibilities for themselves within the settlements "without the mediation and control of males". They were "participating in political activity and forming solidarity groups," in addition to trading in smaller quantities and in cheaper goods than their male counterparts – a strategy well suited for residents in the settlements (Nelson, 1978, pp. 386, 393).

#### *Organisational structures in Nairobi's settlements*

Social movements and organisations have, since the 1940s, been important to women's position in urban society in Kenya. These organisations were established in response to opposition between men and women's trading interests, rural-urban distinctions, or preconceptions of women's role in society. (Kinyanjui, 2019, pp. 33-34; White, 1990, p. 191; Ese and Ese, 2020, p. 123-124). Local welfare organisations recruited women for social gatherings, while also playing a political role during strikes and demonstrations from the early 1920s to the 1950s (Ese and Ese, 2020). Women in Nairobi also participated in Mau Mau<sup>1</sup> as gun runners, organisers, and freedom fighters (Itote, 1967). After independence, the authorities plied close relations to the wananchi (the public) through a grassroots movement called harambee (pulling together). Kenyatta adopted the concept for nation building purposes, encouraging communities to work together to raise funds for schools, health- or welfare centres (Moga, 1984; K'olale, 1992; Hornsby, 2012, p. 138). Harambee has been closely associated with ideas of mutual assistance, social responsibility, and communal self-reliance (K'olale, 1992, p. 96), and is built around women lead traditions of organising social relations in pre-colonial and colonial times (Moga, 1984; Kinyanjui, 2019). The vyama (plural for chama) of today functions in similar ways. Although built around concepts of economic self-help, the vyama are central to community building in settlements. In addition to vyama structures, other institutions have been important to women. In Pumwani, St. John's Community Centre and the Riyadhha Mosque have built their relationships with the area's women over decades. Together with the Chief's Camp<sup>2</sup>, they control much of the community today (Ese and Ese, 2020). As Pumwani was established by Muslims, the Mosque and Muslim organisations have been cornerstones in the community, be it socially, religiously, or economically. St. John's established itself in Pumwani in the 1950s and became a significant institution for the growing Christian population in Pumwani. St John's has developed economic and educational support systems for residents, focusing particularly on girls and women. The Chief's Camp has amongst others been integral to the spatial development of Pumwani, in essence governing the use of streetscapes, and providing allowances for physical extensions to landlords and licences to traders (Ese, 2014). Home to around 25,000 residents<sup>3</sup>, Pumwani is one of Nairobi's oldest and poorest neighbourhoods. Established as the first official African settlement in 1922, northeast of the city centre, its mud and wattle housing have formal roots. It is surrounded by several unplanned settlements, but also some of the first planned African middle-class

<sup>1</sup> A war over land rights waged by Kikuyu, Meru, and Embu fighters against British authorities (1952-1960).

<sup>2</sup> The lowest level of public administration in the Kenyan system.

<sup>3</sup> Population numbers in Nairobi are contentious. We have used the Kenya 2019 Census + 30%, derived from the average between two in-depth Kibera population counts (Desgroppes and Taupin, 2011; Marras et al, 2008). Using different methods, one concluded that the population in Kibera was 20% higher than the Kenya 2009 Census, the other 40%.

neighbourhoods. Adjacent to Pumwani is Gikomba (1972), the biggest market in the city. Pumwani has several permanent shops with a variety of commercial activities along the streets. The houses are privately owned, half of which are absentee landlords, with most residents renting rooms. Pumwani's history is part of its residents' collective memory where women have played a central role in the development of the community as landlords, sex workers, and traders. Bujra (1973) and White (1991) show how women were not repressed in such roles, but held positions of influence, passing down property ownership to daughters and other women up until today. Women's connection to power and their use of public space is thus more established in Pumwani than in newer settlements such as Mukuru kwa Reuben.

Mukuru kwa Reuben is a part of the Mukuru area. Mukuru as a whole has around 185,000 residents<sup>4</sup>, and is one of the largest and fastest growing areas in Nairobi, primarily made up of informally built structures. Established in the post-independence era, it is also much newer than Pumwani. In the 1980s, the government allocated some of the land in Mukuru to private owners for light industry, but as it remained largely undeveloped, illegally built housing was erected. The area is bisected by the Railways, Ngong River, several major roads, and surrounded by industries. This makes access to services difficult. A large number of NGOs and faith-based institutions have invested in schools, clinics, and community centres, but housing is temporary and of very poor quality. As in most slums, electricity, clean water and toilet facilities are scarce. The area lacks green spaces, playgrounds, and spaces for economic activities such as markets. Most of the commercial activity in Mukuru (worth Ksh 7 billion) takes place along the area's roads and lanes (Corburn et al., 2017; Makau et al., 2020). In 2017 Mukuru was declared a Special Planning Area (SPA), allowing for upgrading strategies. The SPA is one of the largest informal settlement upgrading processes in the city. It is a participatory process involving Nairobi County Government and over 40 organisations with representation from Mukuru residents, such as the advocacy movement Muungano wa Wanavijiji (1996) supported by larger international NGOs (Marano, 2022). Through the SPA, the Government has built up and tested alternative ways of running the Mukuru neighbourhoods through government channels and grassroots organisations.

But all developments in Mukuru are not designed to provide for its residents. At the hands of private and government interests, large-scale infrastructure projects aimed at serving the city and its industry threatens Mukuru's housing and residents. Despite residents' focus on protesting these development projects, it has resulted in forced evictions and demolitions. With its long-cemented structures of leases, temporary housing, and cultural hegemony, Pumwani does not face the same spectre of transitions and modernisation.

### **Methods and data**

This research utilises an explorative approach that relies on both qualitative primary data and secondary data pertaining to women and containment in poor urban neighbourhoods. Our data stems from in-depth interviews with single mother traders in Nairobi in November and December 2020. Candidates for interviews were selected with the purpose of gaining information-rich (Patton, 2002) data related to previous research described above, while also fitting our own research questions pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic. We wanted to know how COVID-19 restrictions were affecting women living in poor neighbourhoods, who were dependent on self-generated (informal) income activities (or were employed by others in the same situation), and were sole breadwinners in households

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

with several dependents. The candidates were chosen because they share traits and life situations that render them among those thought of as society's "most vulnerable" in line with statistical research with opposing conclusions by Gulyani et al (2006), SPAU (2020), and Pinchoff (2021). The candidates also fit descriptions of low-income women entrepreneurs in Nairobi-specific research by e.g. Kinyanjui (2014, 2019) and Mitullah (2010) who used public space close to home for income generating activities (Brown, 2006). As our questions related to feelings regarding government containment strategies and effects on livelihoods, qualitative, in-depth interviews were considered a sound approach to collecting data. A total of 12 participants were interviewed. As Nairobi's poor neighbourhoods are varied, we were also interested in whether the neighbourhoods the women lived in made any difference, e.g. housing conditions, spatial layouts, or social structures. We therefore compared the responses of six women living in Mukuru with six women living in Pumwani. We attempted to represent a cross section of age groups. Five of the women were in their 20s, three in their 30s, two in their 40s, and two in their 60s. The women interviewed worked in a variety of trades, all within the informal sector, either as self-employed, employed by others, or as self-employed with employees. They worked with the sale of food, hairdressing, second hand clothing, construction materials, and as artists. One lived elsewhere but worked in Pumwani. Most interviewees from Pumwani operated from fixed locations (e.g. Gikomba Market, stalls in neighbourhood, or from home), while most interviewees in Mukuru were street vendors in the neighbourhoods where they lived. Participants living in Mukuru were contacted by one author, while participants from Pumwani were contacted by another. Both authors live in Nairobi and are fluent in Swahili. The authors utilized a common set of guiding questions for the interviews. Most of the interviews were carried out in Swahili, while some were a mix of Swahili and English. All the interview responses were transcribed into English. We also carried out spatial observations, noting the state of public spaces where the interviewees were conducting business. Out of ethical considerations, the interviewees were first briefed on the purpose of the study and their consent to participate obtained before conducting the interview. Their real identities were anonymised and pseudonyms assigned to them for reference purposes. The verbatim raw interview responses were not uploaded onto any shareable database for data security reasons. With the ongoing pandemic, the interviews were conducted in strict adherence with health guidelines including to keep social distance, wear masks and use hand sanitisation.

The data is presented and analysed in light of the earlier raised questions and the established theoretical framework. The data is collated to establish the coping trends in response to the Pandemic containment and organised in different themes for both presentation and analysis including: COVID-19 and work, assistance, ability to adapt, ability to participate locally, feelings about restrictions and authorities. A comparative analysis is also undertaken for Pumwani and Mukuru in order to establish the correlation between coping mechanisms and the social, physical and governance contexts.

## Results

Table I provides an overview of basic comparable data. Interviewees coded "P" are from Pumwani while interviewees coded "M" are from Mukuru. In addition to highlighting their education, family, and work status, the table also briefly lists the type of assistance they receive, and their ability to organise. These issues are covered in depth in the results and analysis sections, where interviewee numbers are also continually referenced.

Table I. Overview of basic comparable data.

No	Age	Education	Relationship status	Depend-ents	Work status	Type of work	Work location	Assisted by	Ability to organise
P1	28	College	Single mother	2	Self employed	Second hand timber	Stall in market	Family, other traders, community	None currently
P2	35	Secondary	Single provider (spouse in rural)	3	Self employed	Hair salon/ barber shop	Shop	Savings group, renegotiated tax payment	Belongs to several women's groups
P3	60	Secondary	Married	3+1	Self employed	Makes food	From house	Self-help group, family, Mosque	Involved St. John's programs
P4	32	Secondary	Single mother	3	Self employed	Serves food	Kibanda in market	Savings group, Chief	Involved in community issues and protests
P5	64	College	Single mother	4+2	Self employed	Makes food	From house	Self-help group, family, St. John's	Belongs to self-help and savings groups. Member Nyumba Kumi
P6	46	Secondary	Single mother	6	Employer	Fishmonger	Stall in market	SACCO	Member Kenya Union Workers, involved in protests
M7	28	Secondary	Married	1	Employer	Hair salon	Shop	Other traders, NGO	Participates in meetings about settlement development
M8	25	Secondary	Single mother	1	Self employed	Mitumba clothing	Hawks in street	Other traders, NGO	Chama, protests against demolition
M9	27	Secondary	Single mother	1	Employee	Graphics on matatus	-	Brother	None
M10	26	Secondary	Single mother	3	Self employed	Serves food (porridge)	Hawks in street	Negotiated rent	Protests
M11	43	Secondary	Single mother	1+2	Self employed	Sells tomatoes	Stall (hawks)	Chama	Neighbours



No	Age	Education	Relationship status	Depend-ents	Work status	Type of work	Work location	Assisted by	Ability to organise
P1	28	College	Single mother	2	Self employed	Second hand timber	Stall in market	Family, other traders, community	None currently
						and onions	during pandemic)		
M12	32	Secondary	Single mother	2	Self employed	Mitumba clothing	Hawks in street	None	Belongs to grassroots org for road upgrading

### COVID-19 and work

All the women had been adversely affected by COVID-19 and restrictions. Several of the interviewees experienced a 50 per cent reduction of income (P1, P4, P5, P6, M7, M10, M12). Others had their incomes cut by two-thirds or had incomes that were “very low” (P2, P3, M8, M11). One had been laid off because of closures (M9). The low incomes were directly related to restrictions: there were limitations on using public spaces, meaning that the women could not operate the way they did prior to the pandemic. There were restrictions on the way they operated their stalls as well as restrictions on business hours. There were disruptions in provision of goods, and there were fewer people using public spaces, and therefore fewer potential clients. Some of the women believed their business was low because their line of work, e.g. hairdressing, or sale of clothes were not considered essential by customers during the crisis (P2, M7, M8, M12).

The added difficulties of the pandemic resulted in varied views on future prospects among the women. Some were weary and had given up their plans. “Everyone is fighting for survival,” said one interviewee (M10). With increased competition she had “lost hope in advancing the business.” Some of the interviewees mentioned that they knew people who had left the city for rural areas (M10, M11). Others were more entrenched, stating that they would persevere: “The business started going down. But I don’t stop,” said one who sold food for a living, taking care of three children and an ailing husband (P3). Even though she lost most of her income, she was hopeful she would get through: “I solve the challenges on my own,” she said, pointing out that “right now, everyone has their own issues”. Several of the women pointed out that they had taken precautionary measures to avoid the spread of COVID-19, such as providing hand sanitising, demanding mask wearing, or limiting the number of clients (P4, P6, M7, M10, M12). One interviewee (M12), who dealt in *mitumba* clothing, provided information that clothes did not transmit COVID-19. Another, a fishmonger in Gikomba market (P6), kept water and soap outside her stall. Clients were not allowed to come close without a face mask. “For us who deal with food we have to be very careful,” she said.

### Assistance and ability to adapt

As a result of restrictions, a few of the women had diversified their business (P1, P4, M9). “I added selling fruit” said one interviewee (P1). She sold second hand timber for construction, but both supply and demand were cut due to restrictions. “If I depend on the timber business then I will have to pack my things and go back to the village,” she

concluded. Others changed tactics of doing business, e.g. by walking longer routes to sell produce, laying off employees, or extending hours, sleeping nights in the workplace, and changing production times (e.g. food preparation) to better fit within the limits of curfew. Some interviewees had to raise prices to compensate for increased expenses on delivery of goods (M8, M12), while others decided to absorb the increase by lowering profit margins (P5, P6). Others again provide credit or instalment payments, running the risk of customers defaulting (P5, P6, M10, M11).

Several of the women also took measures to renegotiate their tax payments with local authorities, postponed housing rents, froze outstanding debts, or took up new loans with a lower interest from their *chama* (P4, P6, M7, M10, M12). For some this proved a reprieve. Some were also supported by relatives or grown children (P1, P3, P5, M9), and yet others (P1, P4, P5, M7, M8, M10) received support from authorities, NGOs, or faith-based institutions (St. John's or Riyadhha Mosque in Pumwani). Others were not as fortunate. One interviewee downscaled her *mitumba* clothing business once the pandemic hit, but with mounting expenses she was afraid she no longer could support her two children (M12). She developed ulcers and was diagnosed with high blood pressure as a result of the strain. Another interviewee was laid off, kicked out of her rented room, and was unable to secure enough food for herself and her child (M9).

#### *Ability to participate locally*

While some mentioned that neighbours were helpful in times of crisis, others listed their fellow traders as a group on which they depended (P1, P6, M8). Most mentioned that they were involved in *vyama* or SACCOS<sup>5</sup>, but that convening and planning has been seriously hampered by restrictions (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, M7, M8, M11, M12). Digital workarounds were insufficient. "In church, there is Skype and WhatsApp that we use to meet online," explained one interviewee (M9): "but for the *chama* we have to meet because the available technology options are not adequate." The lack of contact points was a problem beyond the *chama*, she indicated: "I don't feel like I have all the information right now. Before the onset of COVID-19, I was up to date with what was going on. I cannot afford to go online and access information updates." Many of the interviewees were actively involved in community work before the pandemic, or participated in Chief's *Barazas* (public meetings) in order to secure water provision, standing up against police brutality, petitioning for better garbage collection, or improving schooling opportunities for children. A few of the women (P3, P5) belong to faith-based institutions doing outreach work in Pumwani, or were committee members in *Nyamba Kumi*<sup>6</sup>, unions (P5), or *Kazi Mtaani*<sup>7</sup> (P6). Most mentioned being cut off from such activities during the pandemic (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, M7, M8, M10, M12). "I have previously attended community meetings to talk about security and children's rights, but this was before Corona," said one interviewee (P4). "Most women have been empowered," said another (P2): "We participate in many activities in the community. (...) But now, because of Corona there are no activities." This was echoed by yet another woman (P3): "I have been so much involved [in community issues], but when Corona came it stopped." It was not just restrictions on meetings that kept the women from organising. Fear of reprisals also weighed heavily. "I would say there is a general fear

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<sup>5</sup> Savings and Credit Cooperatives.

<sup>6</sup> A model of community policing. Neighbourhoods are organised in groups of 10 households. The initiative is designed for citizens to know their neighbours, their activities, and report anything suspicious, especially crime and terrorism.

<sup>7</sup> A work program initiated by the government during the pandemic.

to organise and participate in protest because of the likely confrontation with the police,” said an interviewee living in Mukuru (M12).

Many of the women had a history of participating in public demonstrations (P4, P5, P6, M8), rallying against what they considered to be unjust treatment of their communities. Two (M9, M10) had participated in protests regarding unjust treatment during the pandemic, but felt, similarly to others (M8, M11), that their protests did not matter much: “Programs are usually planned from outside. When community grievances are voiced, they aren’t sufficiently addressed,” said one woman (M11). Another (M10) felt the leadership in the community was corrupt and was critical of the handling of assistance. Still, her daily troubles concerned her more: Clients defaulting on credit, aggressive drunks, landlords demanding rent, competition among vendors, and fewer customers.

#### *Feelings about restrictions*

While the restrictions imposed were clearly detrimental to the women’s livelihoods, most of them felt that restrictions were necessary (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, M7, M8, M10, M12). “If people are not serious [about restrictions] Corona may not go away. It is important to follow guidelines,” concluded one (P5). Even though most agreed to restrictions being necessary, compliance sometimes seemed to be out of fear. “I follow restrictions. I don’t have a choice,” said an interviewee who travelled to work and claimed she risked being beaten by police if she was not home before curfew (P2): “It’s running battles,” she complained, indicating that she may be critical of police actions. Another woman (P1) concurred: “The police help in curbing crime but use excessive force. They kill small boys”. Others had different opinions: “Police are more friendly now and don’t arrest people aimlessly. But they will beat them up for not complying with restrictions,” said a woman in Pumwani (P1). “There is no harassment by police without cause,” comments an interviewee (M7), indicative of a shared sentiment among several women: *Others* living in the settlements were the ones who did not follow guidelines. An interviewee (P6) with a stall in Pumwani said that: “Government should be strict with restrictions and not compromise. They should put harsh penalties for those who get caught.” She maintained that she complied with government guidelines and restrictions and was afraid of losing her business licence if people got infected at her stall.

Others claimed that the police were not present in the communities. “I haven’t seen anyone coming to enforce,” said one woman from Mukuru (M8). “People have been left to take responsibility.” Indeed, many of the women we interviewed were taking responsibility, either through being present in the neighbourhood watching their own and others’ children, or through formal positions.

#### *Feelings about authorities*

Despite finding restrictions necessary and being positive to enforcement, the women’s views varied considerably regarding the authorities who implemented restrictions, and the local authorities overseeing developments in the communities. Several of the women, most in Mukuru, saw connections between their precarious situation, their limited possibilities to do something about it, and the actions of people in power (P2, P6, M8, M9, M11, M12). The women considered these people to be directly contributing to their adverse situation. Other women, most in Pumwani, were also in a precarious situation with limited recovery options (P1, P3, P4, P5, M7, M10). But while they agreed that authorities sometimes were corrupt, they were much more positive to, and supportive of, authorities. Some said they had little choice though, living at the mercy of those in power. Because one of the entrepreneurs (P1) did not have a proper licence to operate her business, she needed to

bribe County government representatives each week. “To avoid getting our business ruined we just comply,” she said. Another woman agreed (P4): “For us we have to follow what the government says”. Several others implied that their businesses were non-licensed.

One interviewee felt that assistance in Mukuru has been fraught with favouritism (M8). Others (P2, P5, M11) also suggested that bribes or networks could be important to getting handouts, getting selected for work programs, or getting away with not complying with restrictions.

Some felt that the authorities did not care about the added challenges COVID-19 brought to poor neighbourhoods. “The [County government] doesn't want to know if there is Corona or not. When they come you have to pay taxes,” said one interviewee (P2). While some were angry about this, others seemed to have resigned: “If it's something that doesn't affect me directly, then I don't bother. I just let the Government be Government,”

lamented one woman (M9), who felt the restrictions were illogical and only hurt the poor. Another concurred (M11): “Students lost a year, and people [living here] can't congregate. But politicians hold rallies,” she points out. The same is echoed by yet another woman (P6), who felt there was a disconnect between restrictions on people and business in the settlements and politicians who held rallies.

Others felt that the Chief's representatives were on their side. One interviewee (P3) claimed that “the Chief and his administration are always there when you need them.” During the pandemic, she said, the Chief's office donated food: “[They] went door to door and were able to identify the needy.” Still, with different levels of government in the Kenyan system, those that were positive to the Chief's representatives could be critical of County government, and vice versa. “I live well with (...) government representatives,” said a woman in Mukuru (M10), while being critical of local handling of projects and assistance. A woman from Pumwani (P3) held an opposing view: “The Chief is on our side. They may be corrupt, but at least they follow up on issues. But for the [County government], we can blame them.”

## Analysis

The interviewees were a heterogeneous group. They represent a cross section of the socio-economic aspirations – and limitations – of entrepreneurial women living in poor settlements in Nairobi. All the women we interviewed had spent considerable time and resources trying to remodel their business to adapt to the crisis. They all provided clear analyses of their situations, and the state of the community during the pandemic. While the virus was something new, the responses of the women indicated that adaptive thinking was something they were all accustomed to. Research by White (1990), Ngesa (1996), Robertson (1997), Mitullah (2010), and Kinyanjui (2014) shows the necessity of adaptive strategies among women and women headed households who have often operated on the margins of society. Ngesa, Mitullah, and Kinyanjui also point out that women are *locally* based, and wholly dependent on public spaces in or near their communities to maintain livelihoods. While media focus has been on curbing measures affecting trade in the city centre and the larger markets (e.g. Namu and Riley, 2020; Kiruga, 2020; Apollo and Njau, 2020), our interviews suggest that in order to better cater for the needs of women headed households in poor communities, focus needs to shift towards the use of and access to *their* local public spaces, taking into account the heterogeneity of both women and places. Our research highlights the convergence between livelihoods and public space as noted by e.g. Brown (2006) and Roji (2020). Restrictions on the use of, and access to public spaces hindered the women we interviewed from carrying out their trade, while limiting the

number of customers. This interaction is central to the dynamics and development of public spaces in communities like Pumwani and Mukuru kwa Reuben. By limiting these encounters, and with the women being barred from using public spaces for congregating and organising, we are witnessing a deterioration of what Madanipour (2020) refers to as the social and political importance of public space, and its democratic potential. Self-help groups like *vyama* or SACCOs, as well as trade organisation meetings, were important community platforms for the women, allowing them to discuss common grievances and plan futures. The use of public spaces for *barazas* or protests were equally important to some of the women to take part in place making. Barring people from partaking in physical platforms may have been necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19, but the effects were socio-economically alarming, decentring the women's access to what Roji (2020) refers to as spaces of public. The restrictions effectively turned the women we interviewed in Pumwani and Mukuru kwa Reuben away from the daily production of space, important to the development of such neighbourhoods. They were relegated from being actors in their communities to becoming inward looking, focusing on their immediate challenges, hygiene measures, household spaces and shared courtyards.

While all the women saw the connections between restrictions and their own precarious situation, the majority were in favour of curbing measures. As breadwinners in households with children, they were caught in an impossible balancing act between maintaining an income and protecting themselves and their children. Most of the women also scolded others for not following regulations. In part, this might be explained by an understandable fear of the virus itself. But it also points to something deeper. Country government authorities, the Chief's camp, landlords, NGOs, faith-based institutions, and the *nyumba kumi* initiative are all actively controlling the settlements where the women live. Women were either members of such entities, or dependent on their support or favour. Bound in a non-reciprocal relationship with authorities, some felt forced to keep on their good terms, while others saw themselves as part of a system of control, consisting of a range of actors, citing moral obligations as reasons for upholding restrictive measures. Thus, the women themselves became active participants in a control system as watchful neighbours and good citizens. Being poor and female in Nairobi leaves the women with few arenas of power. Showcasing moral superiority during the pandemic allowed them to partially bypass restrictive traditions, allowing for a certain degree of assertion and position in their local communities. Such approaches among women in Nairobi are well-documented by Robertson (1997) and White (1990). This counter common perceptions of communities like Pumwani and Mukuru developing in an uncontrolled fashion, and corroborates findings by e.g. Nelson (1973), Ese (2014), and Mukeku (2014) indicating that so-called informal settlements in Nairobi are thoroughly regulated by multiple control structures.

Keeping on good terms with authorities, playing to win the favour of those in power, or simply letting things slide so as not to be seen as a part of the problem, are documented historical long-term strategies to get through difficulties and crises, especially in women headed households in Nairobi (White, 1990; Bujra, 1975; Robertson, 1997). Many of the interviewees operated their trade without the proper licences. They were at the mercy of authorities, paying bribes to get by. Research by Mitullah (2003) indicates that women traders often find licences too expensive, the process too difficult, or are afraid of harassment in the process. Those who voiced criticisms of authorities were careful not to chide the system itself, but rather vented their frustration with individuals in middle management directly responsible for the fate of their business, e.g. the representative collecting bribes, signing off on licences, etc. These women had invested considerably in

physical structures (most of them in Pumwani) like stalls or salons, and in equipment, and were afraid of losing their investments.

Although women-headed households in these communities are often reduced to one category in analysis that highlights vulnerabilities (KNBS, 2020; SPAU, 2020; Pinchoff, 2021), this research shows how such households cope very differently with crises. While all interviewees experienced increased difficulties as a result of the pandemic and lockdown measures, some had, in line with Gulyani et al's (2006) findings, devised coping strategies and demonstrated a flexibility that enabled them to absorb setbacks better than others. Others were less able.

To this, geographic location mattered. There were persistent and large differences between how the women in Pumwani and Mukuru coped. These two communities have different histories and organisation with implications for women's ability to organise, use public space, and connect to power. This is in line with Bergby et al's (2021) comparative research in Pumwani and Mukuru. The women in Pumwani were better connected, had larger networks, and more fallback options than those in Mukuru. They worked in more permanent forms (fixed location stalls instead of street vending), were better equipped to diversify their business, and had on average invested more in their livelihoods. While there has been a tendency of treating poor neighbourhoods in Nairobi as homogeneous, our results show that they are varied. Sources that empirically analyse such neighbourhoods (e.g. Bujra, 1973; Nelson, 1976; Smith, 2019) come to the same conclusion.

Our interviews show an important distinction between *external* and *internal* economic support in the two communities. In Mukuru the women were more dependent on economic aid from the outside. In Pumwani the women garnered economic support through self-organised savings groups. The tenacity of these group structures can be attributed to Pumwani's community identity, and women's historical role in society. The legacy of Kenyatta and Harambee still persists. As does the memory of the political activism of women's groups in the 1960s and 1970s. The historically prominent Mosque, St. John's, and Chief structures were in charge of programs and initiatives that the women we interviewed partook in or depended on. It is therefore not surprising that the Pumwani interviewees to a large degree accepted these institutions and their governing of crisis. Many Pumwani interviewees see themselves and their fellow women entrepreneurs as pillars in the community, and also as patriots; an integral part of Kenya's history of independence

In Mukuru the women lacked internal, self-generated savings structures and distrusted the prominent power structures in the area. They were sceptical of SPA intervention which they believed did not work for them. And they were more vocal on criticism of the government. This can be attributed to the pressures exerted on Mukuru through development projects. While Pumwani has retained a rare position as an island of "non-development" in Nairobi, Mukuru has seen developments happen through the SPA that greatly impacts social, cultural, and economic ways of life for residents. Women in Pumwani partook in protests related to local issues within the community, while in Mukuru the struggle for public space was more intense. It is the uncertainty of the consequences of these developments, including demolition and related changes, that the women we interviewed in Mukuru were facing. They were sceptical to these projects and claimed that participatory processes were check-box exercises, the plans predetermined by those in power.



## Conclusion

Women entrepreneurs in poor settlements in Nairobi have been hit hard by the compounded crisis of COVID-19 and restrictive measures. They have been partially barred from using public spaces in their local communities; spaces that are vital to their livelihoods but also important to their democratic rights to develop their own communities as arenas of empowerment and placemaking. With this as a backdrop our research points to two things. One is that the women we interviewed were able to adapt to crisis, but that there were tangible differences between the two neighbourhoods, where the women living in Pumwani were better equipped at getting through the crisis than the women living in Mukuru kwa Reuben. The second finding is that the women were generally positive to government restrictions. But again, there were differences between Pumwani and Mukuru kwa Reuben interviewees as to their trust of, and attitudes towards, government. The women in Mukuru kwa Reuben were more openly critical of government and those in power.

The historical development of Pumwani has laid the grounds for more conservational institutional structures and stronger community identity that not only provided the women with social security, but also economic security through savings groups that the interviewees in Mukuru kwa Reuben were lacking. While the savings groups and other women-initiated support networks in Pumwani were geared towards personal livelihoods or specific group interests, the groups the women in Mukuru kwa Reuben took part in were more SPA oriented. This provides for two very different ways of – and motivations for – engaging with public space in the two neighbourhoods.

Access to public space was curtailed in both areas as a response to the pandemic. In an area like Pumwani, with its conservative and conservational power structures, women with their community spirit and social networks seems to get through the crisis with less repercussions than in an area like Mukuru kwa Reuben with its newer history, more experimental power structures, culture for protest, and more immediate consequences from infrastructure developments.

However, the conservative power structures of Pumwani may also undermine the women, disallowing them from exploring opportunities and futures outside of the mould that they found themselves bound to. In Mukuru, The SPA is an experiment in societal development of importance to Kenyan society. It may provide important lessons in future governance and management of public space. But it seems less geared towards helping the women through times of crisis. Sentiments among interviewees in Mukuru kwa Reuben indicate that it needs to be more considerate and contextualised. The authorities and grassroots organisations may yet have an opportunity to instil real community engagement and progressive change if tenable connections are made between women's livelihoods, social networks, and public space.

We have pointed to several important distinguishing features between Pumwani and Mukuru kwa Reuben that influence the women's situations, the handling of crisis, and the development and use of public space. These differences are not only important to note in relation to this crisis and the women in question. The research also provides empirical support to discourse promoting the heterogeneity of urban poverty and urban poor neighbourhoods. While it may be useful to think of socio-economic and demographic generalisations such as "urban poor women" in statistical studies at a regional scale, this research ultimately shows that when discussing locational issues such as access to and use of public space by women, it is imperative that we be contextual and specific. The differences between places like Pumwani and Mukuru kwa Reuben, and the implications of these differences mean that the urban poor, their livelihoods, and their neighbourhoods

need to be understood and sought developed with attentiveness to their distinctive histories, cultures, structures, spatial qualities, and demographics – even if they are within the same city.

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## Fostering Functional Public Open Space within Low-Income Post-Apartheid Environments

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### Abstract

Public open space is fundamental to the lives of residents within low-income post-apartheid settlements. With the prioritisation of the provision of housing post-apartheid, limited consideration has been given to the public realm and the functioning of public open space. It is essential that we regard the public realm as an integral component to the lives of the people who inhabit these environments. Because of the living conditions, large portions of people's lives are conducted outside of this prioritised private realm. It is evident that public spaces within these environments become neglected due to a lack of ownership and management. The intention of this paper is to find principles of enhancing public life through encouraging shared open spaces. Delft South, a post-apartheid suburb on the periphery of Cape Town, is a representation of how the legacy of apartheid persists within the landscape. Using the case of Delft South, this paper highlights the attitude towards the provision and upkeep of public open space by the state whilst foregrounding its importance to the lives and livelihoods of residents. Qualitative research analysis is conducted within the area to elicit how the current open space network is used and to grasp the consequences of a lack of public open space provision. The use of the public open space network by school children plays a significant role in the public life of the area. Using this analysis and further theoretical unpacking, this paper seeks to elicit principles of fostering functional open space within post-apartheid South Africa.

**Keywords:** place-making, public open space, urban commons, post-apartheid, South Africa

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## **Introduction**

Low-income settlements in Cape Town historically reflect that the private realm is prioritised over the public realm. The delivery of housing has been prioritised with limited consideration for the supporting amenities and broader public realm. It is essential that we regard the public realm as an integral component of the lives of the people which inhabit these dire socio-economic environments. Because of the living conditions, large portions of lives are conducted outside of this prioritised private realm. It is evident that public space within these environments become neglected due to a lack of ownership<sup>1</sup> and management.

Delft South, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Cape Town is representative of this. A low-income, post-apartheid neighbourhood developed through state subsidised and funded housing schemes for residents previously classified as “black” and “coloured”. The neighbourhood reflects the clear prioritisation of housing delivery devoid of consideration for necessary public space and amenities.



Figure 1. Delft South, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Cape Town

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<sup>1</sup> Spaces within communities which people within the community feels responsible for. The notion of owned space is applicable to all spaces regardless of them being public or private. Owned space is primarily based around perception or feeling, rather than legal ownership.



The intention of this paper is to find principles to enhance public life through encouraging shared open spaces – and how this may exist in a post-apartheid, low-income environment. It considers notions of place-making, provision as well as active citizenship. Furthermore, it will highlight the importance of various user-groups, particular school children, in the successful functioning of shared open space. This paper will provide an introduction to Delft South, the study area, then problematise public space in low-income suburbs to outline the underlying issues specific to South Africa. This is followed by general principles that public spaces should embody. The section, thereafter, will analyse the spatial structure of Delft South and how it is being inhabited. This analysis was done using various exercises to elicit both a quantitative and qualitative understanding.

### **Delft South: a post-apartheid neighbourhood**

The apartheid regime endeavoured to segregate races from one another to benefit the minority white population. The Group Areas Act was enacted to achieve this goal, displacing black and coloured populations to the periphery of the city, removed from opportunity. Following the end of the apartheid regime, the newly elected government embarked on projects aimed to increase service delivery and provision to those who were severely disadvantaged by the regime. One such project was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which aimed to provide free housing for all and has since delivered more than 3 million homes (Cirolia, 2016: 622; Muyebe, 2016: 629). This project, however, has had extremely negative consequences with the vast majority of these new housing areas being located on the periphery of the city, intensifying sprawl and constraining the poor to the margins of the city.

Delft South is a representation of this reality. It is a subsidised housing settlement located 34 km from Cape Town's City Centre. It was planned in 1994 as one of the first housing settlements in post-apartheid South Africa and funded by the government. Construction began on Delft South in 1996. It is located adjacent to the airport and the R300, a national highway. These two elements inform its shape. Many of the houses in Delft South are owned by the people who occupy them. This has allowed for the urban fabric to be greatly changed since the area's initial construction. Although established post-apartheid, legacies of segregation persist within the area (Oldfield, 2004). Delft South was constructed following the end of apartheid to house previously disadvantaged residents formerly classified as black or coloured. The area is adjacent to the older suburb of Delft, which was established under the apartheid regime on the periphery of Cape Town for people previously classified as coloured. The density of Delft South is higher than that of the older suburb of Delft, but is further under-resourced with respect to public facilities and amenities. Racial tensions continue to divide the area of Delft South with groups contesting for the few available facilities and amenities. The public realm is under strain as public spaces are neglected, leaving residents with little respite from their private homes.

Cape Town remains a starkly polarized city with apartheid planning principles being perpetuated. Previously "white" demarcated affluent areas straddle the mountain and remain in close proximity to opportunities. The affluent suburbs embody rich opportunities and access which contrasts the dire conditions of the densely populated and largely poverty-stricken "Cape Flats" that Delft South represents.

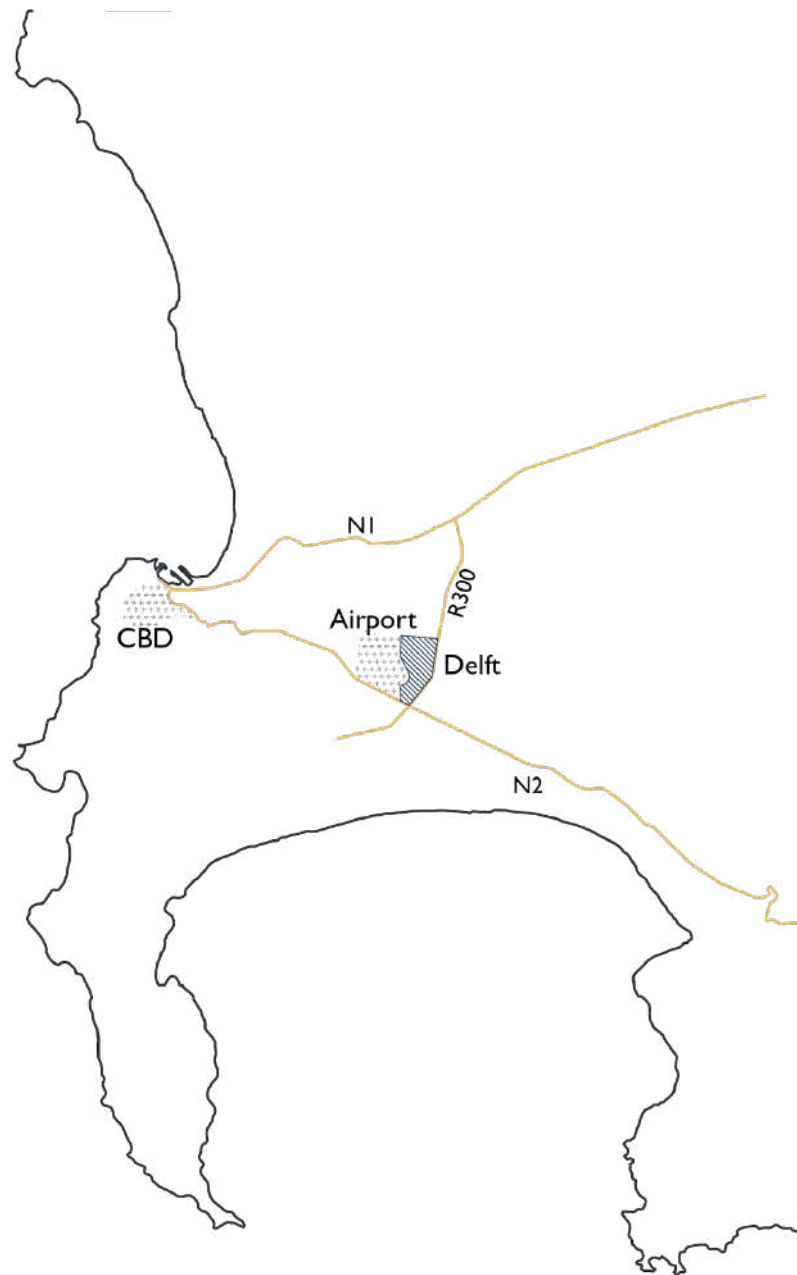


Figure 2. A map locating Delft in Cape Town [source: author].

Furthermore, it must be stated that the experience of public space and public life differs in the affluent, previously white areas, within the city to that of areas such as Delft South. Established parks and public spaces are often well maintained and school properties are large and in superior condition (see figure 3). The affluent middle class has the ability to retreat into their larger properties and access well-kept parks and public space when choosing to do so. The prioritisation of the state to deliver and maintain functional public spaces in affluent neighbourhoods further perpetuate inequities and entrench the apartheid legacy into the landscape.

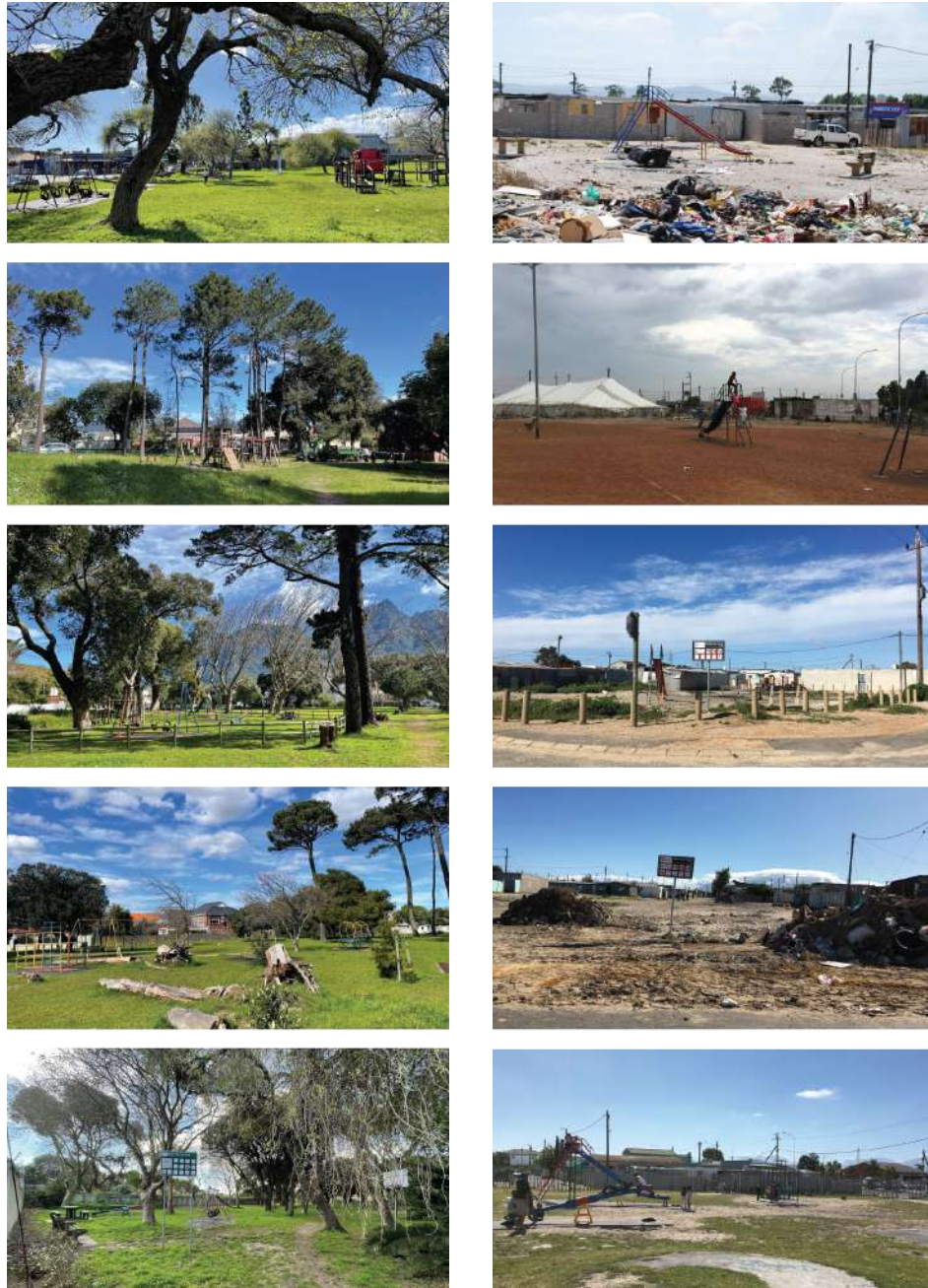


Figure 3. Parks and public spaces in Delft South neighbourhood.

There has been a failure to deliver functional and sustainable public open space where it is most needed. Open space exists in Delft South, but the vast majority of these open spaces function as retention ponds or electrical servitudes which limits its use as functional shared open space. Swathes of land remain in Delft South, demarcated for public open space but never having materialized. Many of these sites as well as parks have become dumping grounds for litter and waste having a detrimental impact on the urban environment (see figure 4).



Figure 4. A neglected park in Delft South [source: author].

The state needs to shift prioritisation of how and where public space is delivered and maintained. Although provision has been made in the planning of Delft South for public open space, these spaces need to be delivered and sustained through appropriate governance levers. This paper aims to highlight the importance of public open space and how it can be delivered to suit the needs and improve the lives of the end-user in low-income neighbourhoods such as Delft South.

## **SECTION I: A Need for Public Space**

### *1.1 A need for public space in low-income settlements*

In low-income communities, there is often little opportunity for the community to withdraw into the private realm, as their houses and plot sizes are too small to accommodate all of their household needs (Southworth, 2010, p. 103). This emphasises the importance of public space within these areas, as it is common for people to be dependent on the public realm to support their daily functions.

Following the end of apartheid, the ANC Government delivered approximately two million houses in its first decade of governance. Delft South, as a post-apartheid suburb, is representative of the fact that the private realm was privileged at the expense of the public realm. The nuclear family housing model was deployed: a single house per plot to house one family (Low, 2012). A characteristic of the South African urban landscape is that the focus of public investment has been put on the individual house and providing the hard infrastructure to service the individual house resulting in limited consideration given to the functioning of the public realm (Pieterse, 2013, p. 186). Today, Delft South



accommodates over 15.000 households, however only has 8.5 hectares of functional public open space. To conform the CSIR Guidelines for the Provision of Social Facilities in South Africa<sup>2</sup> a total of 30 hectares of functional open space is required to support the approximate population, which represents a significant shortfall. Due to the prioritisation of housing provision, the urban spaces such as the streets, parks and pavements display characteristics of abandonment.

This is used as the point of departure for this paper: the public realm needs to be greatly improved in order to improve the living conditions of people within low-income areas. A simple observation can be made within Delft South that people greatly depend on the spaces outside of their homes. This can be seen in the presence on the street as well the load placed on the rare public spaces and amenities. The street is clearly a vital component of the public realm (UN-Habitat, 2013). With the insufficient provision of public spaces, the street accommodates an array of public functions which other spaces fail to do. Urban living involves much more than the use of one room or a singular house (Correa, 1989). Rather, the room is only one element in an entire system of spaces that is needed by people. The house is a mere component within a large urban network and other components, particularly public space, are vital to the livelihoods of the community.

The premise of this paper is to elicit broad-based principles in Delft South to create much needed productive public open space. It is evident that the housing crisis cannot be reduced to maximising the number of dwellings placed on a site at the expense of much needed public open space that is fundamental to the functioning of the system.

### *1.2 Public Space as a Social Necessity*

The insufficiency of public space within Delft South results in very few public forums to engage with other community members. Public space is essential for increasing social cohesion within communities as it provides platforms for social engagement (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001). A common space is required for these engagements to occur. An ideal public open space is a space that the community can take *ownership* to create a safe meeting space and engage. Common land has two specific functions: firstly, it allows people to feel comfortable outside of their private properties and therefore allows them to feel connected to a larger social system; and secondly, common land acts as an important meeting place for members of the community (Alexander, Ishikawa, & Silverstein, 1977). In seeking these forums, the residents of Delft South often resort to engaging each other on the side of the street or within residual and neglected spaces (see figure 5).

Social urbanism can be described as both the phenomenon of architecture and public space being used towards social goals, as well as being a type of urban intervention which is defined by a social process (McGuirk, 2014). With this being said it is important to establish what these social goals are. The immediate common goal is to acquire a space which can be regarded as a shared open space – a space that serves the need of the collective as opposed to an individual. This space needs to be informed by social processes.

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<sup>2</sup> CSIR Guidelines for the Provision of Social Facilities in South Africa was first published in 2012 and aims to provide guidelines for the provision of social facilities for human settlements in South Africa. The guidelines prescribe a total of 0.5ha per 1000 people for open public space.



Figure 5. Residents gather and socialise in the middle of a traffic circle.

The notion of sharing is an integral one with regard to creating an urban commons. This idea of “common” signifies something that is shared by people. The upkeep of the space must be driven by the shared desire, amongst the community members, to create and inform their own urban environment (Simone, 1998). In addition to this, social space facilitates encounter, assembly and simultaneity (1991, p. 101).

### *1.3 Creating Successful Public Space*

The following sub-section looks at various ways to create successful public space. In particular, the following elements will be considered: diversity (through both use and time), encouraging participative citizenship, physical comfort and economic viability. The open spaces within Delft South do not currently display these principles which results in their downfall.

#### *1.3.1 Diversity through use and time*

By accommodating various activities, there is opportunity for the space to be used at different times and for different occasions. This adds another dimension to temporality as the different uses are able to extend the daily life of the space. This reduces homogeneity through encouraging access to supplementary activities. Public space with a diverse range of activities attracts a range of people. It is also a natural occurrence for people to gravitate towards other people (Lerner, 2014, p. 47).

The utilisation of public space is dependent on the time of day as well as the occasion. Ultimately safety is promoted through the presence of others. Therefore, when a space is occupied by more people, the perception is that the space is safer (Mehta, 2013, p. 60). Presently, many of the public spaces within Delft South are not utilised entirely, rather they are only utilised at certain times of the day. Spaces often have a singular function



which results in its limited use. The idea of temporality and use within public space can be analysed through a series of lenses in order to understand the manner in which they function. The physical composition of space as well as the elements that make up the space greatly affects the temporality (Whyte, 1988). Currently, public space within the area is composed to encourage a singular function. Limited consideration is given to ancillary or supporting functions which may support the intense use of public space for extended periods of time.

Intensity and diversity of activity is a factor of positive urban environments (Dewar & Uytendogaardt, 1991). Public open space should promote the intermixing of people and diverse activities. This diversity results in a complexity of conditions of activities, ultimately resulting in spontaneous interactions (Sennett, 2002). These spontaneous interactions are fundamental in promoting social cohesion resulting in urban opportunities that are created through intense interaction (Dewar & Uytendogaardt, 1991). Fundamentally the diversity of use is developed naturally over time as the community will respond to their needs. This complexity that is developed over time should be celebrated as opposed to isolating or separating their elements from one another (Jacobs, 1961, p. 177). Diversity of use was not observed in the open public space within Delft South and it is evident that open public space within the area has not facilitated diversity to develop over time. This paper will outline how diversity of use could be fostered within these spaces.

### *1.3.2 Participative Citizenship*

Using Delft South as a case study, we can identify the role that each of the realms (both the public realm and the private realm) play in the lives of society. The socio-spatial boundary between the public and private realms can be further explored. There is a particular ambiguity that exists between the public and private realms within the area. The change of emphasis between public and private space ultimately alters the character of the area (Sennett, 2002, p. 32).

The private realm can be regarded as the space in which personal activities takes place, and the public realm as the space in which impersonal activities take place. Public space, however should have the ability to facilitate interpersonal activities (Madanipour, 1996). Within low-income environments these aforementioned differences between the public realm and the private realm become less distinct. Public space within low-income environments should have the ability to fulfil both of the aforementioned characteristics: to account for both personal and impersonal activities, as well as facilitate interactions. The urban surface should intend to diversify activities in time, allow for flexibility and for people to engage (Wall, 1999).

The objective of public space is to facilitate an environment where participative citizenship is achieved through presence and friction. Currently, public spaces within the area of Delft South are abandoned and neglected for large portions of the day. Through the occupation of public space by residents, social cohesion is encouraged and people are prompted to participate in the creation of a positive shared open space. The urban commons is constituted by people working together towards a particular goal (McGuirk, 2015). However, appropriate forums to participate and engage do not currently exist and thus shared goals cannot be determined and reached.

### *1.3.3 Physical Comfort*

The physical makeup and components of the street contribute to its physical comfortability. The composition of the street, with regards to the exposure or protection from the elements, play a major role. Successful streets offer protection from the natural elements, but at the same time acknowledges the surrounding environment (Jacobs A. B., 1993).

There is an under provision of urban furniture within Delft South and the urban furniture that exists within the area is under maintained and underutilised. Benches should offer a resting place on a street. The placement of benches determines specific meeting and resting points along a path. The orientation and placement of them also determine their use. To increase the use of benches they should be orientated towards a view of surrounding activities and positioned in a way that they support the adjacent functions (Gehl, 2011).

The experience and comfort of the street and public space within the area is largely dependent on the relationship between pedestrians and vehicular traffic. Minibus taxis often dominate the streetscape, making it challenging for pedestrians to traverse the landscape. The fact that pedestrians and vehicular traffic are mutually dependant needs to be acknowledged. The relationship and friction should provide a great deal of urban opportunity (Alexander, Ishikawa, & Silverstein, 1977, p. 271).

### *1.3.4 Economic Viability*

A major issue with regard to public spaces within South Africa, is the lack of management and funding to maintain them. In Delft South as well as most other cases, the upkeep and provision of public space is purely reliant on limited state funding often resulting in their poor condition. Therefore, alternative funding models need to be explored to ensure economic sustainability. To ensure their success, public spaces need to financially sustain themselves with minimum help from the state. As a solution is sought to be found for the provision and upkeep of public space, an endeavour should be made to increase economic activity through these interventions (Correa, 1998). The following section looks at two existing models of delivering public spaces within Cape Town. This information can then be used as a basis for an alternative model.

### *1.3.5 Dignified Public Places Programme*

The Dignified Public Places Programme as well as the Quality Public Spaces Programme were implemented in order to provide adequate public spaces within Cape Town. These spaces were delivered by the City of Cape Town. The spaces needed to be “robust well made public spaces that communicate a sense of permanence” (NM & Associates, 2010). These spaces were inserted into areas without a management system being put in place in order to maintain them. This “drop and go” approach to the delivery of public spaces is insufficient to the production of positive and well-utilised public spaces. The lack of a management system has ultimately resulted in many these spaces becoming neglected and vandalised. Sibanye Square is a central public square within Delft South and was delivered under the Dignified Public Places Programme. Following its implementation it has run into disrepair due to issues of mismanagement and neglect by the state (see figure 6).



Figure 6. Sibanye Square located in Delft South [source: author].

### 1.3.6 VPUU

A more feasible model is that of Violence Protection through Urban Upgrading (VPUU). VPUU secures funding from both the City as well as external donors (such as the German Development Bank) in order to fund their Active Boxes and Public Spaces. In addition to this they incorporate a top-down management structure which includes members from the VPUU NGO, the City of Cape Town as well as members of the community (VPUU, 2014). The incorporation of a caretaker as well as other positions within the organisation presents employment opportunities for members of the community. Income for the Active Boxes (see figure 7) and Public Squares are generated from the Laterite sports field and meeting rooms.



Figure 7. A VPUU Active Box and public forecourt [source: author].

These user fees are in line City Sports and Recreation annual tariff guide. Live work units are constructed on site and are rented to tenants who are able to reside in the unit as well as work from them. The rental income generates additional income to sustain the public space.

The cost of the maintenance is therefore shared between VPUU and the City of Cape Town. It is clear that the income generated by the sites does not cover the total maintenance cost of the sites. However, it is evident that due to this funding model and management structure, the condition of these spaces is in far superior condition. This model can be used as a basis, but more income needs to be generated to ensure economic viability.

## **SECTION 2: Delft South Public Open Space Analysis**

In order to gain an understanding of the Delft South area and the manner in which public open space currently functions, three primary methods of obtaining information were used. The intention of these methods was to elicit the way in which the people of the area make use of the urban environment:

1. *Mapping and Spatial Observations.*  
As part of the Design Research Studio, Space of Good Hope at the University of Cape Town, information is elicited through mapping. This served as a primary form of acquiring relevant information. In addition, observations were made intermittently over the period of a few months. These provide a more nuanced insight into the neighbourhood.
2. *Narratives through discussions*  
Spending time on site enabled the opportunity to engage with people from the area. Through discussions personal stories that pertain to life within the area were documented.
3. *School's Workshop*  
As part of the Space of Good Hope Studio children from schools within the area was invited to a workshop. This workshop presented the opportunity of engaging with children located in the area. This was treated as a design exercise to creatively think of ways of eliciting information. This will be elaborated upon in the forthcoming section (see 2.3).

### *2.1. Mapping and Spatial Observations*

Observations allowed for the urban environment to be viewed passively and to observe the occurrences of the urban every day. This was done through a series of drive-arounds as well as walking in the streets. Methods of observation enabled an insight and overview of the general life that occurs within the area.

Delft South has a very particular spatial structure which facilitates certain patterns of movement throughout the area. This spatial structure will be analysed, in order to gain a better understanding of how it enables and constricts the movement patterns of the existing community. Because of its planned nature, life and activity has manifested itself within the area as community members respond to both their individual and collective needs through accepting, adapting or capitalising on the spatial structure. The public spaces within Delft South should be understood as a network, as opposed to isolated

elements. They should be understood as a family of spaces, varying in scales (Dewar & Uytendogaardt, 1991, p. 57).

The following section will attempt to address the nuances of the manner in which life has manifested within the spatial structure and how the components of the spatial structure are used. In particular, the insufficiency of open public space within Delft South, and the manner in which they operate will be assessed.

### 2.1.1 Street Hierarchy



Figure 8. A map indicating the hierarchy of streets within Delft South [source: author].

Through the spatial structure there is a clear hierarchy of streets within Delft South. The road hierarchy is fundamental to understanding how public space is utilised.

- *The Main Road:* The Main Road serves as the high street and is the key structuring route and activity spine. The life and activity of the street is most vibrant immediately after the end of a school day. Immediately after school, children take to the streets, many of whom make their way out of the area via means of public transport. Because the Main Road is vehicular dominated throughout the course of the entire day, the activity occurs on the pavements of the Main Road. The spaces outside spaza shops<sup>3</sup> are popular points of contact (see figure 11).

<sup>3</sup> A spaza shop is a small convenient store, often operated out of or in front of someone's home.



Figure 9-10. the spaces outside spaza shops [source: author].

- *Loop Roads:* Loop Roads attach to the Main Road and are the secondary movement routes. They serve to divide the larger area into neighbourhoods in an attempt to create a sense of community. The objective of the loop roads was to stitch the area together, but at the same time allow for variations to occur at the local scale to ensure that each neighbourhood has its own sense of place (MLH Architects & Planners, 1995). Each community possesses its own specificity as well as multiple boundaries. The patterns uncovered by these characteristics are unique, yet comparable to that of another community (Simone, 1998).



Figure 11. Teenagers playing football in a loop road [source: author].

- *Concealed roads:* Concealed roads are attached to the loop roads and are embedded within the neighbourhood fabric. They are planned in such a manner as to encourage communal interactions and to improve the sense of community. They perform a major public function which can be displayed through children occupying and playing in the entire width of the street (see figure 12). The house is not detachable from the city and this can be seen in the activity of the concealed roads (Choay, 2003).



What determines the intimacy and scale of the neighbourhood streets is the relationship between the built fabric – in this case the house and the street. The fabric is tightly woven; therefore, neighbours are in close contact with one another. This results in the spaces immediately outside the property becoming natural spaces for people to dwell (Gehl, 2011) (see figure 13).



Figure 12-13. Outdoor spaces [source: author].

The street performs a significant role in the everyday lives of the residents, as it adopts functions that the larger public opens spaces would normally accommodate.

### 2.1.2 Open Spaces

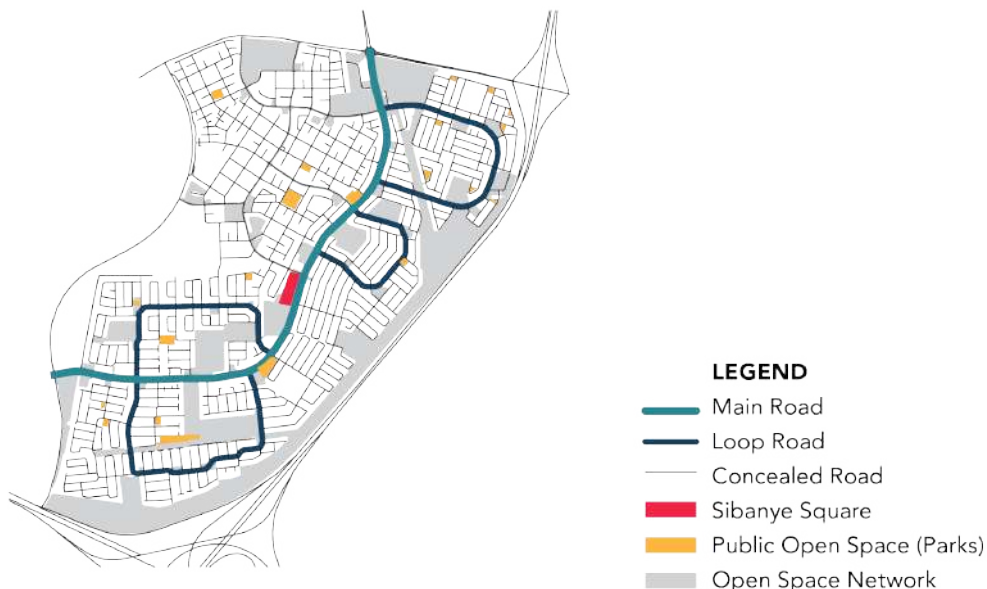


Figure 14: A map indicating public open space within the open space network [source: author].

Public open spaces are positioned within the open space network serving as crucial points of relief within the ever-densifying urban fabric. Sibanye Square serves as the central open public space (see figure 16). It is located centrally and can be seen as the

*maidan*<sup>4</sup> of the area. Within Delft South other public open spaces take the form of retention ponds, parks and fields. In addition to this there are neglected open spaces within the various neighbourhoods, which are in a poor condition. These spaces are poorly managed and underutilised.



Figure 15. Sibanye Square as a trading space [source: author].

Parks within the area can be found along the Main Road as well as within the various neighbourhoods. The larger parks are strategically placed along the Main Road as they are accessible to larger portions of the community.

The parks nestled within the neighbourhoods are smaller in size, therefore accommodating less people and aiming to serve a different purpose. These shared spaces are intended to provide a space for people to interact, thus creating a sense of community within the various areas (Madanipour, 1996). The different scales of the park serve to aim varying scales of communities.

It was found through observation and discussion that some of the crèches use certain neighbourhood parks during the day. The few parks that are adequately maintained are located along the Main Road and are frequently used by nearby crèches. Teachers often bring the children to the park as many of the early childhood development centres have limited outdoor space. The teachers spoken to at the park mentioned that they try to bring the children to the park at least once a week or when the weather is suitable. They did however, mention that many of the parks were unsuitable for children, and therefore, some crèches have to walk a fair distance to an appropriate park.

A popular park is the one along the Main Road which is fenced, separating the children from the vehicular traffic. The park has a grass surface as opposed to some of the other parks which are gravel. At the time of observation, the park was accommodating two separate classes from two different crèches within the area (see figures 17 and 18).

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Correa the *maidan* as the principle urban which is used by the entire city. It is the central public area. (Correa, *The New Landscape - Urbanisation in the Third World*, 1989)



Figure 16 - 17. Crèches occupy parks during the morning period [source: author].



Figure 18. A fruit vendor located on the periphery of the park [source: author].

The life of the parks is also dependant on the school children. Through the workshop activity it was found that children up to grade 7 (aged 13) utilise the parks after school, while the older children did not. The playing equipment as well as the courts and fields are well used and it is common for the boys to play soccer on the courts and the girls to play netball.

Essential to the park is the fruit vendor, positioned on the periphery of the amenity (see figure 19). This constant presence provides an element of surveillance over the space for large portions of the day.

Through these observations and exercises, it is apparent that the parks within the area of Delft South play a significant role to the youth. Unfortunately, the condition of the parks does not meet the needs of the users with the majority of the play equipment being dysfunctional (see figures 20 and 21). Surfaces are often gravel; play equipment often broken and unmaintained; and parks are largely unsupervised, creating an unsafe and unpleasant environment for children.





Figures 19 – 20. The condition of the playing equipment and the park [source: author].

### *2.1.3 Open Space: The Network*

Due to the condition and of the parks and open public space undue pressure is placed upon other components of the open space network. Residents are forced to find spaces to support their daily needs. This results in children finding other spaces to play and adults finding spaces to gather and do their daily chores. Children often play and occupy the electrical servitudes, using the pylons as play equipment and play within the unsafe retention ponds. It is also common to find people gathering outside their homes or in the street. The images below depict the manner in which public life plays out within the public realm.

### *2.2 Narratives from Delft South*

Discussion allowed for specific happenings to be uncovered. A series of discussions were held with community leaders, community members and children within the area.

#### *2.2.1 Narratives*

Through discussions with park-going school students it is understood that children have different routines throughout the course of the day. Despite the differences in routines, there are many commonalities in their practices and habits include moving between multiple spaces after school, animating the open space network. This was a clear indication of their independence and agency which highlights their importance to the contribution to urban life. Children are often unsupervised after school due to the circumstances of the majority of the households. This foregrounds the independence and agency of the children within the area. It also highlights role that children have in the use of public space as well as importance that shared public space plays in the lives of school-going children.

An interview was conducted with a Community Policing Forum (CPF) member, who explained how the spatial structure was used as a mechanism to self-organise. The CPF forms a prominent role within the area, performing neighbourhood watch duties as well serving as a touch point between the police and the community.



Figures 21 and 22: Outdoor spaces for public life [source: author].

In her personal capacity she fosters six children, who she does not allow to play outside due to issues such as gangsterism and safety. These children are therefore confined to the private property after school hours.

This results in the assured safety of the children at the expense of occupying the urban environment. The reality remains that not all children have the privilege of having a safe space to retreat. Many wander the streets, unsupervised, before returning home. A consequence of this is that children and teenagers' resort to gangsterism and anti-social behaviour if they do not have a safe space to occupy, further highlighting the importance of functional shared open space.

The discussion with the CPF member was extremely valuable as it highlighted issues of security and existing measures which are put in place to counter this. It also signified the spatial structure as a device which allows the CPF and neighbourhood watch groups to order themselves. Smaller neighbourhood watch committees are made of a representative of each street. These smaller neighbourhood watch groups are organised within the spatial structure and make up a large portion of the CPF. When patrolling, boundaries are also informed by the spatial structure.

### 2.3 Workshop Findings

The Space of Good Hope Design Research Studio hosted a workshop at the Delft South Library. Children were invited from schools within the area to partake in the workshop for one afternoon after school. The children that participated in the workshop ranged from ages eleven to sixteen representing a target group from both primary and high schools. The workshop presented the opportunity to interact with the children who inhabit the urban environment every day.

In order for the workshop to be both beneficial for the research studio as well as entertaining for the children, activities were designed for the children to partake in. These activities also had the objective of eliciting information about the area and the lives of the children. The workshop exercises allowed for specific issues and happenings

to be teased out. These exercises needed to be designed with a specific objective in mind.

A particular research question was probed during this workshop: *How do people occupy the public space within Delft South?*

An exercised was designed for the children to partake in which would see them map out their activities through the course of the day, as well as on weekends. Magnetic icons represented various activities as well as locations. The participants were tasked to place these icons along a daily timeline. For every activity icon that was placed the participants were required to place a location icon. This indicated the location at which the various common activities take place.



Figure 23. Students documenting their activity through the course of a day [source: author].

Schools do not often offer extra-mural activities. Therefore, many children leave school immediately and are then forced to occupy themselves. A key conclusion drawn from the task is that children within the area do not occupy one space during the course of the afternoon. Rather their afternoons are filled with various activities across various locations. Not only does this highlight the importance of a larger open space network, but it also signifies the key role that children play within the urban environment. The life of the area is greatly dependent on the activities and movement of the children. This also indicates that the children are active agents within the urban environment. An observation that is important to reiterate is that the school children often do not occupy a single space after school hours. Rather, they make their way between various



locations in groups, thus making the public space within the area especially dynamic. Activities include participating in sports at sport clubs in neighbouring areas, playing and socialising in the park and street as well as watching television or playing video games at their own home or at a home of a friend. This results in the use of parks and public space fluctuating through the course of the afternoon. When addressing the public space, the importance of popular movement routes and networks needs to be acknowledged. Children should be able to move freely and safely between locations.

### 3. Towards Functional Public Open Space

‘Social urbanism’ refers to an urbanism which opposes cities to be designed from scratch, but rather establish practices which recognises what was already exists (McGuirk, 2014, pp. 243-244). The fundamental role that school children play in public life has been highlighted through exercises of mapping, observation, and engagement. From this, it is clear that children use all of the available open space despite their unsafe and underequipped nature. At present, public open space within the area is programmed to facilitate singular or limited functions as opposed to encouraging primary uses that are supported by ancillary functions. Public open space can be better equipped to accommodate the needs of school children by ensuring improved condition of the spaces, its playing equipment and the facilitation of additional uses. In doing so, the additional user groups ensure that spaces are used for longer periods of time and public open space is supervised. The public open space network needs to be regarded as a holistic system that ensures the safe movement of children through the urban landscape.

Using the aforementioned analysis of the Delft South area as well as the theoretical understanding, key principles can be derived to ensure the improved condition of public open space as well the increased use of public open space by multiple user-groups. These three principles should be considered when striving to deliver functional public open space within low-income environments in post-apartheid South Africa:

1. Ensure sustainable economic viability as well as governance structures  
Partnerships should be established between the state and the community in order to maintain and manage public open space. The previous “drop and go” approach adopted by the state has not delivered sustainable public open space. Rather partnerships should be established at the beginning of the process with affected stakeholders to ensure that the spaces are appropriately cared for and maintained. Revenue streams should be incorporated into the public space to supplement its upkeep as it is evident that the state cannot adequately maintain public open space.
2. Safety and Physical Comfort  
Understanding existing spatial patterns and movement networks will contribute greatly to elements of safety. Public space should be designed for the appropriate uses and ensure comfortability and safety of its users.  
In addition to this, public spaces should be located appropriately within these structures and designed with passive surveillance and a positive relationship to its surrounds. Additionally, public spaces should be designed to be comfortable, offering respite from the, often, harsh urban environments.  
In the case of Delft South, ensuring safe and user-friendly environments for children should be paramount as they are significant contributors to public life. Safety should

extend into the movement networks to ensure that people are able to move safely between locations.

3. Diverse activity through use and time

Activities should be derived from the site and incorporated into the public open spaces where possible. It needs to be acknowledged that uses cannot be over-prescriptive. It should allow diversity of use to manifest organically over time. A variety of uses should be adopted targeted at different user groups and times of the day. It is understandable that children will occupy public space for large components of the day, but this should be supplemented to encourage optimal usage to extend the period of use. This will ensure that public spaces will have maximum uses and increased presence, significantly contributing to the perception of safety.

In conclusion, it is evident that the public open spaces within low-income environments need to be improved. In many of these environments, the spaces of the public realm cannot accommodate the necessary requirements of individuals and communities. Improving the public realm has great potential with regards to benefitting the lives of many people. Because these spaces are integral, there is an opportunity to propose solutions which will promote social cohesion and shared use. The provision of shared open spaces also has the possibility of fostering active citizenship and promoting economic exchange. When dealing with such large-scale issues we need to establish strategic and pragmatic solutions which should emerge from the particular site. This paper has illustrated how this can be achieved through relatively simple principles. Through the case of Delft South, we can understand the importance of public open space as well as identify the consequences due to the lack thereof. Particularly, we have identified the importance of the role open public space has in the lives of school children and the importance of school children in the functioning and life of public open space. This should be used as a departure point when addressing open public space in post-apartheid South Africa. It is clear that alternative strategies need to be adopted to ensure the provision and the sustainability of shared public open space which is fundamental to the lives of low-income communities.

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# Seeing the City through Traffic Hawking and Merchandise Differentials.

## Urban and Suburban Differentials in Lagos Megacity

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### Abstract

One of the confounding and historical contradictions of Lagos megacity is its permanent state of traffic gridlocks that eventuate in what in this paper is conceived as “traffic hawking”. Although traffic hawking is a common site in Lagos, settlement patterns and economic class of dwellers mark a distinction between the city’s urban and suburban environments. Against this backdrop, this paper contends that the distinction is reproduced by an observed differential in the merchandise of the traffic hawkers. It underscores how social inequality is reinforced through the prism of traffic hawking. Data for the study were generated over a period of six months from four different locations that were purposively selected to represent urban and suburban settlements. Semi-Structured Interviews with 40 hawkers and 8 buyers were conducted between February 2019 to July 2019. Findings reveal that one of the most striking urban and suburban differentials in traffic hawking is the display of “live merchandise”. Highly priced pets, mostly dogs in various species and cross-bred hybrids and other sophisticated good, constitute urban hawkers’ merchandise. Where goods such as perishables and cooked food items are displayed by traffic hawkers, they are rarely and less patronized in urban settlements than in suburban locations. Regular urban traffic merchandise also includes car items such as windshield wipers, seat-covers, and foot mats; info-tech items such as storage devices, laptop bags, and phone pouches; painting and sculptural arts; cutlery and sport wares. The paper concludes that the observed differentials show income and consumption disparity between the urban and suburban dwellers and underscore the enduring colonial heritage of dichotomization of spaces within Lagos in the postcolonial dispensation, even when traffic gridlocks tend to level the spatial binaries in the city.

**Keywords:** traffic hawking, merchandise, income disparity, urban and suburban, Lagos State

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## **Introduction**

Studies on Lagos State Nigeria are dynamic, numerous, engaging and vigorous, basically because it is the country's commercial hub centre. With an estimated 85 new immigrants per hour daily Tijani (2016), Lagos population is rising at an alarming rate. The challenging reality is that this increasing population is spread over a relatively small landmass of approximately 3577 km<sup>2</sup> out of which 39% are wetlands (Dekolo and Oduwaye, 2011, p. 122). Although Lagos land constitutes 0.4% of Nigeria's total landmass Opoko and Oluwatayo (2014, p. 19), it has enormous human capital. According to Hoornweg and Pope (2017, p. 213), Lagos has one of the highest urban growth rates in the world. Immigrants are attracted to Lagos because the state has proven to have an enduring legacy as the industrial and commercial centre of Nigeria (Adedire and Adegbile, 2018, p. 292). The word 'enduring' is striking as it indicates retention irrespective of confounding or contradicting challenges that it may be confronted with. This places it at an advantageous position over other states of the federation. It is why Lagos will continue to play both host and home to immigrants from far and near in search of capital(s) (economic, social, education, etc.). The ongoing urbanisation and optimal use of public and private transportation resulting in traffic congestion alongside other reasons is meant to cater to the teeming population. In Lagos, the subject of traffic is a recurring discourse in the daily conversation of its citizen's. It is being regarded as a monster that people have to live with yet, a normal setting prevalent in the state such that if the roads are traffic free, it plunges commuters into a state of awe and comments such as "why is the road free by this time of the day, have all Lagosians (as people living in Lagos State are popularly called) travelled or thank God the road is free" begin to escape the lips of road users. By Implication, traffic gridlock is considered the norm on Lagos roads and has become part of their everyday life. With the rapid and continuous industrialisation and urbanisation going on in Lagos, it is expected that more people will continue to relocate to the city, thus, leaving an overarching pressure on public infrastructure: one of which is transportation. As indicated earlier, population pressure in Lagos state is at an alarming level and the effect has permeated every fabric of the state. The effect on traffic is dreadful and contrastingly favourable to some others. It is so severe that Lagos public transport drivers charge exorbitant rate for fare with the premonition that they would spend longer time on the road, so, the passengers bear the cost of extra gas burnt. Ironically, survivalists (traffic hawkers) creatively and smartly make use of the congestion to earn a living. This research was motivated by the differential/variations in wares by hawkers in traffic at different locations noticed during a ride through the city of Lagos, and thus, seeks to examine traffic trade ware differentials in the reinforcement of settlement patterns, social inequality and economic status in selected locations in Lagos state. These trade ware differentials vary from place to place. While there are similarities in items sold during traffic gridlock, others are exclusive to particular locations. For instance, items such as (chin-chin, plantain chips, soft drinks, belts, wristwatches, compact disc, air freshener) were found in all study locations. Puppies and birds were exclusive to Lekki/Ajah express road. Hawkers of items such as, fitness kits, berries, apples, dressing mirror, artistic frameworks, toys, sun-dry bed were more prominent in Lekki/Ajah Road with only an insignificant number present in the other study locations. Details of this disparity is explored in the analysis section of this article.



## **Merchandise Differentials in the Materiality of Settlement Pattern and Economic Class**

Economic, natural, socio-political and administrative factors have been classified as basis for spatial inequality (Raheem et.al 2014, p. 164, 167; Adedire and Adegbile, 2017, p. 192). These parameters not only create spatial segregation but also reflect in the consumption patterns of the people such that different lifestyles are produced and practiced. The characteristics of these lifestyles have cut through the city of Lagos to create a dichotomy of space and economic class in the state. The Lagos city space divided into island and mainland have come to be regarded as the high and low brow areas respectively. While the high-brow area is dominated by people of high and average economic income earners, the mainland has mainly middle class and low-income earners residents. However, the mainland also has to its credit some highbrow areas laced with smart houses like Ikeja GRA, Magodo etc. These different settlement patterns have attracted diverse scholarly discourse bordering on spatial unevenness, economic inequality, social class, urbanisation, etc. These studies have demonstrated how different variables drive spatial segregation and economic class (Olukoju 2018, p. 93; Adedire and Adegbile 2017, p. 192).

Alemdaroğlu (2016, p. 3) weaves his study around the nexus between spatial disparity and social inequality. He captures how the daily experiences of low-income workers in bourgeois location in Bilkent echoes social and economic inequality. The spatial and social margin that these workers traverse daily from their shanty or suburban settlement to high-brow areas in order to earn a living shape their personality or self-worth. This scenario resonates with the daily experience of Lagos suburban workers who travel distance to different parts of the city, especially the island, to work. Their experiences are basically hinged on their interactions with employers, colleagues and clients alike. These experiences are nuanced to include good and bad treatments, but the position of scholars like Reeves (2018, no page) appears to sympathise with low-income workers whose show of respect is expected to be limitless on the one hand, and are also expected to endure all manners of disrespect. As a matter of rule, it is the duty of the low-income or financially disadvantaged to pay loyalty to the wealthy. There is a sense in which these disparities leave psychological trauma with the workers who mostly are residents in sub or peri urban places. In a bid to capture the reliving of social binary, Yazıcı (2013, p.518, 519) analyses how the everyday experiences of commuters on traffic reinforces spatial segregation and social inequality. For him, facial expression, gestures or non-verbal cues are conspicuous indicators for class subjectivity on the go. This position reverberates with Lagos commuters in ways that are dynamic to the resonance of class and status.

In the light of understanding the mechanisms by which settlement patterns and economic class are reproduced, Kiran and Joshi (2012, p. 843) examines how human activities result in urbanisation, industrialisation and several other transformations which explains the pull of population. They drew attention to the effect of industrialization on the creation of urban sprawls. The study explicates how population growth or increase leads to traffic congestion which in this article, eventuate traffic hawking. Ding and Zhao (2011, p.48) had earlier expanded Kiran and Joshi's view by highlighting agglomeration economies, positive externalities, and spillover effects as factors that attract firms and businesses to locate together, creating cluster patterns of employment centres or nodes as factors that determine urban space. Put differently, the formation of urban space,

leads to the creation of spatial segregation and nowhere is this more evident than in Lagos megacity where central business districts are clustered on the island with vigorous on-going industrialisation and urbanisation projects. Also, (Ming and Zhao, 2006, p. 42) draws attention to the fact that spatial segregation is created as a result of government's urban-biased policies. Their findings reveal that settlement pattern by status is inherent in the master plan which further consolidates segregation initiated from colonial times. This kind of plan ab initio is class oriented, bequeaths power to the wealthy privileged. In a similar vein, Pierre (1987, p. 10) argues that 'class' is not a function of certain level of income, education or type of occupation rather, of how the accessibility of resource and power weakens the access of another. This is in conformity with (Ming and Zhao, 2006, p. 46) position that biased urban policy creates inequality. Be that as it may, the policy is one of favouritism which from inception, puts the underprivileged in an inaccessible position to resource and power. Along the same path is the position of Hechter 1972 (cited in Cohn, 1982, p. 477) that concludes that structural inequality is a function of the dominance of industrialisation in a particular region or location. It is important to state at this juncture that Sawyer (2014, p. 277) categorises Lagos Island under which Lekki/Ajah falls, as a Central Business District, which is why government's attention is concentrated there. Its continuous developmental projects both public and private is a factor critical to the interpretation of not only their economic status but other statuses. One of such other statuses is their educational advantage which according to Nunn et al. (2007, p. 42) is a yardstick for high social status. Now, these are all very interesting reviews meant to demonstrate how social status, economic inequality and settlement patterns are being constructed, created or measured using different variables. However, to understand the spaces of inequalities, as a product of economic class, social status, needs and desires, negotiations, the influx of population as an influencer of traffic which eventuate in hawking in traffic is examined. Traffic trade ware differentials as a parameter for categorising the city's settlement pattern and economic class is accentuated to allow a clearer understanding to the underlying causes of spatial segregation. As evident in the interviews conducted, economic status is reinforced not only in settlement locations, cars, quality of clothes worn, attitude or even looks, but also on the trade items sold in traffic in the different locations identified in this paper.

### **The Place of Government's Policies and the Concerns of Hawkers in Traffic in Lagos State.**

In order to realise the vision of the Lagos megacity, the government has formulated series of policies that cut across different pressing issues in the state. To ensure that these policies are implemented, different agencies are formed- For instance, the Lagos State Environmental Sanitation and Special Offences Unit, (LSESSOU), and the Kick Against Indiscipline (KAI) are part of the state's agencies that are encumbered to ensure proper environmental culture. LSESSOU is the state's agency saddled with the responsibility of addressing the challenges of poor sanitary condition in the state. In addition to its primary responsibility, the agency offers support to sister agency like KAI to clamp down on street hawkers. To do this, the agency is empowered by law to prosecute street hawkers. KAI's primary responsibility is to keep hawkers off the road, and it is guided by the mandate of the policy to eradicate street hawking in Lagos State.

Several reasons account for this action and they range from security to health, environment, social, safety of the hawkers from road accidents in particular (Sam, Akansor and Agyemang 2018, pp. 92, 93). This government's action may just be informed by McGee and Yeung, (1977, p. 41) position that hawkers are anti-developmental agents that hinders the development of a city. This sits perfectly well with the Lagos megacity vision. In line with the Lagos state policy to kick street hawking off the road is Sarpong and Nabubie (2015, p. 106) argument that the hawkers constitute nuisance and cause more harm than good for the government, other citizens as well as road users. As an affirmation to Sarpong and Nabubie's argument though contrary to their possible intention, some hawkers consider traffic hawking as the best medium of sales because they do not sell on credit, no payment of shop rent, neither do they pay levies to the government unlike traders who are in rented shops. They indirectly rob legitimate shop owners of patronages that may have come to them. Revealing is the fact that others have it as their last resort and would be quick to quit if and when life offers them a better survival opportunity.

In contrast, is the argument that traffic hawking is an enterprise and a form of employment therefore it contributes to the development of a city McGee and Yeung, (1977, p. 49). However insignificant their contribution maybe, they cannot be erased from the contributors list of Internally Generated Revenue of the state. They, without gainsaying, increase the sales of production companies, transportation and expend money on many other logistics which trickles down into government's purse. This is why McGee and Yeung, (1977, p. 49) suggest policies that are more liberal and accommodating for the hawkers. This suggestion is reflected in the requests of the hawkers as they either want the government to provide better opportunity for them to earn a living or relax existing policies prohibiting traffic hawking. Incidentally, whatever sense the traffic hawkers make of their current location or trade, striving for the better and hoping for a better future are common narratives that reveal the engagement is temporal.

### **Study Area**

The rapid industrialisation going on in the state has singled out the state for an impressive status as 'the centre of excellence'. The state has achieved a commendable relevance both locally and globally due to its flourishing trade and commerce industry (Cheeseman and de Gramont 2017, p. 457). Its demographic location by the sea and a status as a former capital to the country further consolidates its enduring status as Nigeria's commercial nerve centre. These two fundamental privileges have continued to sustain the myriads of activities which the state is predisposed to. Its division into mainland and island to mean low and high brow areas is founded on the concentration of housing types, literacy level, social network, economic or commercial activities/power, government presence etc. For these reasons, this study was carried out in four selected locations divided into two low/average income earning areas and two high/average income earning areas in the state. They include Maryland/Ikeja and Lekki/Ajah as urban areas while Ikorodu and Iyana-Ipaja make up the suburban areas. Maryland/Ikeja is on the Lagos mainland with Ikeja as the state's capital. This route is significant to this study because it connects the Murtala Muhammed International Airport while Lekki/Ajah is on the Lagos Island separated by the Third Mainland Bridge.

With exclusive houses, heavy urbanisation and industrialisation prominent on the island, it is a core central business district of the state. Iyana-Ipaja and Ikorodu which represent suburban areas are mainly dominated by residential homes, and pockets of private businesses operating mainly on small and medium scale. Iyana-Ipaja and Ikorodu are link roads that connect to the neighbouring Ogun State. Both suburban areas were selected for its strategic location that connects it to Ogun State- a state which many regard as an extension of Lagos. The population congestion in Lagos has forced many Lagosians to relocate to the neighbouring Ogun State (Onilude and Vaz 2021, p. 16).

## **Methodology**

Following the nature of the study, qualitative approach with an ethnography design was employed for data collection. Hawkers were approached at each study site and the research objectives explained to them. Their consent was sought before recording was done for ethical purpose. Semi-structured interviews were recorded electronically for onward transcription manually. This method prevented the loss of information and also served as a reminder for unspoken expressions and gestures. Semi-structured interview guide was used to direct the path of this study. The essence for adopting an open-ended question is for follow-up questions that allows the interviewer probe for more explanation and clarity from hawkers. Interviews were conducted to the point when respondents only repeated what had already been said.

While hawkers were approached either when they are taking a rest or when they return to their storage bases to restock, buyers were approached when the traffic is jammed or when they pulled-up to buy wares from the hawkers. Some buyers did turn down the request for an interview for personal reasons, while some obliged the researcher. Interviews with buyers lasted between 8-10 minutes. The research was conducted for a period of six months from Feb; 2019 to July 2019 putting into consideration morning and evening rush hours. The rush hours fall between 6am-9am and 4pm-10pm. These hours are peak periods when the traffic is severe and when hawking activities are equally at its peak. During the off-peak periods when there is free flow of traffic, the hawkers either go to restock, rest or prepare for the next traffic congestion.

For each location, 10 hawkers and 2 buyers were interviewed. Questions were asked regarding their general knowledge about traffic hawking and merchandise differentials, why buyers choose to buy from these hawkers, their experiences (challenges and gains), the role of location to their trade, what they think about traffic hawking in the other areas understudied, the role of the government and its policies on their activities, their plans for the future etc. Although demographic information like age, state of origin, cause of hawking in traffic, year of relocation, and gender were collected but were not given priority in the discussion of the article because it had very little effect on the data collected. Although questions around quality checks were asked, attention was directed at the types of wares sold especially as quality checks on goods are done by the National Agency for Food Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON). Hawkers confirm that they only buy their wares from reliable sources especially dealers of the products they sell, so as to avoid selling fake or expired products. Nevertheless, simple quality check was done by the researcher who deliberately purchased goods to confirm their expiry dates and their registered

NAFDAC or SON'S numbers. All products purchased by the researcher either had their registration number, or had a farther expiry date. Data was grouped under themes, and analysed using deductive and explanatory methods. The study also relied on relevant secondary literature to deepen the study.

## Findings and Discussion

This section puts the responses of hawkers through deductive and explanatory analysis. Responses are systematically grouped under themes for coherence.

### *Income capacity*

This theme examines the nexus between income capacity and traffic merchandise. Here, road users earning capacity are determining factor in the type of wares that are sold in traffic. It also underscores the relationship between income capacity and choice of goods bought. Unavoidably, the sense drawn from this connection is that one's standard of living, is reflected in the choices of quality and types of goods and services purchased/patronised. Having recognised this fact, the hawkers and like any trader, ensure the types, price and quality of goods are in tandem with the standard of the location of their business. Below is a response by Solomon, a 24 years old hawker who incidentally stands as a representative of responses that highlights this fact:

“... you know this area is mostly occupied by rich people. They have the financial capacity to purchase the things we sell. As a matter of fact, if we sell local or low-quality wares, they will not stop to buy and it will affect us because we get our daily bread from here. Perhaps you can get local items on the traffic on the mainland. That is where you find those low grades of people”.

(Interview, Lekki, March, 2019).

Solomon demonstrates a good knowledge of income and merchandise differentials as obtainable on the Island and mainland of Lagos. His response also provides an understanding on how their survival is dependent on the taste of commuters whilst drawing a sharp contrast between both locations under consideration. In an elucidating contribution, Chibuzor's singular instance using quality and types of cars captures the income dichotomy that is intended in this paper. For him, more exotic cars ride on the Lekki/Ajah Road as well as Maryland/Ikeja. Quite vividly put, “*you do not expect a wound-up exotic car to stop, wind down the window only to buy coco*” (*cocoa yam chips*). From this narrative, it is presumed that people who drive exotic cars are wealthy and too sophisticated to buy such local snacks. They would rather stop at an eatery or supermarket as the case may be to get whatever they want. Perhaps that explains why sachet water is not commonly sold by hawkers on Lekki/Ajah Road but will certainly be found such in Iyana-Ipaja as well as Ikorodu.

Taste and income are not only brought to fore in this response but goes to determine behavioural patterns of people. Impliedly, there are activities or actions, that come with status which places a kind of restraints or permissions on a person.

*Buyers Influence on Sellers and the Question of Attitudinal Differences*

Of the 10 participants in Lekki/Ajah study area, 7 attributed their physical transformation to their everyday contact with enlightened customers. They claim to have been greatly and positively influenced by the show of love and care from customers. The impacts created a sense of belonging and importance which is why respect is suggestive of distance but love and care brings closeness. Others on the other hand have kept the contact as strictly business. There is also the sharp improvement in dress sense, body maintenance and outlooks, as well as their expressive capabilities and character. Audu (28) male who sells apples and berries at Lekki explains in the exact words below:

“Before I leave my village to Lagos, I cannot talk English but now as I sell on this Lekki road I can able to talk and understand my customers. Even at home, I can talk well to my neighbours now”  
(Interview, Lekki, April, 2019).

Though grammatical errors are noticeable in Audu’s response, it does not take away the understanding conveyed in his thoughts. Audu’s narrative reflects the influence of interacting with the elite His description is comparative in retrospect to show his improvement in his communication skills. He recognizes the transformation that has evolved in him and he is appreciative of his influencers who are his customers. The impact of the business interaction between the buyers and sellers hawking during traffic also rubs off on the character of the sellers. Recognising that his location bears influence on his improvement again, is a reminder of the disparity in standard and calibre of people residing in the area. Aniema, a 33 years old female hawker, who sells groundnut, gave a narrative which corroborated Audu’s position. According to her, she has learnt and become friendlier following her daily interaction with her customers whom she qualified as “humble”. She confirms that some of her customers are friendly and would go the extent of inquiring about her day and sales, thus giving her a sense of relevance and love. However, a quick realisation that generalisation can be erroneous, the seller swiftly acknowledges the impolite manner with which some other buyers talk to them. According to her,

“...some of these rich people are so rude with condescending look, but because we have to sell to survive, we just ignore their insults”  
(Interview, Lekki, March, 2019).

As illustrated by these narratives from Audu and Aniema, there is a shared experience of positive influence from customers, but on the flipside, is the confirming view of Reeves (2018, p. no page number) that respect is primarily the responsibility of the disadvantaged. Similar experience was echoed in the narratives of the suburban areas studied. Kelechi male, (42) who sells air freshener on Iyana-Ipaja traffic says:

“some customers talk to us calmly while some talk to us harshly. They insult us but when you remember you have children at home to feed, you just behave as if you didn’t hear them. You know when someone is poor, such a person is aggressive”  
(Interview, Iyana-Ipaja, March, 2019).



For this participant, responsibilities at home is a driving force that aids him employ a coping mechanism of silence. His iconic connection between the buyers' economic status and attitude is extreme, albeit, a reiteration of Aniema's dualistic position of buyers' attitudinal differences to hawkers. The acknowledgement of attitudinal dynamics by buyers underscores Alemdaroğlu (2016, p. 14, 17) explanation of the mixed daily experiences by low-income earners who work in gated communities or bourgeois locations in Bilkent.

These narratives are nuances of the attitude exhibited by buyers of merchandise in traffic but should not be considered valid to rate as normal or general because they are overtly and covertly exhibited at individual discretion. They underscore the connection between attitude and personality, as well as the critical role spatiality plays in the personality of a person. By implication, your environment shapes your personality. The environment on its own is considered a field upon which other actors perform. It is therefore instructive to note that irrespective of economic, social or spatial segregation, different things may inform peoples disposition at different times of the day and should not be permanent labels on them. This failed to reflect in the views of the respondents who may be seen at some point as sentimental or subjective.

Ekene, 24 years old university student, who sells windscreen wipers in Ikorodu believes that no area emerges in a single day; development is a gradual process and with the right strategy in place, development will catch up with rural or peri-urban areas. His interesting contribution is a calculated strategy he believes earns him better than hawkers on the Lagos Island. He said: "I am selling this in this area because I will not make much sales in Lekki. In Lekki, most of the cars are in very good conditions unlike here. Most of the cars that ply this road have one fault or the other but the owners will continue using them until they pack up". He furthered his explanation:

"Ikorodu is equally a developing area just like Ajah but government's concentration is on the island that is the reason the island has more opportunities than the mainland especially areas like Ikorodu" (Interview, July, June, 2019).

Ekene's vivid explanation echoed Ming and Zhao (2006, p. 45) Olajide, Agunbiade and Bishi (2018) analysis of how the markers of urbanisation and urban-biased policies reinforces urban-rural inequality. Governments have been accused of playing the favouritism card for Lagos Island with little attention given to the mainland. Since the island has within its ambit the most concentration of the affluent and considered a CBD, it goes without saying that the government would raise more IGR from that axis of the state hence, the concentration of urbanisation and industrialisation. Ekene's explanation for selling such items in Ikorodu may not be absolutely valid considering that the statement criticizes itself to mean that most vehicle drivers who ply the suburban areas do not engage in vehicle maintenance, nevertheless, he was not out of place. Ming and Zhao (2006, p. 45) posit that the migration of labour from a location would reduce the competition of labourers in that area and also increase their wage. If logic is applied to this situation, it would mean that the less the people selling such items in Lekki/Ajah, the less the competition and the more their sales. However, in Ekene's case, he is more interested in regular and high turnover than uncertain sales with high profit margin.

*The nexus between wares differentials and spatial segregation.*

This theme considers some exclusive merchandise in the study areas. The next verbatim transcription shows the dynamics in the perception of security and safety demonstrated by residents in the two divides of the city. According to Geoffrey a 32 years old man who sells live puppies:

“...it is only in this area that I can sell these pets because the people here are fascinated by things like this. Is it in the suburbs that the people there are even afraid of pets that I would go and sell? They are rich here so they need it” (Interview, Lekki, May, 2019).

Geoffrey’s response highlights the intrinsic security benefits of dogs. Dogs are effective and efficient animal trained for various purposes such as security, detection, pet, etc. Austin (2000, p. no page number). This statement alludes to the patterns and wealthy lifestyle of people living in Lekki/Ajah. Deductively, they are protective of their wealth hence the need for dogs often used as security guards for their homes. In the same vein, from his narrative, one is not likely to find residents of the suburban particulate about acquiring a security dog for protection because they don’t consider themselves as possessing anything invaluable that would attract any form of harm to them. Nevertheless, the research discovers that a cogent reason some suburban dwellers don’t acquire dogs for any of the aforementioned reasons is because they may have neighbour(s) who abhors it since in most cases, they live in rented apartment. The people living in urban areas are most likely to be staying in their owned apartment which needs no approval from anybody to take such decision on dog acquisition. When asked why Richard was selling books on the traffic on Maryland/Ikeja road, he simply said

“...the people plying this road are literate, enlightened and exposed. Also, they know the importance of these books and have the time to read it. I said that they have the time to read books because they don’t belong to the struggling class who spend almost all their time looking for means of survival. My target audience have money” (Interview, Maryland/Ikeja, March, 2019).

This explains why Nunn et al. (2007, p. 42) understanding of a social world characterised by earnings, life chances, standards etc. is tied to education. For this seller, people living in the suburbs are too preoccupied to read books or perhaps, not enlightened or exposed to know the significance of knowledge acquisition from books. Their focus is so fixed on how to make ends meet such that reading books does not form part of their daily schedule.

Tomiwa (29) male who sells inflated mattresses along Maryland/Ikeja road gave an insight into the significance of the route as a determining factor for the types of items sold. He holds the notion that the route is mostly used by the wealthy since it connects the island where the rich lives to the local and international airports. According to him,

...we have to sell sophisticated wares as most customers get them in orders to engage themselves during their journey or even just drop in

the car for their driver to take home. Some of them do not have the time to go to the market so buying-on-the-go is an opportunity for them to get their needed items” (Interview, Maryland/Ikeja, February, 2019).

Tomiwa unveils the importance of route to the types of goods sold. In the same vein, route echoed economic class and vice versa. It won't be surprising if you do not find the affluent plying any of the roads in the suburbs because their social and economic status may possibly have no link to those areas. One can equally relate to the fact that the wealthy also have busy schedule trying to be better or at least maintaining the status quo. My interaction with hawkers in Iyana-Ipaja traffic reveal that instant consumables are of high demand. Fortune (30) female has this to say

“Customers buy snacks more on this road. Most of them work for *ogas* (boss) either in Ikeja or on the island. They get home late and are usually too tired to cook hence the need for on-the-road eating. But most of the people on the island have maids at home. So, they do not stress themselves preparing food when they get home late as dinner would already have been ready by the time they get home” (Interview, Iyana-Ipaja, June, 2019).

There is a corroboration between what Fortune said and Sawyer (2014, p. 277) referring to Ikeja as been known for employment. Fortune's narrative brings to the fore the confirmation that Ikeja and Lagos Island are dominated by employers who are basically not bound by the 8am or 4pm standard resumption and closing time respectively. They have the prerogative of time and days control so; they decide when to resume or close from work. They could leave the office earlier or later which may not subject them to spending long hours on Lagos traffic. They could equally take a day off work as they deem needed. The kind of lifestyle urban settlers observe is the reason perishable sellers take some caution in preparing their wares for sale. Seyi (24) female, who sells vegetables on traffic in Lekki, expresses a sense of health consciousness portrayed by buyers anytime they stop to buy her wares. That consciousness according to her informs the quality of vegetables she sells in terms of freshness and without blemish having painstakingly selected the vegetables. It is inferred that such degree of health consciousness is not exhibited by commuters on the mainland especially in the suburban areas of this study. This gives credence to Keene and Padilla, 2014, p. 393; Pearce (2012, p. 1922) view that spatial stigma has its effect on health inequality. In this circumstance, commuters in the different regions of study, exhibits different levels of health awareness which reflects on their consumption culture.

#### *Spatial segregation and negotiation power.*

The author's interview with Ifeanyi (31) male who sells sunglasses on Maryland/Ikeja traffic, reveals a rather controversial dimension to the nexus that exists between the calibre of people that ply a route and the negotiating power of the parties involved (sellers and buyers). He emphatically reiterated that he could and would not be able to cope with selling on the traffic on Iyana-Ipaja or Ikorodu roads because commuters in

those areas have strong negotiating power and would prefer to go to the market to purchase. He said, "I won't make the kind of profit I make here in those areas". Obviously, this seller is taking advantage of the economic status of the customers who buys from him. Ironically, he does not consider his exorbitant price as exploitation, but rather as having better bargaining strength which aligns with the experience of one of the buyers as highlighted in the succeeding section below. Diamantopoulous 1991 (cited in Kienzler and Kowalkowski 2017, p. 103) contends that pricing is determined by various factors amongst which is environment, firm objectives, customers' characteristics and pricing situation. Using the discriminatory pricing strategy, Ifeanyi combines these factors to fix prices for his wares to his advantage.

#### *Exploring buyers' views and experiences of hawker in traffic*

Responses from some buyers show a myriad of reasons for buying items in traffic. For madam Ruth, she considers it stress free and time gained to be used for attending to other needs. Like Chaudhari (2022, p. 7) puts it, inability to accomplish task owing to poor time management will result in fatigue and stress. Chaudhari position is relatable especially as this typically justifies the action of Ruth, who is compelled by her overwhelming activities to buy from the hawkers in traffic, and it does not matter at this point the relativity in price provided her time is saved. Mr. Ayo thinks the items are cheaper in comparison to what is being sold in malls or supermarket. Even though like the first respondent, he may have saved himself the troubles of going to the market and also time, this respondent is driven by the price advantage that he considers as "cheaper". As for Engr. David, he feels it is his own little way of encouraging people who are not as privileged as he is by not selling on the road and running after cars. Engr. David is moved to empathy for the hawkers and as such patronises them to encourage and support their trade. For him, their survival is tied to the fortune on the street, and they should be given the chance to at least survive.

On the other hand of the spectrum are people who would not buy from traffic hawkers because they consider their items too expensive and would rather go to the market to buy. Mr. Jude narrates how he bought a casual slipper on the traffic in Lekki and it was over #1,000 cheaper in the stall close to his house. For him, traffic hawkers are extortionists and should be off the road. One may consider his position as hasty or general but again, he is not to be brushed aside because while his opinion is factual because of his experience, it may be a fallacy to another who may have bought same product from the traffic at a cheaper rate. Others say they would not buy because the hawkers usually do not have varieties from which they could make a choice. Yet some others are of the opinion that traffic hawkers sell sub-standard products that won't give them value for money expended.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper analysed traffic trade merchandise differentials in the materiality of segregation in four different study areas in Lagos state. An ethnographic study found traffic merchandise differentials not only reveals the different strands of segregations and inequalities overwhelming the state, but also unfolds the influence of the commercial activities on the hawkers' behavioural pattern through daily interactions

with customers. The paper found that, for most respondents, the narratives provided for the differentials are substantially true when juxtaposed with previous related literature. Economic capacity, elitism, level of literacy, exposure, spatial difference, etc. resonated in the responses of participants. Finally, it is imperative to state that with the alarming population growth in Lagos state, traffic gridlock would always eventuate traffic hawking which on one hand emphasises the polarity between spaces, and on the other, levels the binary between urban and suburban areas of the state.



Fig. 1. Lagos hawker by Lagos Culture blog.

*Seeing the City through Traffic Hawking and Merchandise Differentials*



Fig. 2. Photo credit: The Guardian Nigeria News



Fig. 3. Photo credit: Participating Artists Press Agency



Fig. 4. A traffic hawker being arrested by Kai. Photo credit: TheInforNG.





Fig. 5. Traffic hawkers taking advantage of the traffic congestion. Photo credit: Alamy.



Fig. 6. Photo credit: The Nigerian Voice.



Fig. 7. Photo showing a commuter who pulled up before negotiating with a traffic hawker. Photo credit: Author.



Fig. 8.  
Photo credit:  
African Ripples Magazine.



Fig. 9.  
Photo credit: Punchng.com.



Fig. 10. A traffic hawker fixing windscreen wiper for a customer in the rain. Photo credit: Author.



Fig. 11. Picture showing a hawker transacting business with a commuter during traffic congestion. Photo credit: Author.





Fig. 12. Layout of high rising buildings on Lagos Island. Source: ArchNaija



Fig. 13. Photo credit: the MLS Properties. <https://www.mls.com/>

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## Largo da Peça in Benguela (Angola) and the Municipal Market in São Tomé (Sao Tomé and Príncipe).

### The production of Public Spaces in Portuguese Colonial Cities

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#### Abstract

African cities face complex dilemmas and transformation processes, related to social, environmental, and political-economic dimensions, these affect the quality of life of their citizens. Public spaces are one important indicator of urban quality of life and an essential tool for spatial planning and land-use management. They are a symbol of collective power and the link between citizens and government, as here publicness is practised and experienced. This contribution aims to provide insights into how public spaces in Angola and Sao Tomé and Príncipe that have been neglected by the governments are still places of socialisation and interaction. The cities of Benguela and São Tomé share common historical paths; created during the Portuguese colonial time, they became the centre of their regions. We take a public space in each city to discuss the usability and from this to address the potential and development challenges. The two cases are the Largo da Peça (Angola), whose name was taken from a cannon placed here in 1846. The cannon is a reminder of the Portuguese defence against the attacks of the native people. The second case refers to the surroundings of the Municipal Market Hall in the city of São Tomé (Sao Tomé and Príncipe). The Market Hall is one of the first modernist projects in the art deco architectural style built in the small insular country. Backed by documentary research and field observations this study provides insights on the current use of public spaces and the challenges public space development face in post-colonial African cities. The analysis suggests that although the lack of an effective public policy for public space management and development, both spaces have become places of collective interaction.

**Keywords:** public space, socio-spatial practices, Angola, Sao Tomé and Príncipe; Largo da Peça, municipal market

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## 1. The Portuguese-speaking African countries

A city reflects different historical moments of societies, they are as Calvino (2015: IX–X) rightly points out “a set of several things: memory, desires, signs of a language. Cities are places of exchange (...) they are exchanges of words, desires, memories”. This contribution intends to deliver a situational reflection on the public space development in two Portuguese-speaking countries by analysing a public space in the cities of Benguela (Angola) and São Tomé (Sao Tomé e Príncipe). These two African countries share a common historic path, both have been colonised since the sixtieth century B.C. by Portugal and became independent in 1975. The overseas expansion of Portugal in Africa resulted in five sovereign countries, Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tomé and Príncipe. As a result of the common colonial past, these countries share Portuguese as an official language, called in Portuguese *lusofonia* (lusophony), and are members of organizations such as the Group of Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOP) and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP<sup>1</sup>). The development in the Portuguese colonies is vastly different and resulted in different economic, political and socio-cultural development patterns, which must be taken into account in discussing the urbanisation process in these countries. The archipelago São Tomé e Príncipe, in the Gulf of Guinea, was uninhabited and first colonised by Portuguese seafarers, who arrived in 1470 and gradually settled. The islands were used as a centre for the slave trade to South America, this resulted in a population predominantly of African and *mestiço* descent (Aragão and Smaniotto, 2022a). In Angola, which has been inhabited since the Palaeolithic age, the Portuguese seafarers met in 1484 a densely populated area by different nomadic tribes and several large kingdoms. The land take in Angola and Sao Tomé e Príncipe initially began with coastal settlements and trading posts and remained for long periods limited to the coastal fringe, from where the slave trade where organised. Slaves were the major export and an important commodity for the African colonies (Britannica, s.d.). Slave labour was used in the coffee, cotton, and sugar plantations and processing, and later exported from Angola to the coffee and cocoa plantations in Sao Tomé and Príncipe and Brazil. Only in the nineteenth century, was the Angolan territory completely controlled by Portugal. This control requested investments in infrastructure and in upgrading urban settlements, whereas the coastal cities although more affected by the slave trade and loss of land to settlers, expanded and became the first administrative centres. After the independency in 1975, the two cities, São Tomé and Luanda became the two national capitals correspondingly, and Benguela (Angola) the regional capital of the province of the same name.

## 2. The urban challenge – the public spaces in past colonial cities

The planning of urban development and architecture of public buildings for all overseas colonies were centralized and designed in Lisbon by the Colonial Urbanization Office (GUC, Gabinete de Urbanização Colonial), a department of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs. After the constitutional change in 1951, this office was renamed to Overseas Urbanisation Office (GUU, Gabinete de Urbanização do Ultramar), and again in 1957 to Directorate of Urbanisation and Housing Services (DSUH, Direcção de Serviços de

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<sup>1</sup> [www.cplp.org](http://www.cplp.org)



Urbanização e Habitação), under the also renamed Ministry of Overseas Territories (Milheiro, 2012). This Office is seen as a symbol of modernisation and homogenisation of the built landscape in the colonies, serving as a “*common organism for all colonies in Africa*” (Milheiro, 2012, p. 88).

The urban design and architecture of colonial cities was inspired by the aesthetics and conditions of the Portuguese cities and reflected their social and collective characteristics, public services and spaces (Rodrigues, 2019). The morphology and the functional, social and environmental characteristics of such a city were established in Lisbon without taking into account local or regional peculiarities and needs, and considered often only the “colonial” city sector, leaving the “native” sector developed without any co-ordination. Such a colonial rule affected the spatial structure and conditions under which the native population lived, as leaving much of urban expansion to unplanned and unregulated growth. This had implications for the citizen's daily life as much as for the countries' development, exacerbating the legacy of colonialism that spawned weak urban planning institutions (Pieterse and Parnell, 2014).

Urban growth, with functional and social differentiation of space, the expansion of suburbs, and expressive demographic development are challenges shared by the African countries. Medeiros (2006) states that the development process of Portuguese African cities has historical *landmarks* that date back to the 1950s and 1960s, and evidenced by the independence and building of new states, these had to find a place in a new global order. Understanding the reality of African cities calls for identifying the dichotomy of formal and informal cities (António, 2017; Fernandes and Nascimento, 2018), a coexistence modelled on exploitation and segregation practices (Medeiros, 2006). The African city, being rooted in particular by (micro)structures of land occupation, segregation, and by continuity or ruptures (the civil war in the Angolan case) requires “a more comprehensive, plural and flexible urbanism” (Viana, 2010, p.2). In the view of Jane Jacob, cities have “*innate abilities for understanding, communicating, contriving, and inventing what is required to combat their difficulties*”. Such vital cities hold potentials and strengths, she calls them “seeds” for their own regeneration “*with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves*” (Jacob, 1992, pp. 461-462). Public spaces can be one such seed, as they provide social, environmental and economic benefits for the whole society, contributing thus to human welfare and wellbeing (DTLR, 2002; URGE Project, 2004). Promoting quality public spaces is thus an important pillar of sustainable urban development. To fully provide such benefits, public spaces have to be responsive and meet the needs of the citizens. This in turn calls to gain knowledge on how people use spaces and what are their spatial needs. Identifying the socio-spatial practices is an essential step towards better tailored public policies.

Many of the problems faced by urban development in Benguela and São Tomé are of colonial nature, and can be used as a showcase of the long-term and multi-level processes, stressing a weak promotion of territorial cohesion, which also results in the lack of integration between the coast and the interior. Cities, and in particular capital cities, concentrate resources, and thanks to these they also become hubs of rural exodus exposing the daily struggle for social rights and spatial equity. The fight for survival and the right to the city is a driving factor in daily collective life (Fernandes and Nascimento, 2018).

The meaningful but disordered urban growth resulted, as Pinto, Remesar and Amado (2008, p.149) list, in:

- a) Fragmentation of ecosystems and habitats,
- b) Loss of identity and connectivity in the urban fabric,
- c) Social exclusion and marginalisation,
- d) Economic disparities and lack of economic diversity.

Therefore, the gap between the structural and social relationships, between design and local and regional situation, results in aggravating urban poverty and the levels of social exclusion, which shaped by fragmentation, informality and need for survival, is witnessed by the manifold and polymorphic urban mosaic of Benguela and São Tomé (Viana, 2010; Aragão 2014).

### **3. Materials and methods**

The paper uses an integrative case analysis and literature review to explore different aspects of public space uses and management in two different urban (and national) settings of local significance. The research is based on on-site field behaviour observations (URGE Project, 2004) and content analysis (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018), with the aim of assess and better understand the reproduction of spatial quality from the perspective of different types of users of public spaces. It takes the Largo da Peça in Benguela and the Municipal Market in São Tomé to identify the problems and challenges these spaces face and towards proposing improvements for their more effective and efficient management. The fieldwork, as part of the PHD Programme, was executed in July 2022 in both cities.

The usability of public spaces is explored by systematic site observations and mapping the behaviours of public spaces users, as these allow the collection of a broad set of qualitative data. The field observations were organised randomly in both spaces and included site visits, each of at least two hours and in different periods of days (morning, afternoon and evening, and both weekdays and weekends). In both cases, three locations in the spaces are defined for recording and scoring information collected. The two sets of data are recorded using a template developed by the URGE Project (2004) and widely used in similar research (Smaniotto et al., 2006, 2020, 2023). Occasionally, when users and researchers were able to interact, a short interview could be performed. Questions about the purpose and use frequency, and an opinion about the space qualities (what is good or bad) could be posed. This information was annotated as field notes and evaluated together with the mappings.

The research approach enables a simple empirical data collection and easy access to a broader population, potentially reflecting a more accurate user spectrum. The method relates the local features, facilities and equipment with the different activities that users perform in this space. This contribution also allows us to reflect on the methodological, analytical and political challenges that urban studies have to consider by analysing aspects related to urban theory, design and territorial cohesion that affect the production and dynamics of public open spaces in African cities. The public open space, with its social, collective and multifunctional character is of central importance for urban studies and is one of the main strands of research for urban planners (Smaniotto, 2019).

#### 4. Largo da Peça in Benguela (Angola)

##### 4.1 The context of Angola and the City of Benguela

Angola is a relatively young sovereign state (since 1975), accordingly is legislation that concerns territorial development and urban planning, as a violent civil war (1975-2002) followed the war for independence. The turbulent political history also provoked major migratory movements causing high urban growth rates and widespread poverty, since urban development was not able to keep pace with such movements. Angola is one of the most urbanised countries in sub-Saharan Africa and has high urban rates (63% of the total population lives in cities and 44% alone in Luanda, the national capital).

The Land and Town Planning Act (*Lei do Ordenamento do Território e do Urbanismo de Angola*) has been in force since 2004. It has been completed 2006 by the act *Regulamento Geral dos Planos Territoriais, Urbanísticos e Rurais*, which establishes the national planning system and the framework for division of powers between the central, provincial, municipal and local government bodies. Despite their wide scope, both make almost no reference to approach public space development. The government identified other development priorities, such as infrastructure and housing, that suffered from any effective planning response during the civil war (Viana, 2010).

The City of Benguela is the capital of the homonymous province, which is located on the central-west coast of Angola and occupies 3.19% of the national territory. The city has a population of 623,777, most female and between 25 and 64 years of age and is one of the oldest Angolan cities. It was founded in 1617 by Portuguese explorers, who had to face strong resistance from the native populations, in particular the “Mundombe”. To afford a permanent settlement and further explore the south coast, a fortress was built in 1661, which became the core of the village. The village grew from a fortress to become the capital of the new Portuguese domain in the south of Angola.



Figure 1. Panoramic view of the Largo da Peça, with colonial houses in the background.  
Photo by Isaac Santos (2022).

##### 4.2 Largo da Peça

This square, located in central Benguela, is a part of the old fortress. Here a piece of artillery (cannon) was placed, which after the independence has been taken to a museum. The place as well as the neighbourhood however took the name Peça (piece).



*Largo da Peça in Benguela (Angola) and the Municipal Market in São Tomé (Sao Tomé and Príncipe)*

The square is an important landmark, in a quarter with variegated architecture styles, with (rustic) brick and baroque houses (most newly renovated) side by side with newer contemporary buildings. It is a mainly residential neighbourhood with some commercial and retail activities, in the immediate vicinity only a bakery and small construction material suppliers could be mapped.



Figure 2 (top). View from the lawn towards the centre of the square.

Figure 3 (right). The cannon column in the middle of the square.

Photos by Isaac Santos (2022).



Figure 5. The game court and the kiosk/restaurant at the west end of the square.

Photo by Isaac Santos (2022).



Figure 6. The ongoing landscape maintenance, watering and mowing done by municipal workers.

Photo by Isaac Santos (2022).

The square is about 120m long and 56m wide and comprises a landscaped area with shrubs, lawn, large palm trees and radial pathways to the centre where the artillery piece was placed – today a column with a cannon. The pathways are covered with black

and white cobblestone; known as *calçada portuguesa* (Port. pavement); it is a traditional-style pavement largely used in Portugal for pedestrian areas. The square has also a multi-sports court and a kiosk/restaurant. Despite the quality that can be recognised in terms of the variety of vegetation, its maintenance is an issue that poses some challenges. Young people from the neighbourhood are significant users, especially on weekends the court is used by young men for playing football, while women use the green areas to sit and chat. This spectrum of users corresponds to widely discussed by Gehl (2011). The lighting is poor, which restricts the use and raises safety problems for users, and car traffic, especially when combined with low lighting and the absence of signs (on the pavement or vertically). This square due to its features, equipment and use patterns is a typical case of public open space in Angola.



Figure 6. View from the eastern end of the square, where equipment for small children's play is placed.  
Photo by Isaac Santos (2022).

## 5. Municipal Market in São Tomé (Sao Tomé and Príncipe)

### 5.1 The context of the Republic of Sao Tomé and Príncipe and the City of São Tomé

The Democratic Republic of Sao Tomé and Príncipe consists of two main islands: São Tome, and Príncipe. The capital, São Tome, has 74 000 inhabitants but is part of an agglomeration of 135,000 - 68% of the country's population. The city was developed around the harbour in Ana-Chaves Bay, in the northern part of the island. The harbour became a major maritime hub in Portuguese Africa. In 1951, an Urban Development Plan brought important infrastructure for the city's development. It also foresaw the rehabilitation of the historic centre and the identification of new urban expansion zones. The urban growth shifted between large-scale residential quarters and single-family houses neighbourhoods, between low-density and monumental road axes, in a typical manner also used in Portugal during the so-called Estado-Novo (1933-1974) (António, 2017). Sao Tomé and Príncipe became after five centuries of colonial domination independent in 1975. For the first time, an African identity could be established, and the principles of universality and the indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms be respected. The last 30 years have been marked in Sao Tomé and Príncipe by significant urbanisation levels, although in a disorganised and unstructured manner. The urbanisation level of over 80% (Africapolis, s.d.), one of the highest in Africa, puts pressure on the government to adopt more integrated policies and promote quality urban spaces. The country counts on a comprehensive planning framework. The most relevant is the National Spatial Planning Plan, which leads to the conceptual discussion around "collective spaces", "public spaces" and "spaces for collective use". The plan,



however, being of strategic nature does not provide guidance for formulating urban agendas; this is delegated in turn through the Territorial Planning Instruments Act to the district level, which shall define parameters for the development and use of public goods, including public spaces.



Figure 7 (left). The market hall and taxis waiting for passengers.  
Figure 8 (right). A typical busy streetscape around the market surrounded by colonial houses.  
Photos by Diderot Carvalho (2022).

## 5.2 The open spaces around the Mercado Municipal

The Municipal Market Hall and the open spaces around it were built in 1951 when a swamp was drained. This market hall was designed in Lisbon, as design sketches from 1946 displayed in the Historical Archives of São Tomé and Príncipe show (Milheiro, 2012, p.94). Market halls were built mainly for the supply of Europeans living in the colonies, but as places for trade, they also became a central landmark and a “traditional” place for socialising, contributing to the identity building of the community (Pintaudi, 2006). Due to the strategic location, the public spaces around the market hall are also used as the main transport hub in the city, with the traditional yellow cabs (*Maximbombos* and *candongueiros*) dominating the scenery [Fig. 7 and 10].



Figure 9 (left). Old warehouses in the harbour with advertisements to help protect and prevent COVID-19 disease  
Figure 10 (right). The market hall and the waiting taxis are a recurring motif in São Tomé.  
Photos by Diderot Carvalho (2022).



Once there are no publicly run transport modes in São Tomé, a vast network of taxis covers the entire island. These taxis are privately run and receive no subsidies. They rely entirely on passenger fares that vary by distance (Aragão, 2014). These features make the public spaces around the market hall an important gathering point, with bystanders, informal traders, buyers and sellers sharing the narrow street spaces - telling us interesting stories about the tussle between tradition and modernity. The market hall and its surroundings serve thus as spots to gather, linger and mingle around a public building. The broad spectrum of uses reflects the country's population structure. The presence of shops, bars, and restaurants is here a major factor in creating spaces for interaction. This confirms the fact that social eating and drinking together has always been a community-building activity in the Portuguese society, which has been adopted in the colonies.



Figure 11. The crowd sharing with cars and street vendors the pedestrian areas around the market hall. Photo by Diderot Carvalho (2022).

## 6. Discussion

The Largo da Peça and the Market Hall are public spaces of social [inter]relationship in their communities, located in historic surroundings and close to very busy main exit roads. These amenities confer to the places an important permeability. Serdoura (2006)

argues that the permeability and size of the blocks represent greater accessibility, in both cases, the once colonial and regular layout has been absorbed by the irregular and organic features of African cities. Both cases share further common features – both are gathering places for their communities and thus important hubs for social interaction where people meet naturally. Although their design and equipment do not permit an interaction comfortably, and often because of the lack of opportunities and attractions in the neighbourhoods they are overused. From the field notes in both cases, the following shortcomings could be detected:

- Poor lighting provokes feelings of unsafety and consequently little use of spaces during nighttime. The importance of public spaces at nighttime in contemporary cities and the potential conflicts are highlighted by Giordano et al. (2019).
- Poor facilities for people with reduced mobility, in particular elderly people
- Lack of urban furniture and amenities (benches and group sitting opportunities, contrary to the general recommendations to make public spaces more attractive (PPS, n.d.; Smaniotto et al. 2023)
- Lack of new facilities and equipment, which could turn these spaces into a more dynamic spot for economic activities and promote social inclusion, as advocated by different research, such as Schmidt & Németh, 2010; Giordano et al. 2019; Smaniotto et al., 2023.
- Lack of thermoregulation amenities and shelters and shaded areas, sparse use of greenery, as reported as part of sustainable solutions by different institutions, research, policies, etc., i.e. URGE Project (2004).

These shortcomings show how investment in public spaces for recreation and leisure is neglected, although both countries, Angola and Sao Tomé and Príncipe, have a comprehensive set of legislation to provide guidance for transforming the cities into more people-friendly environments. Indeed, the existence of legislation does not necessarily mean an automatic answer to the challenges that public space development demands. In Angola, for example, strategies for promoting and creating public spaces are proposed in the framework of territorial planning (República de Angola, 2006, 2007), which guides the government practices (and other interested parties). The same legislation also emphasises the citizen's right to participate in the production of the city. However, in Angola (and in Sao Tomé and Príncipe), public participation is still quite limited (Isaksen et al., 2007).

## **7. Conclusion**

Understanding and addressing the urbanisation phenomena in African cities forces us to look at poor data and weak statistical information if they exist at all. Such poor data diminishes the ability of countries also to make good policy decisions (Bédécarrats et al., 2016; Aragão & Smaniotto 2022a).

The multiple results of inertia and expansion in both Benguela and São Tomé created a complex mosaic of “empty” and “full” places at different scales, as if they are an adjustment to colonial patterns and irregularities, creating both formal and informal public spaces. Squares, markets and streets are the traditional types of public spaces in both cities, and as shown in the cases; these are important for the perception of the city and the urban life. The search for solutions requires also studying the forces that are

driving the development of urban infrastructure and thus the quality of life. Research is absolutely a prerequisite for this, as we need to know more about how public spaces are being used and the role they play for the local communities. Incipient studies are vital, in particular for countries with weak planning tools and urban management (Aragão and Smaniotto, 2022).

This study offers insights into two African cases, which although different in their morphology, features and uses, converge and illustrate the dichotomy of African cities. Both cases expose the relationships between the colonial and post-colonial, the formal and the informal city, and between regular and irregular patterns of urban growth, as acknowledged by Viana (2010). Such dichotomies and development bottlenecks are supposed to persist and are reinforced by inappropriate *reactions* by the government of both Angola and Sao Tomé and Príncipe. This calls for experimenting with community-based and government-fed informal planning actions, where the traditional ecological/local knowledge is acknowledged and finds an appropriate arena. Contemporary design and management, regardless of the city, do not invite users to new activities, which could increase interest in urban issues, as highlighted by (Smaniotto et al, 2023). The analysed places although popular among the citizens, translated by a high number of users, could be better valued if different aspects of the local communities were taken into consideration.

A more sustainable and community-based environment should reflect the multifunctionality (and vitality) of urban centres of African cities, as they provide the “space” for coexistence and interaction between people and their territory. The city, as a living organism, in which various actors and entities congregate, is the great challenge of contemporary society, and currently, we live in the duality between the call for more multifunctionality and the existence of monofunctional public spaces on the flip side. The local governments in Benguela and São Tomé, as in any other cities must look at public spaces as an asset with crucial social, economic and cultural dimensions. Looking for these fragile structures is also a way to increase territorial cohesion - with different scales of action. The path for more inclusive and people-sensitive public spaces includes oriented and integrated urban planning as a tool to boost territorial development and competitiveness.

The analysis in both cases shows, how urban life in public spaces requires a careful reflection on social dynamics in emerging societies, which are still searching for their own identity. Public participation is therefore the key in defining and sharing objectives and strategies, in the development of measures and interventions at different scales of action. Meeting the challenges of modernity requires “acting locally, thinking globally”, through a collective reflection where all actors have a space and place.

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## Multiple Mnazi Mmoja.

### Exploring Identities of Contemporary African Urban Landscapes through an Experimental Architectural Studio: Unit 15X at the GSA

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#### Abstract

This paper argues for the appreciation of multiple identities present within cities in Africa by discussing the pedagogic experiment of an architectural design studio and the design projects of the studio between 2017 and 2019. Mnazi Mmoja is a Kiswahili phrase loosely translated to mean "one coconut tree"- oneness in a post-colonial context. This paper interrogates the problematic single-stroke description of African challenges, a continent with over 51 countries with diverse cultures, ethnicities, and urban morphologies. The paper argues that there are many Mnazi Mmoja. *Unit 15X's* design teaching strategy has been to challenge knowledge in architecture, landscape, and urban design by first taking students at the University of Johannesburg to other African countries to foster cultural awareness. Secondly, *Unit 15X's* studio utilizes landscape themes, allowing students to research complex relationships between urban inhabitants and their landscapes and their production to enhance critical awareness and move beyond aesthetic explorations. Our curiosity guides us to understand what it means to practice architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, and planning by interrogating public spaces on the continent. This paper discusses *Unit 15X's studio exploration of Larval (Emergent) Landscapes* on the public space of the Mnazi Moja site of historical and cultural significance in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania through two students' speculative design projects. Two students' projects, *The Anti-Atlas*, and *The One Coconut Tree*, explore the concept of Mnazi Mmoja- 'oneness' - to pause questions that challenge planning and design legislations and begin to speculate on how indigenous knowledge, multiple identities, and African material conditions can be (re)-applied to contemporary contexts in order to raise awareness of: identity; multiculturalism in cities; post-colonial urbanism within cities in an attempt to reinterpret the multiple representations of the concept of Mnazi Mmoja.

**Keywords:** transformative pedagogy, decolonizing, identities, urban, multiculturalism, Mnazi Mmoja

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## Identity of African Cities

It is fair to say that the identity of African cities is in a state of flux as they all face similar unprecedented challenges linked to rapid urbanization, internal and local migration, growing population, increasing densification, economic upheaval, liberal multicultural politics, the end of post-independence euphoria, and growing impact of climate change (Abbot, 2012: 427; Myers, 2011). Important in the identity of African cities is how they have been viewed, analysed, interpreted and written about in the past, through the lens of Western worlds (Abbot, 2012: 402). African cities have been seen as failed, riddled with crisis urban environments, with overcrowding, increasing informal settlements prone to environmental disasters, high unemployment, violence and failed economies with an ever-growing informal sector (Myers and Murray MJ, 2007: 1). In this critique of African cities, there is little discussion of the resilience and innovation of inhabitants of African cities. These challenges call for new understanding of the identities and material conditions of African cities to be investigated.

Identity in cities is formed by who has access to its facilities. Nearly all “modern” African cities were established during the colonial period and initially were exclusionary in use to the settlers with the indigenous peoples granted limited access or spatially segregated, as exemplified by Apartheid system in South Africa and Namibia. During the colonial era, state ideology defined Africans as rural dwellers and, were regarded accordingly as temporary workers in the city (Myers, 2011: 52, Gervais-Lambony, 2006). Upon attainment of independence, freedom meant access for people to the cities, but in most cases, this has meant access to public spaces which came in various forms and scales. In the main, informal occupation of land for dwelling and conducting business in the cities has been the most transformative aspect of cities in post-colonial Africa and has been written about widely by many academics and scholars.

What has not been studied widely in African cities is public spaces as part of urban infrastructure both existing and emerging, and how the local ‘new’ inhabitants are utilizing these transforming spaces. There is growing recognition of the role of public space in cities globally, and in Africa in providing equitable access to facilities for citizens (Garau (undated), UCLG. 2015). Abbot (2012: 418) posits that the only way African cities can provide meaningful sustainable development is by rediscovering the true nature of public infrastructure which includes public space and its role in contemporary society. True nature of public space speaks to matters of identity and who among the citizens identifies with such spaces and how they use and occupy them. This has been the objective of the research design studio, *Unit 15X*, in the Graduate School of Architecture (GSA) at the University of Johannesburg- to understand how public spaces as public infrastructure of African cities are evolving and to draw lessons from this knowledge. *Unit 15X* has explored various public spaces in African cities, the latest being *Mnazi Mmoja*, a ceremonial space in the heart of the city of Dar es Salam. It is through the public space of *Mnazi Mmoja* that *Unit 15X* derives its conceptual meaning of *Mnazi Mmoja* (*One coconut tree*) translated as “we-are-one” - in Ki-Swahili the main language of a unified Tanzania.

## Identity as a Transient Concept

*Mnazi Mmoja* translated to mean “we are one” which is taken from *Kiswahili* language that signifies the unification of inland Tanganyika and the Islands of Zanzibar to make

one identifiable country of Tanzania after independence in 1960 and symbolically commemorates the traditional gathering place of Tanzanian villagers and townspeople in the shade of a tree (Myers, 2011:44). And so, in our exploration of public spaces, we found public spaces named Mnazi Mmoja in the city of Dar es Salaam and in Stone Town of Zanzibar. Others posit that the term Mnazi Mmoja signifies the political unification of Tanzania- unifying mainland Tanganyika and the Islands of Zanzibar- as the country was conceived as a one-party state ruled by the Chama Chama Mapinuzi Party (CCMA) under the African socialist leader Julius Nyerere.

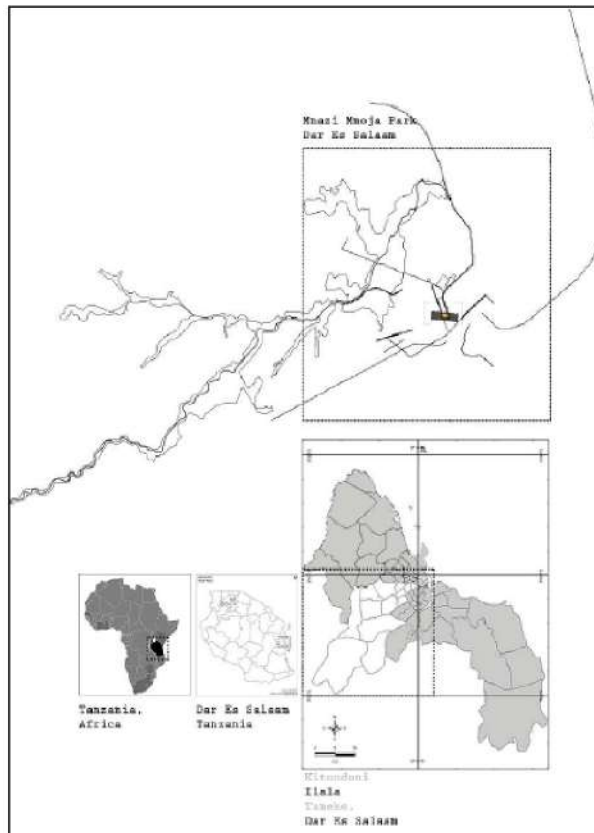


Figure 1: Location of Mnazi Mmoja Public Space in Dar es Salaam Tanzania. Source Smith,2019.

We have borrowed this idea of Mnazi Mmoja ‘oneness’ - as a starting point to interrogate, the deep history of public spaces as sites of multiple identities, that may be obscured by Tanzania’s post-independence drive for ‘oneness’ and seek to bring to light, representative multiple identities that might inform how we can begin to conceive, conceptualize and to design future public spaces in African cities. In a manner like that of Myers’ (2011:42), we start with making the assumption that understanding one African city’s evolution could be a basis for identifying common themes in urban development that may be applicable to other cities on the continent and other parts of the world. We use the principle of ‘oneness’ to interrogate the Mnazi-Mmoja public space in Dar es Salaam as it offers us the chance to identify themes that may be common and applicable to other public open spaces on the African continent. From the themes identified at Mnazi Mmoja we will interrogate the themes through the work of

our students' propositions on what public spaces mean and could be, what shapes their identity and how they could be reimagined.

*Mnazi Mmoja* is an open space- a green space in the city, marked with monuments that tell the selected history of Dar es Salaam (Fig1). The students' projects reveal the 'hidden' histories of *Mnazi-Mmoja*, one that speaks of: spatial segregation; forced removals; imperial domination by the Omani Kingdom, colonial German and British establishments; pre-colonial racial segregation; a post-colonial site of reconciliation, contemporary site of economic liberalization; a contested site for the contemporary unemployed inhabitants of Dar es Salaam; and a site of rigid planning regulations by city officials. *Unit15X* studio challenges its students to re-interpret *Mnazi Mmoja* in ways that spoke to the needs of current inhabitants of multiple identities of Dar es Salaam.

### **Unit15X Studio: The Research Design Studio**

In the typical architecture studio design tasks and explorations are set by the design lecturer with emphasis on the students to provide novel ideas about the problem at hand that are many times insular and reliant on the students' skill to imagine a range of solutions. Reference to global canons of knowledge i.e. modernism and post-modernism, sometimes leads to a design agenda in the studio that is devoid of contextual interrogation and integration - design for the sake of design. In the context of global discourse decolonizing knowledge (Abbot, et. al, 2018) the *Unit15X* Studio in the GSA proposes an approach to design exploration that interrogates context and uses it to develop responsive projects that respond to the challenges of the context. In line with arguments for decolonizing the curriculum, *Unit15X* subscribes to the notion of students being co-creators of knowledge with as much agency as their studio masters (Freire,1993). Secondly, *Unit15x* argues that the challenges of the local context provide students with an opportunity to engage in a transformative learning experience that will develop the scope of architectural education in a relevant and responsive manner. Decolonizing the curriculum challenges the design studio masters to explore ways of bringing excluded voices into the architecture studio, especially those of indigenous voices that have historically and by design been left out of the mainstream discussion on architecture and urban issues (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Thirdly, we recognize that architecture programmes have lagged behind other professions like, planning and urban design, developing learning that responds to the social, economic challenges of the context (Rakodi,1996,48). Finally tackling complex problems, like public space, helps us to break notions of covert learning inherent in most architectural programmes, that the architect is the sole designer of a product, process or a place. In *Unit15X* studio one of our objectives is to reveal the importance of co-creation through understanding of broader systems, economic, social and environmental that underpin every design product or process. Thus, we deliberately engage our students in investigation, interrogation, design and speculation of landscapes of public spaces because no single individual or designer is responsible for success of a place - public spaces have many actors as realized by early 19 Century architects that their individual building designs fell short of achieving the 'beautiful city' and become increasingly concerned with arrangement of spatial of the urban context (Rakodi, 1996). Hence our focus of public spaces is not intended to achieve the Utopian concepts of the City Beautiful in the African context, but rather to explore ways in which our future architects can better

define their role in the broader systems of changing cities - climate change, loss of biodiversity, densification and urban sprawl- through a search for “solutions from below” that take into consideration, actually existing social conditions (Bekker and Leilde, 2006).

*Unit 15X* studio’s teaching approach is underpinned by exploring broader issues that affect public spaces in African cities as a way to better understand how contemporary infrastructure challenges can be understood and how they may be approached and how new identities can be defined and forged (Abbot. 2012). Underlying *Unit 15X* approach is the conviction that architecture and urban planning are “tangible tools” with which to explore and imagine post-colonial public spaces in African cities (Myers, 2011:46).

### **Exploring Teaching in Architecture and Planning Contemporary African Context**

It is important to explore the identity of contemporary public spaces in African cities from their initial creation as part of cities and towns in the colonial period whose purpose was to serve the interests of the European settlements. The design of such public spaces reflected the imported interests of safety, health and ideals of beauty borrowed from the European experience (Rakodi: 1996, 46). In the post- independence era public spaces have evolved to assume new roles based on democratic principles and equitable access for all to public infrastructure including public spaces (Garau, undated). At best, some public spaces have been retained in design, quality and maintenance regimes with little room for the general public to reinvent the use or appearance of public space. In these cases, symbols of independence have replaced colonial figures or have been placed on prominent locations on the sites. In the worst-case scenario, colonial public spaces have been overtaken by new users with new functions rendering their designs to be dysfunctional and unrecognizable. As African cities have grown, there has been a need to design public spaces with a new kind of identity that expresses the changing aspiration, hopes and vision of citizens. The design of such spaces is once again problematic in that most designers, planners and landscape designers have training that is European oriented or have actually trained in the West. Finding the new spatial language and methods with which to engage and design new public spaces is driven by *Unit 15X*’s conviction that the quest to define new post-colonial spatial order, will not as Demisses argues, be found in the government planning offices or gated communities, by will instead be found in the “ ‘ingenuity with which African urban residents have developed novel strategies’ for confronting the ‘structural and social crisis confronting them’ ” (Demissie in Myers, 2011: 58), found in crowded the informal markets, streets and settlement of African cities. *Unit 15X*’s focus on informal public space is to extend the post-colonial spatial discussion to architecture, landscape architecture and urban design that has already begun in the sister fields of the arts: film photography, sculpture and painting.

### **Architecture, Urban Design, Planning and Landscape Architecture**

Problems of African cities’ developing context are different from those of the Western world. Cities in Africa continue to experience rapid growth and urbanization, have little resources for the built infrastructure; and have weakly developed governing processes based on truly democratic ideals (Myers. 2014, Rakodi, 1996,49). Solutions of these

unique African problems require rethinking of the skills, competencies and skills of professionals in the built environment which have perhaps not been provided by their education and training as suggested by Zetter (1996). Professionals, architects, planners, urban designers and landscape architects in these emergent African cities are tasked with design of new infrastructure and by default the task of creating new identities. This is a complex task that needs professionals to be consciously prepared for, otherwise they run the risk of repeating the mistakes of their educational and professional heritage located in Western education. Any new language in African cities that will help to define and galvanize new identities of public infrastructure and more specifically public spaces needs will have to emerge from critical engagement with the context to understand local people's cultures and processes. This is understanding what *Unit15X* aims to engage students in various contexts in African cities, to provide a deepened and critical analysis and assessment of contemporary people processes and their influence in contemporary public space and city-making. *Unit15X* searches for news representational skills and competences that the architects, planners, urban designers and landscape architects needs to develop in order to define new identities of public spaces in African cities signifying what Zetter (1996,58) describes as a new paradigm for the built environment professional in the developing world. This new paradigm through seeks a new identity by envisioning what Myers (2011) calls alternative post-colonial African cities through multiple avenues: critical re-writing of African histories: developing multiple themes of Afro-centric architecture; and, re-thinking the curricula for architecture and planning school through African planning and socio-cultural process. It is the re-envisioning of curriculum that is the focus and driving force of *Unit15X* research studio. The studio experiments with various themes that speak to the many characteristics that shape the identities of African cities.

*Unit 15X* public space research studio is built on four key assumptions that seek to address the challenges of African cities: Firstly, it is that understanding of public space in a rapidly urbanizing African cities requires an integrated approach, one that breaks the artificial boundaries set by professions that Rowland describes as '...jealously guarded professional territories.' (Rowland, 1996; Zetter, 1996). We use this position to challenge current educational systems of built environment professionals in Africa. Secondly, there is a lot of learning from studying novel processes of how people appropriate design utilize public space, and their limitations thereof, in both formal and informal public spaces in cities. Public spaces offers the opportunity to explore the potential of informal settlements and public spaces to define postcolonial *citiness* in Africa (Myers, 2011:70) Thirdly, in African cities have a colonial heritage that combines with inequalities, social, economic and spatial, of contemporary societies in cities and that continues to shape public space through archaic planning regulations and processes and new policies that driven by liberal democratic process of free-market policies and agenda (Myers, 2011) . Fourthly, the *Unit15X* studio acknowledged the changing processes of knowledge production and in the process who knowledge gets recognized in the learning process and who knowledge is ignored in public spaces. This assumption is driven by the need to interrogate the multiplicity and hybridity of identities that inhabit the contemporary African cities (Bekker, 2006:207). We interrogate historically how public space was used to separate, erase and subjugate certain communities in cities and use that investigative processes to envision new identity of public spaces in African cities.



### **Assumptions of *Unit15X* Studio and its Speculative Design Approach**

*Unit15X* Studio learning is tailored to address public open spaces because it challenges established and traditional principles of design by asking students to think in an integrated manner. Once students realize that there is no one designer, actor or participant in public space, but that there are instead, multiple users of public space with a hybrid of converging identities that the designer has to contend with. In doing this we are stretching the scope of the architecture and design research methods exploration used in the studio (Abbot et al,2018,108), and raise questions about the new skills that design architects must employ as lagging group of role players in urban affairs of postcolonial Africa (Rowland, 1996). *Unit15X* Studio uses speculative design of public spaces to imagine future diverse, innovative and alternative public space environments that respond to the multiple identities and factors of African cities; economic, social, cultural and ecological.

### **Two Studio Projects: Challenges, Process, Emergent Themes and Identities**

To examine the two *Unit15X* studio projects offered in 2019 in the context of emerging identities of urban affairs in the built environments offers the opportunity to interrogate the effectiveness of key informants in the transformative teaching process that we have engaged in. This we have been able to do in a number of ways: firstly, to be able to reflect on the changing studio agenda in the service of the postcolonial African society; secondly, to reflection on the teaching competencies versus the skills and competences students need to acquire to be effective in complex African urban mix of emerging urbanity; and thirdly to be able to envision, by means speculative design- spatial exploration of environments that take advantage of people's novel initiatives in various African urban contexts.

The context in which we framed two studio projects is in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. For this study the discussion focuses on two projects that were done in 2019 by two *Unit15X* masters students on the *Mnazi Mmoja* site, an important public space centrally located in the city of Dar es Salaam. *Mnazi Mmoja* has survived as a public space because of its history as well as its identity, which has been interpreted in part as a site that represents independence of Tanzania from colonial British rule in 1960 as well as the symbolic unification of mainland Tanganyika and the Islands of Zanzibar which together make up the country of Tanzania.

*Mnazi Mmoja* site is symbolic of Tanzania's independence and unification, and so yearly celebrations to commemorate these events have been held on this site. In the eyes of many Tanzanians, *Mnazi Mmoja* public space provides a new identity of freedom attained in 1960, and that event has been marked in concrete by the erection of the eternal flame- the *Torch of Liberation* (fig3) on the location central the park. This important symbol of post-independence identity of the public space has led to the preservation and protection of *MnaziMmoja* as an important public space in the history of Tanzania. Control of *Mnazi Mmoja* public space is under the Ilala Municipality of Dar es Salaam.



Figure 2: Mnazi Mmoja Public Space site in the middle of the city of Dar es Salaam (source Masango, 2019)

As it is in the central part of the city, pressure of development is an ever-present threat over *Mnazi Mmoja* from both formal and informal business. More recently, in the post liberalization era of the economy in the 1990s, increased numbers of informal business entrepreneurs arriving in the city of Dar es Salaam, have posed even greater threats to any public space, as space is seen as a potential site for business. The threat of *Mnazi Mmoja* being taken over by informal traders is a lingering challenge for Ilala Municipality authorities and their solution has been to erect a wall fence (Fig 4) around the whole of *Mnazi Mmoja* site so as to control its functioning and use.

There are a few gates which are accessible only under permission and the public is only allowed free access on Independence Day which is commemorated annually on 9 December. This has led to a situation of overcrowded streets around *Mnazi Mmoja* for most of year as, informal traders try to conduct their business between the sidewalk and streets. The meaning of *Mnazi Mmoja* as a public space is only experienced for one day in a year and a few when people are granted access for permitted functions by Ilala Municipality. People have minimal connection to *Mnazi Mmoja* public space, our student's projects became a means to speculate about how new meanings and identities might be explored that the authorities could use to revitalize a public space like *Mnazi Mmoja*.





Figure 3: Mmoja “Torch of Liberation” Monument on Mnazi Mm0ja public space signifies Tanzania’s Independence Day. Picture by authors, 2019.



Figure 4: Mmoja Mmoja’s edges are ‘protected’ by a fence which restricts traders and users to the congested street bordering the public space.

In such a pressured and dynamic environment, it may be informative to provide alternative interrogation of the public spaces that might bring broader means and possibility to point to new uses and functions of the site. The two students' projects were selected because they raised critical issues of history and identity embedded in the public space of *Mnazi Mmoja* - Bonolo Masango whose project is entitled *The Anti-Atlas* and Veronica Chipwanya whose project is entitled *The One Coconut Tree* were selected.

### **The Anti-Atlas- Bonolo Masango**

The first project, entitled the *Anti-Atlas New Cartographies of Mnazi Mmoja Open Space* by Bonolo Masango investigates the truthfulness of maps and their representation in Dar es Salaam, through the public spaces site of *Mnazi Mmoja*. Masango was drawn to study the site because of its rich colonial and pre-colonial Omani history and questions its representation as a wonderful green space for leisure on maps of the city of Dar es Salaam that does not reveal its original function during the colonial period – that of a *Cordon Sanitaire* (Sanitary Barrier) used to separate the European (German) from the native populations or other races (Seifert & Moon 2007: 49, Sulemanji, M. 2017).



Figure 5: Cordon Sanitaire is marked by the gap in between settlements – the current location of Mnazi Mmoja. Source Masango 2019.

Masango's investigation of map making – cartography- suggests that green space was a tool for colonial town planning. This planning strategy resulted in forced removal of the African population who lost their land, culture and values associated with their ancestral lands. Masango used this history of *Mnazi-Mmoja* open space as the *Cordon Sanitaire* shown as the open space in figure 5 to explore and reveal the boundaries and territories that form the contested public space as the major design project.

Masango's project proposes indigenous cartography – a non-western mapping method - as a strategy to deconstruct the historical creations of colonial cartography to reveal the physical and non-physical boundaries and territories that continue to influence people's experience of the *Mnazi-Mmoja* open space. Masango argues that indigenous maps making, is as important as the product itself, their means lies much in the making as in the interpretation of the constituent parts.

Masango's project raises questions of land ownership, territory, and identity to heighten our understanding and conception of future public spaces on the African continent. Moreover, it illustrates that although colonial cartographic maps are presented to be neutral and objective, are imbued with manipulation techniques that hide and erase certain social groupings, engineer class distinctions, promote a language of exclusion and ethnocentricity (see Figure 6).

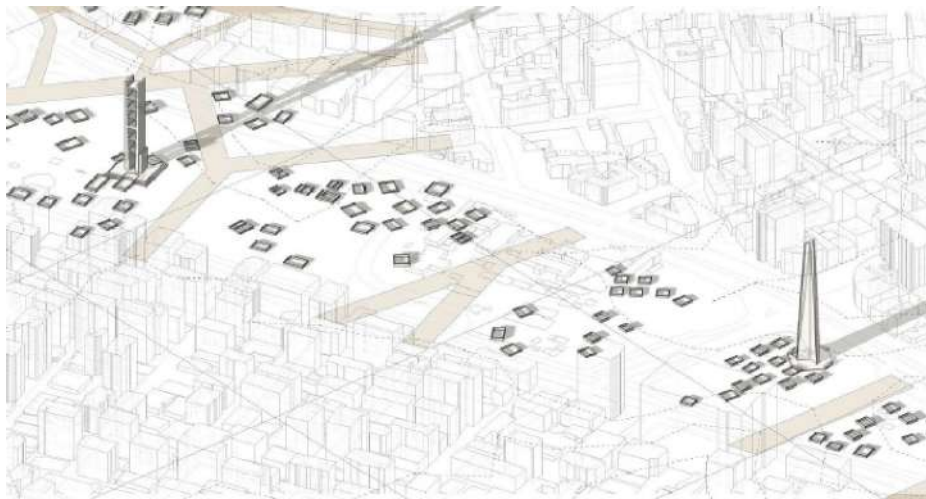


Figure 6: Countering the single narrative of Mnazi Mmoja site and its monuments by revealing the footprints of the lost homes and bringing life, memory and belonging to a landscape.

Source: Masango 2019.

Masango's deconstruction of cartography uses Mnemonic, Cosmographic and Solicited maps to reveal indigenous occupation and extended displacement of indigenous people on *Mnazi Mmoja* public open space. She borrows James Corners 1996 concept of 'Taking Measures Across the American Landscape' to imagine new relationships between contemporary users of the site who are presently restricted to the periphery of Mnazi Mmoja as shown in figure 4 above. Masango proposes three measures of Mnazi Mmoja that reflect that value of its relationship with the citizens of Dar es Salaam: *The Measure of Land*; *The Measure of Faith*; and, *the Measure of Control*. In the *Measure of the land*, illustrated by the collage in figure 7, Masango, records the contemporary user and uses of Mnazi Mmoja which on a daily basis are restricted on the periphery of the public space (illustrated in black solid fill), maintained and defined by the fence surrounds it.



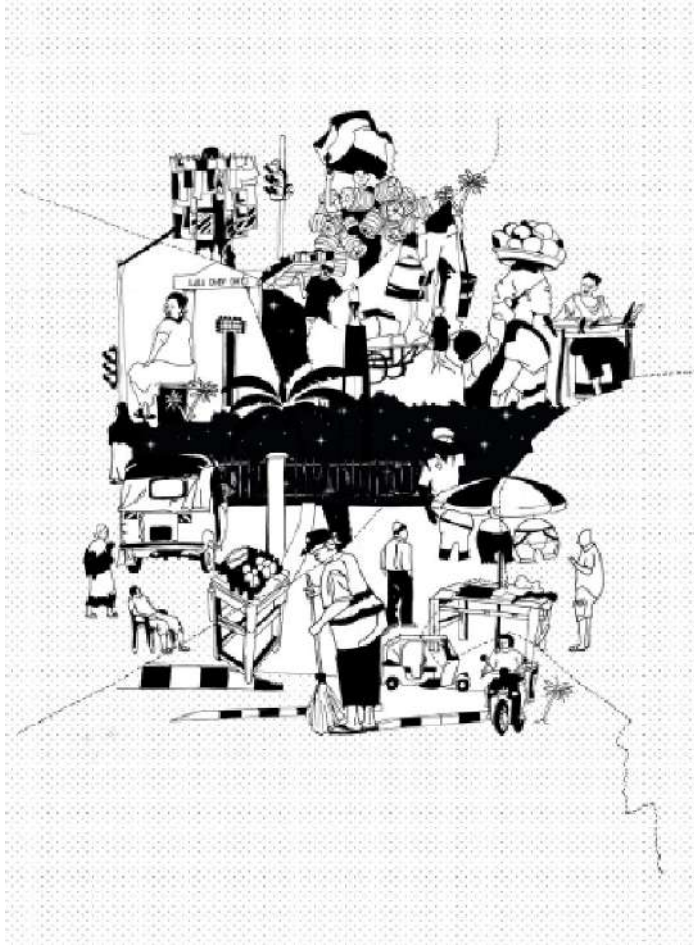


Figure 7: The Measure of Land. The image shows the relationship that the people have with Mnazi Mmoja site. Inhabitants use the periphery of Mnazi Mmoja to make a living or traverse to another place but sadly the open space remains inaccessible due to the fence. Source: Masango, 2019.

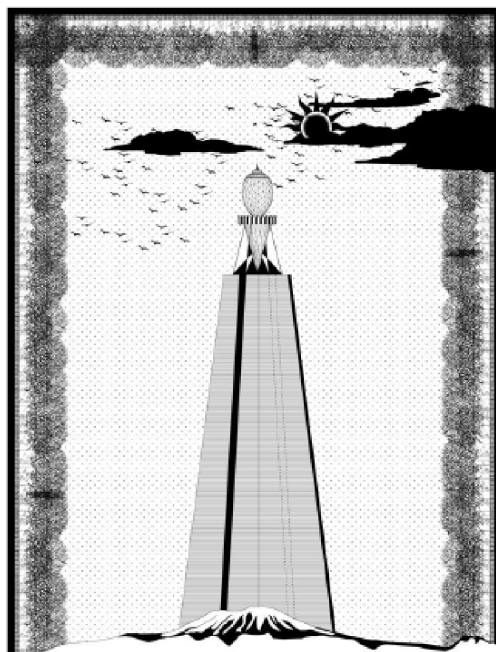


Figure 8: The Measure of Faith: On it, lies the independence monument that commemorates Tanzania's independence from colonial rule. The torch was symbolically placed on the top of Mount Kilimanjaro and on the 9th of December 1961 during Independence people marched to that exact spot in Mnazi Mmoja. Source: Masango, 2019.



In taking *The Measure of Faith*, shown in figure 8, Masango records peoples' associations of joys and struggles of human life and the aspirations for freedom and independence that Mnazi Mmoja represents through the Uhuru Freedom Monument located on the public space.

In Figure 9, showing *the Measure of Control*, Masango exposes the tools and processes of ownership of Mnazi Mmoja public space by the government through the legislation and local authority of Ilala Municipality and the day-to-day custodian of the site.

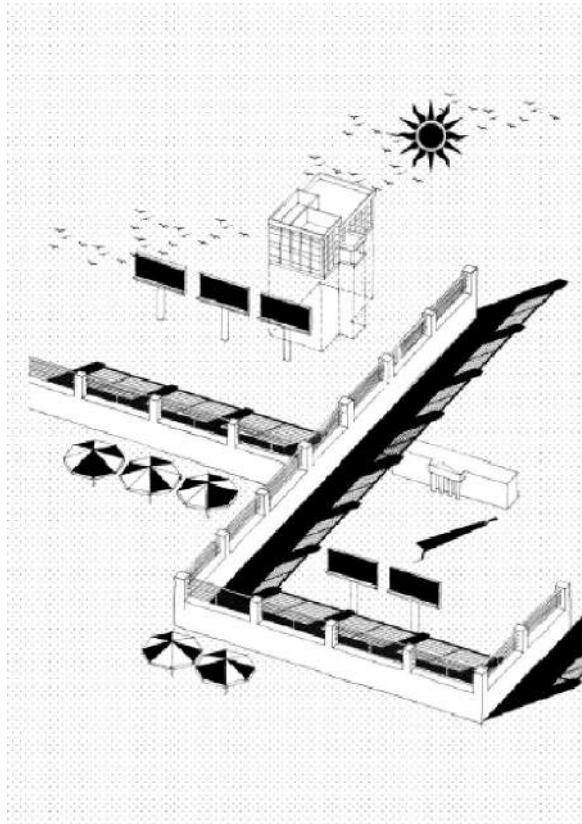


Figure 9: The Measure of Control Mnazi Mmoja site is controlled by legislative powers, where the legislation outlines that a public open space must have a fence to protect it from encroachment, yet the local government continues to erect buildings on it. Source: Masango, 2019.

These measures enable us to visualize the complex relations associated with Mnazi Mmoja and variant claims to its ownership as a public space by multiple identities of stakeholders, all of whom need to be consulted in the transformation of the sites. In thinking about the future transformation of Mnazi Mmoja, Masango (2019) suggests two taxonomies as strategies to enable us to imagine Mnazi Mmoja as a representative, responsive and evolutionary public space: 1). a Taxonomy of Indigenous Maps; and 2). a Digital Taxonomy. As a Taxonomy of Indigenous Maps, Masango imagines Mnazi-Mmoja, as a communal space and place that benefits the local community. African cartographic culture allows Masango to speculate on how diverse and marginalized ways of map-making can be used to bring new meaning to contemporary design of public spaces. Masango uses indigenous “cartographic” symbols to emphasize the importance of communal meaning in the making of public space.



Figure 10: A Taxonomy of Indigenous Cartographic Communication (in Masango, 2019)

In Digital Taxonomy, Masango plays the role of contemporary mapmaker by using communal information gathered from digital platforms - Instagram users on Mnazi Mmoja site- to produce a of a “continuous-map”, that gets updated when the people on Mnazi Mmoja post images of it (Masango, 2019:94). Masango imagines the contemporary map of Mnazi Mmoja public space to be one that needs to be a changing map that is updated in real-time as characters change and different events take place on it. As people’s pictures and stories appear on contemporary map, updated by the #Mnazi-Mmoja, Masango envisages that live cartography allows the people on the site the freedom to participate in the map-making process by them to be able to continuously manipulate and change the narrative to reflect their interests. The contemporary live map is no longer a mere 2D frozen narrative generated by those in power, but it now has multi-dimensions that reflect other qualities that come closer to revealing Mnazi Mmoja’s sense of place.

Masango (2019) asserts that, “...live cartography gives us a glimpse into the sense of place of Mnazi Mmoja open space and reveals the needs or urban desires of the users on site. Most of the stories that were posted outside the site were tagged to be in the site, this could be because of the users’ desire to access the public space.”

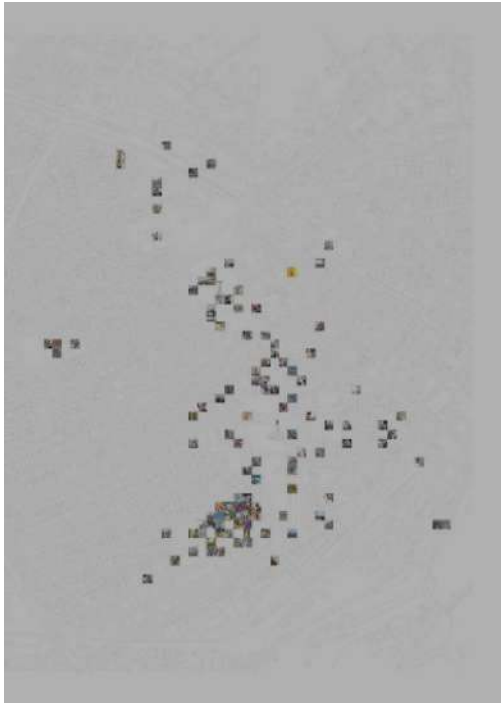
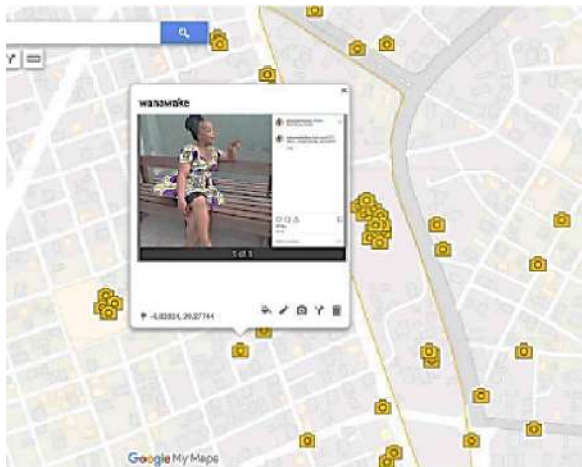


Figure 11. Digital Taxonomy shows how using social media and the internet could inform designers and planners of the uses and needs of people on Mnazi-Mmoja a site as a possible new form mapping.  
Source: Masango 2019.



#### What does the Live Map tell us?

The Live Cartography gives us a glimpse into the sense of place of Mnazi Mmoja open space and reveals the needs or urban desires of the users on site. Most of the stories that were posted outside the site were tagged to be in the site, this could be because of the users' desire to access the public space.

The map also identified the need for women and children on the site. Recreational activities also occur on the periphery of the site and the user's stories tell us that they may want to use the site for recreational purposes.

Figure 12: Instagram image of #Mnazi Mmoja expressing the need for women and children on the site.  
Source: Masango 2019.

Masango's project suggests that we examine map and plans of public spaces in ways that reveal layers of meanings, marginalized communities and cultures that provide the basis through which true ownership and identity to public spaces could be achieved. The proposed new cartographies speak to Harley's call for an epistemological shift in the way we interpret the nature of cartography by looking for new rules for map or plan making. Masango's rules includes, firstly, engaging indigenous cartographic that reveal

our complex and diverse past and secondly, developing digital taxonomies that require us to apply innovative digital technology for the general public who are users of public space to participate in mapmaking, thereby making the cartographic process a democratic one. The designer, planner or the bureaucratic official are not the only one with the power to make decisions about change in public spaces, thereby giving public spaces diverse and democratic identities in terms of making.

### **The One Coconut Tree - Veronica Chipwanya**

The second project, entitled *The One Coconut Tree*, interrogates Mnazi Mmoja as a public space that fails to recognize its changing role in the contemporary city of Dar es Salaam by examining the commemoration of Tanzania's Independence Day that signifies freedom from colonial British rule. The thesis argues the festivities of the December 9 Independence Day Celebration on Mnazi Mmoja, remain steeped in marking the symbolic crashing of colonial legacies, through continued display of military might through marches, political party aligned speeches, choirs, and dances, but speaks little of reinvention of Tanzania's wider heritage and multiple identities. (Chipwanya, 2019). The design of Mnazi Mmoja continues to evolve in the manner similar to the colonial interpretation by erection of the monument – Uhuru (Freedom) Monument (figure 3) which, as Chipwanya argues, together with the existing monuments provide visual narrative that speaks to the legacy of colonial German and British rule and ignores indigenous Tanzanian heritage. Further, the daily experience of Mnazi Mmoja public space by inhabitants of Dar es Salaam is one of restrictive access, as it is only opened to the general public during momentous events such as the Independence Day Celebration which is hosted by the government of Tanzania. Access to the public spaces is controlled by Ilala Municipality and citizens of Dar es Salaam have to obtain permission to use the Mnazi Mmoja public space, which many may interpret as challenging the very freedom that Uhuru Monument symbolizes - freedom of movement and freedom to enjoy public space in the city. Instead, city authorities' only solution is to erect a fence around Mnazi Mmoja in an effort to preserve its integrity (figure 4). It is important to note that 'the fence' is legislated under the Planning Act of Tanzania, CAP 355 (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2007) and therefore freedom of movement, in this case, access across the Mnazi Mmoja public space, is restricted by legislation. The current state of Mnazi Mmoja public space provides an opportunity to imagine new functions and new narratives that engage multiple identities richly informed by the diverse identities of the Kiswahili culture. Chipwanya (2019) observes that Kiswahili culture has engendered national pride in Tanzania and argues thus that the Kiswahili visual lexicon can be used to re-imagine the event of December 9 Independence Day Celebration on Mnazi Mmoja public space. Chipwanya proposes the design of an event that subverts (through protest) the formality of the current military event. The event itself speaks to Tanzania's multiple identities, cultures, histories and an interpretation of contemporary uses and functions on Mnazi Mmoja public space (figure 13), it simultaneously dismantles the boundary wall around Mnazi Mmoja to make it accessible.



Figure 13 Reimagined Mnazi Mojo public space as an open and fully accessible to the public, this has not been the case in over 14 years. (Source: Chipwanya,2019)

Chipwanya names the event Mnazi Mmoja translated from the local Kiswahili language to mean the one coconut tree, a metaphor used to describe symbolic unification of mainland Tanganyika and the Islands of Zanzibar that resulted in the one country of Tanzania after gaining independence for British rule in 1960. The event explores the complexities in uniting the Kiswahili people through the counter-event that imagines the life of the Mnazi Mmoja in the future as an open and accessible public space. The project tells the new story of Mnazi Mmoja through celebration of Independence Day through dance as a protest, unlike the usual military parade that have traditionally marked the occasion. Chipwanya imagines the reclaiming of the public space by enacting an inclusive dance on Independence Day on the site with participants drawn from the Sukuma, the Makonde, Zaramo, Arabic and Maasai tribes that defines and make visible the complex and dynamic relationship between Omani immigrants and the indigenous people along the East African. Chipwanya's illustrations, depict a gradual takeover, of the conventional military parade held on Mnazi Mmoja, that traditionally marks Independence Day and symbolized the unrivaled obedience of the military to the president and the military strength of the nation by the counter-event of indigenous dancers whose dress and masks contain subliminal acts of disobedience (figure 14). Chipwanya (2019) concludes that:

*“Through multi-cultural dance what has been embodied in this event is a reinstatement of the consciousness of heritage and the desire to preserve it for future generations. The opportunity to confront or challenge the individual's current perception of identity against the politically conditioned or forced identity.”*





Figure 14. The Independence Day Dance is reimagined as a multicultural protest geared towards making Mnazi Mmoja an accessible public space. Source: Chipwanya, 2019.

Chipwanya proposes a new choreography of dances that replaces the forced sense of political unity and identity that is symbolized by past military parade in Independence Day on Mnazi Mmoja public space. A new parade is imagined containing Arab Folk Dance, Arabic Belly Dance, Maasai Jumping Dance, Sukuma, Chagga, Zaramo, Makua, Makonde dances dance breakdown which counter the military style marches on Mnazi Mmoja, whose walls are proposed to be broken down to allow for new functions. Chipwanya's, project of the Independence Day Event through a re-imagining the multi-cultural Dance, provide us with a method of interrogating and challenging current celebratory uses for public spaces that are informed by a strong sense of identity such as the struggle for political freedom, yet the manner in which the multi-cultural Dance is celebrated continues to exclude other cultures. Chipwanya's project, defines a process



through which the multi-cultural Dance can be used to create a new and contemporary sense of identity of diverse heritage that define public spaces.

The two projects, describe the challenges that schools of architecture, planning and urban design and indeed all other professions or discipline involved in planning, design and maintenance of public spaces, ought to address if teaching and practice has to respond to the needs of society and cities in Africa. The projects begin to address Myers and Murray's (2007) concerns that school of planning and architecture in Africa have not engaged critical reflection of what they teach their students.

## **Conclusion**

When the studio set out to examine the public space Mnazi Mmoja, the studio leaders had envisaged a conventional exploration of the projects that led, as normal would in studios architecture or landscape architecture programmes, to a design resolution with solutions clearly worked out for implementation. Instead, the two students' projects by Masango and Chipwanya discussed above led us to broader epistemological questions that would turn the studio on its head and challenges how we ought to critically think about design in public spaces.

The two projects presented here challenges, the silo nature of teaching architecture, planning, landscape architecture and urban design in African schools. The projects suggest inclusion of disciplines like, legal studies, art, cartography, heritage studies etc., suggesting that schools of architecture ought to rethink their profession, perhaps invent ones that can directly respond to the issues informed by their unique identity. While the two projects leave us with design alternatives with which to suggest improvement to Mnazi Mmoja public space, they also pause critical questions about our role as spatial disciplines and professions responsible for shaping public spaces and societies.

The two projects in the studio provide us with three points on which to reflect and challenge our accepted roles as built environment professionals and practitioners. These are as follows:

- A) That we have for too long uncritically accepted descriptions and conceptions of professions based on Western deals of built environment professionals and that it is time rethink these colonial definitions and to develop new ones based on the African identity and the lived and material postcolonial conditions in its cities
- B) Schools of built environment programmes in Africa are key to leading this transformative trajectory by developing innovative teaching approaches that are multi and cross disciplinary in order shape a new African identity of public space and infrastructure in the next fifty years of African design in the urban space?
- C) New rules and regulations, guided by multiple identities and ideals of spatial justice in urban context, the need to be developed to guide professions and the public in the making of new urban spaces.

In carrying out a research studio using public space as the vehicle for interrogating identities in cities, we hope that Unit15X studio has begun to empower students to recognize the vital role that the public could play in shaping identities of future African cities and to realize that cities do indeed have multiple identities such as has been revealed in Mnazi Mmoja public space- its postcolonial 'oneness' is made up of multiple identities.

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## Young Residents' Perceptions of Windhoek's. The Uncanny Sense of Public Space in a Post-Colonial African Capital City

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### Abstract

Urban streets are public spaces that can gather residents and create vibrant and diverse experiences contributing to the positive qualities of an urban landscape. Windhoek's suburban model, which has evolved from colonial and apartheid planning, relies heavily on private motorcars, which most residents cannot afford. The city's various neighbourhoods have historically been segregated by race, ethnic group, and wealth. The city lacks public spaces where different residents can easily and freely interact. Windhoek presents a particularly unsettling disconnect between the formal systems governing and producing the city and residents' socio-cultural backgrounds and everyday spatial practices. Windhoek presents a particularly unsettling disconnect between the formal systems governing and producing the city and residents' socio-cultural backgrounds and everyday spatial practices. This paper develops a methodology that combines non-expert participatory methods and tools to investigate perceptions of young residents of Windhoek's streetscape, extending beyond objective spatial descriptions and generalised socio-political critiques to address individual subjective perceptions, recollections, and experiences of specific urban spaces within Windhoek. The conceptual lens of the uncanny is employed as an organising concept to consider how the spatial and social legacies of colonialism and apartheid continue to affect Windhoek residents' perceptions and behaviours in publicly-accessible spaces. The paper examines residents' objective topological understandings of the city's spatial structure, their movement through it, and their subjective, qualitative social perceptions about place, value and belonging connected to that spatial understanding.

**Keywords:** perceptions of public space, uncanny, streetscape, place

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## Introduction

Namibia's capital city Windhoek has been called a particularly clear example of the *architectural uncanny* (Vidler, 1992), the city's built form conditioning structures of power and subversion and bearing the hostile imprint of two successive colonial occupations (Obert, 2015). This paper draws on this conceptual framework to investigate the subtly embedded experiential uncanniness in Windhoek's urban landscape and the systems and imaginaries that reproduce it. Windhoek's neighbourhoods have historically been segregated by race, ethnic group, and wealth. The city's lack of accessible, truly public, spaces (Lühl, 2012) further exacerbate residents' estrangement from one another. Windhoek's suburban form is designed towards Western middle-class ideals and imposes strict behavioural conformities on residents (Friedman, 2000). Namibian society is laden with historically-rooted group identities and imagined communities contrived towards colonial projects of occupation, subjugation, and segregation (Silvester, 2005). This recent history is lived experience for many of Windhoek's residents, influencing the meanings and identities that construct urban space.

This paper investigates residents' perceptions of Windhoek through the conceptual lens of the uncanny. The pervasive sense of unease experienced when navigating the city is explored through residents' perceptions, analyses of the city's spatial structure, and a critical examination of Windhoek's regulatory systems. In doing so, this paper asks the following questions: How do the uncanny spatial and social legacies of colonialism and apartheid continue to affect ordinary residents' perceptions and behaviours in Windhoek's publicly accessible spaces? What are the strategies by which residents navigate the city, and what do these reveal about the city's spatial structure? The paper's methodology combines non-expert participatory methods and tools to investigate three interrelated registers of perceptions: residents' overall subjective meaning of Windhoek as a place; residents' knowledge of the spatial structure of the city; and the attributes and qualities they attach to publicly accessible places.

## Windhoek's spatial structure

Windhoek is arguably the only urban settlement in Namibia home to a diversity of residents broadly representative of the entire country. Successive colonial occupations have shaped the city's urban form, embedding unequal power relations into the urban landscape (Roland, Stevens and Simon, 2023). The city is composed of spatially separated residential enclaves and distinct income-based regions demarcate its urban structure. A series of spatial buffer areas of infrastructure, industrial zones, and open space separate the city along a North-South axis. The city-centre and affluent eastern and southern suburbs are isolated from the middle-income western neighbourhoods by the city itself. This separation is reinforced by the railways and industrial zones that bookend the city. The city's middle-income western suburbs are separated from the low and no-income suburbs on the city's northwestern fringes by the Western Bypass highway, a structural barrier reinforced by open space, institutional functions, city services, and road reserves. Modernist town planning and low-density single-use zoning, reliant on private motorcars, has been implemented in Windhoek since apartheid, and continues to be the way the city is planned.

Windhoek's street network has two regional thoroughfares bisecting the city, the Western Bypass in a north-south direction and Sam Nujoma Drive in the east-west direction. Other main (or trunk) roads demarcate suburban boundaries and connect the suburbs to the city centre. These main roads extend like individual spokes from the suburbs to the city centre without establishing connections across enclaves of varying income levels. Residential roads

are confined within these enclaves, infrequently crossing main roads. Windhoek's hilly topography has distorted the network of main roads into an irregular, curvilinear shape without considering view corridors or sightlines.

Urban streets have long been considered important public spaces with the potential to draw city residents together, creating vibrant, diverse experiences and contributing to the positive qualities of an urban landscape (Jacobs, 1993). In the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns have highlighted the role public spaces, such as streets, play in limiting or encouraging human interactions (Malonza, 2020). However, Windhoek's municipal government considers urban growth primarily driven by capitalist market forces, favouring middle- and high-income residents (Friedman, 2000; Lühl, 2012). Municipal planning thus prioritises the creation of private spaces or privately-owned public spaces, like gated communities and shopping malls, which are generally located within Windhoek's more affluent suburbs. Enclaves within enclaves thus define Windhoek's spatial structure. Windhoek's hierarchical street network provides links between such spaces across the metropolitan area, for those who have the means of transport to use them; but the city's streets are not social places in their own right.

### **Surveillance and control: the role of planning regulations in Windhoek's Street network**

Windhoek's Structure Plan, the document that outlines the city's town planning goals, considers streets as functionally engineered spaces, hierarchically ordered by vehicular carrying capacity and "envisaged to accommodate traffic growth" (*The Windhoek Structure Plan*, 1996, sec. 19.4). The plan considers urban environments as constructive economically while emphasising the negative social impacts of cities such as crime, visible poverty, and the deterioration of family structures. According to the plan, these social ills require rigorous control through "new street layouts which concentrate on designs which improve local surveillance or can be privatised" (*The Windhoek Structure Plan*, 1996, sec. 8), the opposite of making streets inviting to the public. Public space is not mentioned in the document. At the time of writing, the Structure Plan, in place since 1996, is in an ongoing process of being revised. Preceding public consultation for review, distributed documents highlight Windhoek's 'spatial fragmentation', 'mono-functional land use' and the 'persistence of the apartheid spatial form' contributing to spatial and social injustice. The concept of public space, specifically streets as public spaces, was absent from the document that focused on promoting economic growth and development.

Windhoek's street network is managed by the *Department of Urban and Transport Planning* under the *Planning, Design and Traffic Flow* division. The department administers streets and public places through the Local Authorities Act of 1992. In this act, ordinances<sup>1</sup> lay out the "regulation and control" of "traffic, processions, performances, singing, dancing and gathering in streets and public places", "the maintenance of order in streets and public places", "the prohibition, restriction, regulation and control of begging in streets or public places and the soliciting or touting for employees or for business or trade", the "regulation and control of street lines and building lines" and the "prohibition of the conducting of any business or occupation or any other activity for gain in or alongside streets and other public places" except when expressly permitted by the local authority (*Local Authorities Act 23 of 1992*, 1992, secs 94(d)-(i)).

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<sup>1</sup> the *Road Traffic and Transport Act of 1999* and the *Roads Ordinance of 1972*.

The language of regulation and control of streets highlights the city's negative view of street life. In a comparative study of Malaysian shopping streets, which covered a range of scales and spatial typologies, activity influenced people's perceptions (Ujang, 2012). Human activities produce place identity and vitality in the sense of liveliness, and energy, comes from pedestrian movement and human activity (Jacobs, 1993). Streets, and their sidewalks, are the main public places and first impression of a city, and lively streets, with "eyes on the street" through human interaction, encourage use and add to a general feeling of safety (Jacobs, 1961, p. 109). Buildings along these streets "cannot turn their backs or blank sides on it and leave it blind" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 109). City streets can encourage "a very wide range of direct communication and cultural exchange", and the quality of public space directly impacts the "volume and character" of the life it contains (Gehl, 1989, p. 15). Windhoek's Town Planning Scheme<sup>2</sup> detailing building regulations and zoning stipulates a five-metre set-back from the street boundary across most use zones, including residential, industrial, institutional and office (*Windhoek Town Planning Scheme*, 2017, sec. III (14)). Main streets and residential streets have the same set-backs and often the same road widths and speed limits. Set-backs from streets and property edges prohibit the evolution of a finer or denser urban grain along main roads that could differentiate them or generate landmarks and nodes aiding orientation. Set-backs to residential roads continue to perpetuate blank, fortified walls by which residents attempt to shield themselves from the dangers of the streets.

Streets and spaces of movement were used as spatial tools by modernist apartheid planning in township design to create asymmetry (spaces separated from each other and only accessible indirectly via other spaces) and a lack of alternate connections to other parts of the city (Mills, 1989, p. 72). Windhoek's residential areas west of the Western Bypass, which have expanded from Katutura and Khomasdal, both apartheid-era townships, display similar spatial strategies despite post-dating the official end of apartheid.

Windhoek's municipality has tacitly accepted that racial segregation be replaced with economic segregation instead of critically engaging with inherited colonial systems of urban space-making (Friedman, 2000, pp. 12–13). The superficial de-racialisation of urban policies and schemes, merely re-wording a few paragraphs, continues to implement the essence of colonial and apartheid urban planning, using the city's streets as infrastructure to separate and control residents.

### **Perceptions, spatial image and mental maps**

Every city has a public image, a collective character or idea of the city, formed from many individual perceptions (Lynch, 1960). Cities, in their urban structure and layout, influence human behaviour. Roman cities reflected their military role within the Empire in their strict schema of streets, forums, public buildings, and barracks, and Haussmann's plans for Paris used broad boulevards to facilitate military control of the population, simultaneously giving rise to the flânerie and cafe culture the city is known for (Gehl, 2010, p. 9). Citizens collectively use these city images to navigate urban environments and their social relations (Lynch, 1960). Urban environments, through their structure and attributes of physical elements, can facilitate or limit residents' orientation (Long, Baran and Moore, 2007). A city's spatial structure affects residents' daily experiences by influencing their sense of autonomy, and low intelligibility reduces the ability to react to the expected behaviour of

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<sup>2</sup> a document ratified in 1976.



others, diminishing an individual's sense of personal control within an urban environment (Kim, 1999).

In most cities, only partial control over urban growth and form has been exercised (Lynch, 1960, p. 2). Windhoek is an example of near-complete realisation of colonial spatial projects of racial discrimination and control, first in an ad-hoc manner during German colonialism (Zollmann, 2010; Roland, Stevens and Simon, 2023) and later comprehensively during apartheid. Apartheid was enforced more rigidly in Namibia than South Africa (Pendleton, 1996, p. 38). Mills, investigating the connections between built form and social organisation in South Africa, finds the racially-segregated township operates as a direct spatial reproduction of the social structure of apartheid, making “optimum use of the power of space to separate people from one another” with street layouts instrumental in restricting or directing movement (Mills, 1989, pp. 71–72).

### **The uncanny: a conceptual framework**

Julia Obert has argued that postcolonial cities exemplify Anthony Vidler's notion of the *architectural uncanny*, and that Namibia's capital city Windhoek provides a particularly clear example of this. The legacies of both colonialism and apartheid remain firmly embedded in the city's built environment and, as noted above, also in the systems, tools and imaginaries that reproduce them, the “strong residue of colonial attitudes [...] encoded in legislation, building codes, [and] surveillance procedures” (Rogerson, 1990, p. 39). The colonial drive to (re)create home in foreign lands, and local resistance to this, have been inscribed in the city's landscape, and this struggle has coloured the mechanisms, language and imaginations used to (re)claim and (re)make the city in independent Namibia. Place, as the notional space of self and belonging, of *home*, is delegitimised for the majority of the city's inhabitants by these colonially inherited constructs and imaginaries. The cities' urban spaces have been described as ‘visibly haunted’, retaining spectral traces of subjugation and oppression as constant reminders of the colonial past (Obert, 2015).

The uncanny is considered a counterpoint to the notion of *place* as a sort of *anti-place*; that which haunts place, the ‘presence of absence’<sup>3</sup> on an urban scale. The concept of the uncanny refers to perceptions of tangible and intangible factors, intersecting notions of belonging, memory and place, occurring in physical spatial structure and social relationships. Windhoek is uncannily haunted by something that is repressed but not permanently excluded and continually threatening to reappear. The City of Windhoek's self-promotion since independence as ‘The Cleanest City in Africa’ demonstrates an uncanny omission of the city's poor northwestern suburbs from any collective discourse or conceptual idea of Windhoek as a social space. Referencing colonial notions of propriety and order, the different status of the “squeaky clean” city centre and so-called formal suburbs to the more populous, *informal* northwest is perpetuated (Tjirera, 2020). The persistence of these colonial logics has seen planners in independent Namibia continue their emphasis on surveillance and hygiene when planning for the city's poor districts (Obert, 2015). Tourists visiting Windhoek frequently remark on the city's ‘un-African’ character (Steinbrink et al., 2016, p. 26).

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<sup>3</sup> a phrase coined by Peter Eisenmann, architecture as a form of text read through the present/absent traces of a design process.

## **Methodology**

The research questions, asking how the uncanny spatial and social legacies of colonialism and apartheid continue to affect Windhoek residents' perceptions and behaviours in publicly-accessible spaces and what their strategies of navigation reveal about the city's spatial structure, constructed a methodology that integrated spatial analysis with experiential data produced through non-expert participatory methods. The research aimed to explore how Windhoek's urban environment was deliberately arranged to counteract (and still actively challenge) residents' endeavours to establish connections with each other and the city itself, as a place of residence and a foundational source of their sense of belonging. Using participant data foregrounded individual subjective viewpoints, memories, and encounters linked to particular urban spaces within Windhoek.

The research paradigm, contrary to conventional expert-produced spatial data and policy analysis, did not aim to establish generalisable findings about residents' relationships to Windhoek but instead to produce a methodology to explore the psychological experiences and interpretations of public space, providing a glimpse of how residents negotiated their existence in the city. This phenomenological paradigm guided the selection of participants, which will be elaborated upon in the subsequent chapters. The paper examines residents' topological understandings of the city's spatial structure, their movement through it, and their subjective, qualitative social perceptions about place, value and belonging connected to that spatial understanding. The paper uses the uncanny as an organising concept for examining the complex mutual influences between urban spatial layouts, orientation, memory, social interaction, and well-being. The uncanny focuses on negative perceptions and experiences of absence, unfamiliarity and exclusion germane to Windhoek's demography, history, politics, and landscape.

In previous studies of place perception, the spatial layout of a city has been shown to either facilitate or limit orientation, depending on the arrangement and character of the physical elements of the city (Long, Baran and Moore, 2007). Spatial layouts affect movement and circulation and generate connections between spatial elements, which form mental images and relationships between spaces (Koseoglu and Onder, 2011, p. 1193). Space syntax theories have demonstrated that orientation and wayfinding suffer when these spatial connections become harder to perceive (Hillier, 2003). Lynch considered a city's legibility, the ease by which its physical parts and components could be recognised and organised into patterns by residents, central to residents' well-being and confidence and sense of control in using and moving through urban space. A legible city produces a robust mental image associated with positive feelings stemming from the spatial qualities that make it recognisable, memorable and navigable (Lynch, 1960).

People's graphic or verbal representations of urban space have been used to demonstrate their perceptions of the city and how they mentally structure their environment (Karan, Bladen and Singh, 1980). Cognitive, or mental, maps are a tool used to study cognitive processes that enable people to acquire, order and manipulate information about their spatial environment, a key component in everyday spatial decision-making (Stea, Downs and Boulding, 2005). Composing a mental map challenges participants to construct an image held subliminally, an introspective exercise drawing out subjective experiences of the city (Pocock, 1976, p. 493). The mental mapping method examines how space is produced and experienced, clarifying human-environment relationships and how space structures social relationships (Gieseeking, 2013). Lynch's method of mental mapping has found application in studies of many segregated cities such as Jerusalem (Greenberg Raanan and Shoval, 2014), Sao Paulo (Freeman, 2003), Dar Es Salaam (Smiley, 2013) and Cape Town (Forde, 2019). Researchers have also used mental maps to gather input from previously excluded groups

(Jung, 2014; Campos-Delgado, 2017) and to study so-called informal urban areas (Karan, Bladen and Singh, 1980; Damayanti and Kossak, 2016; Harris and Little, 2019). Yi-Fu Tuan considers mental maps “cartographic representations of people’s attitudes towards places” (Tuan, 1975, p. 205).

### **Combining and adapting methods**

People not trained in spatial analysis often find it challenging to verbally communicate the multi-sensory aspects of spatial experience and complexity, which can be mitigated by combining visual, verbal, observational, and spatial methods (Edinger, 2014). Although the official language of Namibia, most of Windhoek’s inhabitants are not native English speakers, and their varied cultural backgrounds encompass a range of social norms and conventions; addressing self-consciousness stemming from these factors was important in devising the methodology. The research was conducted in an informal outdoor setting, with group interactions, videos, visual prompts, and example drawings sourced from other research. The methods elicited non-verbal means of expression from participants, which guided and eased verbal discussion. In examining what Windhoek, as a place, means to residents, their knowledge of the city’s spatial structure, and the perceived attributes and qualities of publicly accessible spaces, this paper adapted and combined methods that would position participants at different scales and registers to the city. Semi-structured interviews asked broad but subjective questions about the overall meaning, and general description, of Windhoek, discursively framing the city in terms of its history as a colonial capital and significance as the capital of independent Namibia. Mental maps, as a personal, experiential, and subjective description of the city, shed light on participants’ knowledge of the city’s overall structure. A qualitative mapping exercise, outlining areas of danger, discomfort, and safety, elicited place-specific qualitative attributes.

Lynch’s original mental mapping study confined itself to small, relatively well-defined inner-city areas. Although Windhoek has a well-defined and generally well-known city centre, this research was interested in participants’ overall perceptions of the city. Participants were given full agency, choosing scale, orientation, colour, layout, extent, amount of detail, planimetric, perspective or narrative views on a blank sheet of paper. The instructional set emphasised eliciting a personal, meaningful representation of the city. Examples sourced from other mental mapping studies elsewhere were shown to participants merely to equip them with a range of representational techniques.

Mental mapping studies have shown that colonial history is integral to beliefs, preferences, attitudes, and values in learned and imagined features, and meaningful and well-liked places are included in maps (Madaleno, 2010, pp. 123–4). Prior studies have suggested that people do not include places and features considered unimportant or irrelevant to them on their mental maps (Smiley, 2013, p. 217). It was hypothesised that Windhoek’s participants would be equivocal in illustrating places or spatial features of the city that were perceived as particularly uncanny or uncomfortable. In the mental maps, the uncanny was presumed to occur in the ‘presence of absence’ of otherwise prominent spatial or ordering elements. To engage participants in talking about areas of discomfort, an exercise where they mapped and verbally described their familiarity and comfort with different areas of Windhoek was introduced. This method is based on participatory GIS mapping methods, as an alternative qualitative methodology to spatially represent place-attachment and spatial narratives (Pavlovskaya, 2022). The method integrates the rich descriptions of qualitative place studies eliciting different perspectives without a reliance on technical equipment or drawing skills in participants (Lowery and Morse, 2013). The method was adapted from a group setting to

an individual exercise, in line with the research questions' focus on subjective experiences of the city. Participants were given a diagrammatic map of Windhoek and asked to outline areas of comfort, discomfort, and danger in different colours, paying attention to the placement of edges, and inclusions or exclusions.

### Sampling and data collection

Ethnic and group identity in Windhoek is deeply intertwined with historical colonial agendas, and this recent history remains a lived reality for many of Windhoek's residents. Establishing commonalities in residents' connections to the city would necessitate balanced representation across various generations and proportional inclusion of ethnic and language groups. By not selecting participants based on ethnicity, the recruitment process intended to preclude these aspects from influencing participants' involvement and subsequent data analysis. Participants were of the so-called "born free" generation, born after 1990 into an officially de-racialised Namibian society. They did not have a spatial sciences and town planning background and were proficient in conversational English. They were between 19 – 26 years old. With the help of a local research assistant, recruitment was done by snowball technique via social media and flyers distributed at schools and tertiary institutions. The sample was not stratified by gender or ethnicity, but excluded those who had lived in Windhoek for less than two years. Sample sizes were based on Lynch's studies which involved 15-30 participants. Amid the Covid-19 lockdowns and group gathering restrictions in 2021, data collection and sequencing had to be repeatedly rescheduled, with the pandemic significantly amplifying participation reluctance as many young residents temporarily left the city. 13 residents finally took part in the study; five male and eight female.

Although the small number of participants did not make up a proportionate sample of Windhoek's residents, they included the four main languages spoken in the Khomas region<sup>4</sup>: Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Afrikaans and Damara. Ten participants lived in Windhoek's most densely populated low-income suburbs west of the Western Bypass freeway, and three resided in the middle-income suburbs west of the city-centre. Only one participant owned a car. Data collection was carried out in two stages. First, participants undertook the mental and outline mapping, in small group settings, presenting their sketches to each other. Second, participants were individually interviewed using their visual material as prompts. The data collected for each participant was a mental map, an outlined map, and a semi-structured interview of 45 – 90 minutes.

### Data description

#### *Imagining Windhoek*

Participants' imagined depictions of Windhoek favoured the city's overall social relations. Participants were asked to explain what Windhoek, as a place, meant to them, followed by asking them to broadly describe what the city *looks* like. Despite an emphasis on visual explanations, most city descriptions were *social*. These were its dangers due to crime, economic and educational opportunities, residents' segregation, their diversity of language and ethnicity, and having to hustle to survive.

Only five included *visual* as well as *social* descriptions. Visual descriptions described the modern nature of the city, its schools, healthcare, universities, shopping outlets and office

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<sup>4</sup> According to the latest available census data.

buildings. Windhoek was called a beautiful place because of its buildings and lights. It was also considered messy, dirty, and crowded. Participants' descriptions revealed a strong link between the modernity of the city and its perceived dangers. Three participants chose to describe Windhoek as a capital city, combining visual and social descriptions, a symbolic centre or *heart* of the country, with many ministries, universities and banks. The diversity of residents, in this case, was related to the city's varied history of habitation, including historical events to describe the city's significance.

The interviews indicated participants' difficulties formulating a generalised physical city description. This frustration was also evident when participants were asked to describe prominent elements on their mental maps in more detail. These inquiries frequently prompted depictions of social connections rather than visual portrayals of locations.

#### *Mental maps and spatial structure*

Participants' mental maps of Windhoek could be ordered into three categories: sequential, spatial, and storytelling. Sequential maps are structured by continuous or linear elements, mostly streets, that are connected (Appleyard, 1970). Spatial maps show elements scattered across the page without clear connections (Pocock, 1976, p. 496). Storytelling maps use landscape as a device through which significant actions and actors are portrayed (Campos-Delgado, 2017). Spatial maps tended to be city-wide, sequential maps tended to be localised to neighbourhoods. Most participants drew spatial maps, three drew storytelling maps, and two drew sequential maps.

Windhoek's segregated spatial form was reflected in participants' sketches which often concentrated on small home territories, with important places such as the city centre or universities connected by conceptual curvilinear paths. Noticeably, these paths were never referred to by their name but described by their origin and destination. Three main roads, *Florence Nightingale Street*, *Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue*, and *Independence Avenue* running from the city centre to Katutura, were alluded to when aggregating participants' cognition of Windhoek's Street network (Fig 1). Schools and local shopping centres were often used to exemplify a residential neighbourhood. These places of interest were concentrated along the main roads. Only Post Street Mall and Independence Avenue in the city centre were considered destination streets. Commonly recognised landmarks were confined to the city centre, with Windhoek's only centrally accessible public park, *Zoo Park*, the most prominent.

Johannes, a Katutura resident, depicts his insights into the spatial dimensions of Windhoek's social disparities through his storytelling map (Fig. 2). In the top right, a cross on a hill symbolises Windhoek's German Christchurch, surrounded by the tall buildings of the inner city and the dollar signs of its central business district. Near the inner city are large homes, 'houses for the rich' with 'low crime' and 'luxury service provision', including the universities. Towards the middle of the page, on the right, are smaller 'homes for medium income', with green spaces and many cars. A mountain range, police station and symbolic red line divides the page horizontally; below it the low-income areas, 'populated homes' and 'plenty [of] shebeens'<sup>5</sup>, where the 'low standard of living' gives rise to 'drugs', 'rape', 'high crime' and even murder.

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<sup>5</sup> local name for the informal licensed drinking establishments

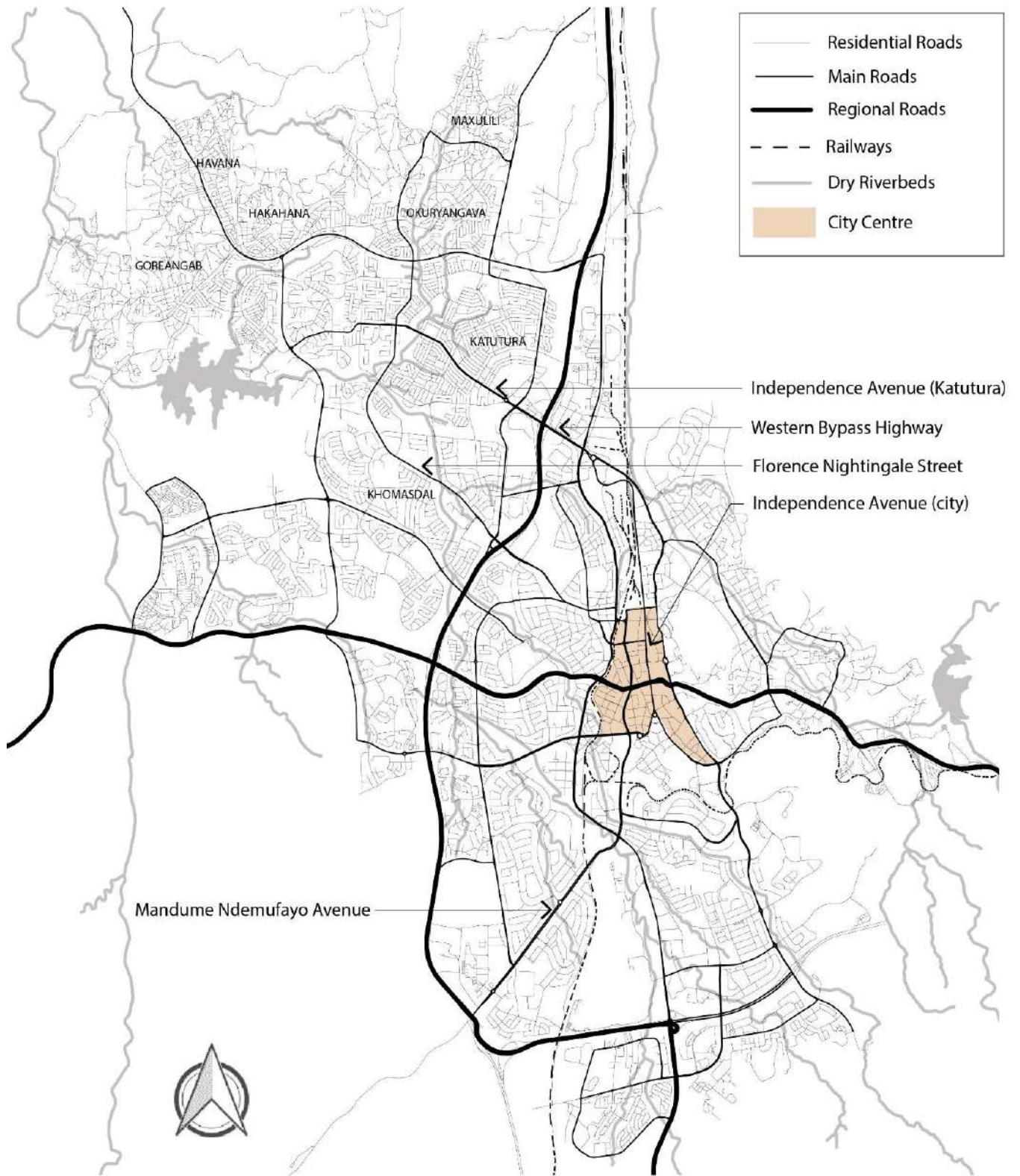


Figure 1: Windhoek's street network.





Figure 2: Johannes' storytelling map

Johannes explained that the red line epitomises the separation of the poor and the rich, adding that crossing the Western Bypass highway from Katutura to the 'other side' means better living standards. The red line is reinforced by hilly topography, pairing this notional division with landscape features. Income enclaves are separated by blank spaces and shown as marginally connected by dotted lines, suggesting a way of moving from one to the other without any direct spatial interaction. Johannes' map shows human activity in the low-income areas, but this does not continue into the middle- or high-income areas, where people presumably remain in buildings, cars or other private spaces. The notional streets are not drawn as having any character or spatial relationships to other elements on his map.

#### *Place attributes and qualities*

The outline mapping produced no overall coherencies on places of safety, danger or discomfort. Participants had various interpretations of these, substituting feeling comfortable for safety and being in an unfamiliar place for discomfort or danger. Participants consistently experienced a sense of comfort in their home territories, even if they didn't perceive them as entirely safe. Uncomfortable areas frequently surrounded these home territories. Reasons for feeling uncomfortable ranged between fear of crime and bodily harm, being told it was unsafe, not knowing anybody in a place, being unfamiliar with it, and feeling intimidated in higher-income suburbs. Areas deemed unsafe were sometimes places participants had not personally visited. First and second-hand accounts of assault and home burglaries were used to describe unsafe areas. Windhoek's informal northwest, including *Goreangab*, *Havana*, *Hakahana*, *Okuryangava*, *Okahandja Park* and *Maxulili*, was considered safe by participants that lived there. Non-residents considered these areas unsafe even when they were familiar with them. Katutura was the most-mentioned place in this exercise, despite only three participants being residents of that area. Despite not being congruent on safety, danger and discomfort, participants' edges and outlines produced distinctly separate territories within Katutura.

In the interviews, Katutura was often used to discursively construct Windhoek, to describe what other places were not: a symbol of the historical displacement of Black residents, full of street life, danger and crime, and visited regularly by most participants. Katutura has been called the antithesis to Windhoek's orderly, clean middle-income suburbs and city centre (Mendelsohn, 2018). The former apartheid-era township is both a "narrative point of reference central to the construction of Namibia's national identity" and a mirror reflecting the changes and social challenges Namibia has experienced since independence" (Pendleton, 1996; Steinbrink et al., 2016, p. 28).

#### **Analysis**

Interviews were notable for their lack of physically descriptive information about the urban environment. Abstract concepts were used to describe the city, such as its modernity, beauty, dangers, and criminality. As Johannes' mental map illustrates (Fig 2), these conceptualisations seldomly alluded to individual spatial elements. They reveal an imagined high-level ordering of the city's urban landscapes, describing spatialised inequalities within a restrictive urban landscape. These conceptual abstractions were

frequently used to draw contrasts between territories in the city but not between geographically connected or adjacent territories. These comparisons were a means of describing what places are and what they are not in relation to each other. In using analogies to speak about different territories within the city without physically describing them, participants also revealed a general unfamiliarity with the city.

### **Windhoek's disorientating streetscape**

Like most of Windhoek's residents, most participants could not afford a car. Walking was considered dangerous and impractical outside of home neighbourhoods. Windhoek is heavily car-dependent and lacks walkways, cycle paths and affordable public transport options (Heidersbach and Stropfen, 2013, pp. 36–37). Participants' reluctance to walk correlates with prior studies showing that topography and the paucity of sidewalks limit the appeal of non-motorised modes of transport such as walking and cycling (Rodríguez and Joo, 2004). Distances are overestimated when routes cross perceived impediments such as hills (Sadalla and Staplin, 1980), which may result from the hilly topography's distortions on spatial awareness (Sun *et al.*, 2015, p. 37). Topography also affects visibility, impacting on the spatial awareness of pedestrians (Greenberg, Natapov and Fisher-Gewirtzman, 2020). The accessibility, size, and spatial attributes of public open space can encourage, or discourage, activities such as recreational walking (Giles-Corti *et al.*, 2005).

Participants said they did not get lost in Windhoek, limiting their movements between well-known places by taxi. Taxis prefer to remain on the main roads, especially during rush hour. 87% of Windhoek's population is unable to afford a private motorcar, with half of Windhoek's population spending at least a quarter of their income on transport, and the city's lowest-income residents unable to afford even the low public transport fares (Heidersbach and Stropfen, 2013, pp. 36–37).

Because participants relied on transport driven and navigated by others, their mental maps used non-Euclidean projections without discernible cardinal orientations. There were no common hierarchical cognitive organising principles, and drawn and narrated distortions were unrelated to actual spatial elements. Giving directions between well-known places, Tobias gave a typical response:

*I would just say like ... from Khomas Grove Mall that person should just, like, drive straight... because it's just way straight, straight, then you find the robots [a local term for traffic signals]. Then straight again, then you just turn on your right. Once you turn on your right and go again straight, then you reach the CBD [Central Business District].*

The more familiar a subject is with a certain route, the more detail they include on their sketch maps (Blades, 1990). Tobias' inclusion of *robots* points to a spatial familiarity with the route. However, his directions show that he cannot name streets, mentally arrange them into a legible pattern or cardinal orientation or describe them as having any defining characteristics. He knows where the streets can take him but cannot differentiate one street from another; nor can he describe any specific landmarks a traveller would need to recognise to change direction.

Tobias' directions refer to *Florence Nightingale Street* (Fig 3+4), a main road from Katutura to Khomasdal to the city-centre.



Figure 3: Florence Nightingale Street, a high-traffic main road. The lack of sidewalks makes walking difficult, and pedestrian barriers to overgrown open space further impede human movement. Robots and street in the middle distance are the only street features. A view of the Auas mountain range to the south of the city in the background. Photo by Fellipus Neghodi, with permission.



Figure 4: Wide streets and road shoulders. Buildings are set back a minimum of 5 metres behind fences and walls. Florence Nightingale Street in Khomasdal. Photo by Fellipus Neghodi, with permission.



The street is long, with wide unsealed road shoulders. Street edges are formed by the walls of private property topped by razor wire, electric fences, or spikes. Fast-moving traffic and untended sloping gravel road-shoulders make walking along the street difficult and dangerous. Fenced overgrown dry riverbeds further limit movement. Without direct sensory experience, people's cognition of large distances demands the integration of a series of sequentially experienced events into a representation of a distance (Sadalla and Staplin, 1980, p. 167). Without differentiating spatial features along Florence Nightingale Street, Tobias struggles to form a sequence of spatially distinct events along his route.

Windhoek's major streets are generally 8 - 13 metres wide, expediting the rapid expansion of the city and increasing volumes of motorised traffic (Heidersbach and Strompen, 2013, sec. 30). Main roads in the city's western and northwestern suburbs, of which Florence Nightingale Street has been discussed as a typical example, all intersect with the Western Bypass Freeway (Fig 5). The freeway separates middle-income from low-income and so-called informal areas. It is characteristic of freeways with large overpasses, intersections, and wide, unsealed road shoulders to either side (Fig 1). The Western Bypass was considered dangerous due to road accidents and the 'bush' around it, where participants recounted second-hand accounts of sexual assault and bodily harm.



Figure 5: Western Bypass Highway, looking North from Florence Nightingale Street.  
Photo by Fellipus Neghodi, with permission.

Tobias' spatial mental map shows Windhoek's streets as an undifferentiated curved network of identical lines, with a suburban roundabout near his home being the only detail (Fig 6). Streets show no connections to the elements facing them. They do not set

up any spatial relationships between places. The most vividly drawn feature in the top left is the Khomas Grove Mall. The shopping mall is a concentration of human activity at the core of Khomasdal. Tobias' mental map shows two schools, and he lists with pride Khomasdal's other schools and sports facilities used by residents outside of school hours. The green sports fields, the playground, and the mall are publicly-accessible spaces to Tobias. Their prominent position and colourful illustration highlight their importance to him. Streets merely construct the edges of the irregular spatial archipelagos circumscribing these significant places.

As a point of comparison, a mental mapping study of an Indonesian *Kampung* found that streets with fast-moving traffic were perceived as disconnected from the buildings facing it, in contrast to the *Kampung's* smaller alleyways that had strong social and spatial connections to the urban fabric (Damayanti and Kossak, 2016, p. 63). The alleyways were perceived as meaningful for the social life within them. Similarly, Tobias' most significant elements, drawn prominently and colourfully, facilitate social interactions and human activity. The street network exists independently and is disconnected from these places of social interaction. His connection to his neighbourhood centres on publicly accessible places of social interaction, and it is clear from both his visual and verbal explanations that streets are devoid of any social interactions.

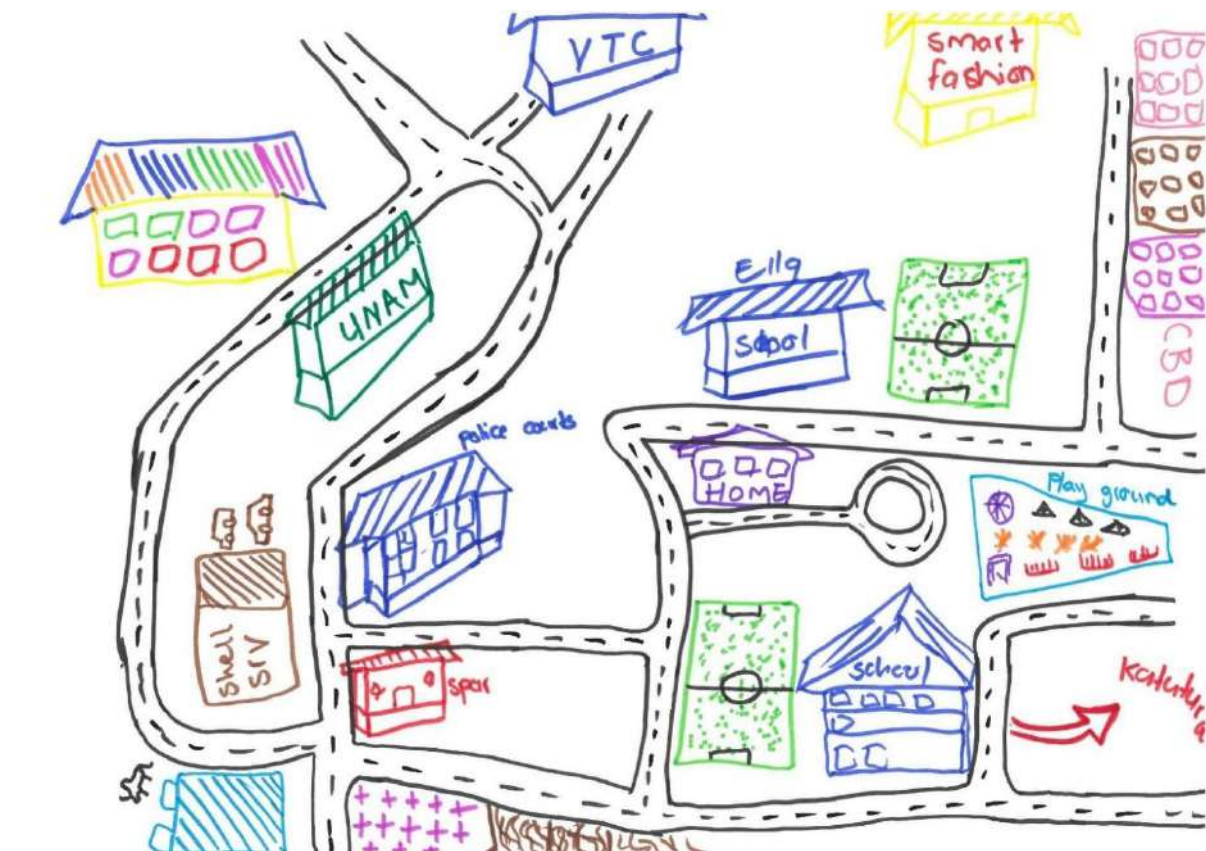


Figure 6: Tobias' spatial mental map, showing Khomas Grove Mall at the top right, and the sports fields associated with Khomasdal's schools in green.



Participants' limited mobility was evident in their use of abstractions and their difficulties in visually describing different areas of Windhoek. Windhoek's streets, designed along modernist town-planning lines for efficient vehicular movement since the 1960s, are not intended for pedestrian movement. The impact of the hilly topography on visibility is not considered in street design or layout, making the curvilinear distortions of the street network confusing. No view corridors are established by streets that point toward recognisable landmarks, nodes or public spaces. Curves, hills, dead-ends and overpasses instead obscure them. Streets are not experienced through bodily movement, and the main roads across the city's suburbs are long and monotonous. Residential streets are confined to suburban enclaves, not connecting across territories. Similar to the analysis of Jersey City by Lynch's respondents, with a "formlessness of space and heterogeneity of structure" (Lynch, 1960, p. 25), Windhoek's streets, lacking any relief in the general texture, have a disorientating effect. Windhoek's warm climate, hilly topography and lack of sidewalks discourage walking; the large distances between low-density clusters and vast tracts of overgrown open space between them are a further deterrent. The street network negatively impacts residents' spatial awareness and inhibits exploration on foot, recreational walking or cycling, and social interactions on streets. The disorientating and pedestrian-unfriendly streets negatively affect residents' overall sense of well-being and ease in relation to being in Windhoek's urban environment.

### **Social estrangement and dissociation**

Beyond their immediate home territories, participants generally felt unfamiliar with the city, shaping their mental image of Windhoek. Their awareness of safe, uncomfortable, or dangerous areas did not share consistent characteristics. Yet, a pattern emerged around each participant's home territory, which was considered safe or comfortable, surrounded by occasionally visited uncomfortable areas and even less familiar dangerous zones often known only through hearsay. Discomfort and danger were attributed not to a physical change in the urban environment but to the unknown people who inhabit them – the uncanniness of strangers. Festus described it as follows:

*"I am familiar with these places; I go there some of the times. But whenever I am there, I am always on alert. You know, I am always suspicious of people coming closer to me or people I am walking past. So, you are there, but you are not free. You are always on alert."*

A common perception was that a stranger in an unfamiliar neighbourhood would immediately be identified and targeted for robbery or bodily harm. Windhoek's urban spaces have been described as "visibly haunted", retaining spectral traces of subjugation and oppression as constant reminders of the colonial past (Obert, 2015). This haunting, referencing the city's periodised architectural spaces, is also transfigured into a social register in the city's northwestern suburbs, where differences in people, their spoken language, slang, way of dressing, and behaviour echo the social alienation characteristics of apartheid's ethnic segregation. Jennifer explained:

*"I would say my location [Nama10 in Katutura], it's like, it's safe [but] it's actually not safe. Like it's comfortable and it's safe only if you are known, but if you are not known then it's not safe."*

The connection between Windhoek's modernity, characterised by participants as its unique status in Namibia as a city featuring modern, tall buildings, institutions, commerce, and government, crowded with culturally diverse residents, and participants' perceptions of the city's socially-generated hazards reveals their sense of estrangement. Participants would describe onlookers' indifference to muggings and beatings and uncaring attitude to others' homelessness and hunger. Like South Africa, apartheid made modernity a "deeply ambivalent experience for many" (Robinson, 2006, p. x). This project's inquiries into residents' perceptions of belonging demonstrated this equivocation, with participants always distinguishing between where they considered *home* and where they were *from*, even when they had been born in Windhoek. Cultural identity was grounded on rural ancestral settlements, but notions of home were related to individual preferences in lifestyle. The bustling and crowded nature of Windhoek was either appreciated or viewed as undesirable by participants. This individual-society dialectic considered the root condition of metropolitan modernity, illustrates the tension between the drive for social and individual realisation (Simmel, 2019). In Namibia, as in South Africa, modernity, and its contemporary counterpoint of developmentalism, considering African cities in need of policy-informed economic solutions towards attaining Western ideals and standards, are products of a colonial past (Robinson, 2006, p. 4) and continue to influence group identities, and the language used to describe urban places. In Katutura, certain areas are still informally referred to by their apartheid names, denoting particular ethnic groups, such as *Herero Location*, *Single Quarters*, *Damara Location*, *Dolam*, *Donkerhoek*, *Owambo Location* and *Nama Location*.

Dysfunctional built environments have been shown to embody the psychological principles for which they have been designed, affecting spatial users (Weizman, 2007). Urban spaces are no longer considered simply a container for, or outcomes of, social processes, but as a medium through which those processes unfold (Pinder, 2008). Windhoek's former townships, built during apartheid to ethnically separate Black residents, continue to facilitate social processes of othering, the colonial psychological principles underlying their spatial design. Research participant Jennifer, speaking about Katutura, explains this uncanniness:

*"After independence the people [...should] remove the names of the locations<sup>6</sup> because we have names according to our ethnicity and it's kind of weird to go stay in a place where I am a Nama. I am described as a Nama and me staying in Wambo location, it's just kind of weird. [...] I feel like the names of the locations should be changed because it affects. Because like people look at you as a foreigner when you go to that location [...] that contribute to tribalism and it doesn't stand for what our nation is because our nation is one Namibia, one nation, but then that divides us."*

Group identities, constructed by colonialism and apartheid and embedded in the urban landscape, continue influencing contemporary social interactions. They undermine a more inclusive sense of belonging by reinforcing an uncanny atmosphere of uncertainty, fear, and mistrust of others. Writing about South Africa, Edgar Pieterse considers this underlying spatial structure the 'deep code' of post-apartheid cities (Pieterse, 2010). In an urban environment not legibly designed for free movement or easy interaction, this deep code has been assembled by residents to construct an internal representation of perceived social differences. Rumour and hearsay were employed by the research participants as navigational strategies in an urban environment fraught with perceived dangers and areas considered off-

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<sup>6</sup> a local term for township, used during apartheid to describe Black and Coloured neighbourhoods.

limits. These gaps in participants' cognitive representations, spaces known about but not visited, are reminiscent of Vidler's dark space. Dark space is an interpretation of the philosophical voids underlying the conditions of modern estrangement, that space which eludes 'techniques of spatial occupation, of territorial mapping, [...] invasion and surveillance', hiding "in its darkest recesses and forgotten margins", those things that haunt the imagination (Vidler, 1992, p. 167). These dark spaces, haunting participants' imaginations, surrounded their home territories.

## Conclusion

The research findings reported here reveal much about residents' unfamiliarity with Windhoek as a place, their lack of engagement with commonly visited public spaces, and their difficulties in developing a clear mental image of the city beyond their immediate home territories. Windhoek's collective character is a disorientating and uncannily unfamiliar and dissociative urban landscape in many places. Residents' mental maps rarely used streets as structuring devices when recalling the city's urban form. Streets remained unnamed and drawn as notionally connecting places without establishing any topological relationships. As a result, residents' mental images of the city were made up of territorial fragments with poorly understood connections, and interviews were striking in their lack of visual/spatial descriptions. Participants' mental maps also revealed the lack of human activity in streets as places of public interaction. In preferring to use details of social relations to describe Windhoek, participants revealed their lack of mobility and spatial experience within the city. Windhoek's current street and building codes, echoing colonial planning intentions, continue to reproduce streets as spatial tools for surveillance and control, designed for vehicular movement and not for pedestrians. In (re)creating streets as wide, empty spaces designed for efficient motorised traffic flow, with blank walls and deep building setbacks, the city's streets lack spatial features that could act as orienting devices. Sidewalks are not provided by the city, remaining the responsibility of individual property owners, and are especially insufficient in low-income neighbourhoods. The city's street network, the spokes of main roads radiating out from the city centre, are rarely crossed by residential roads, and don't connect between different income enclaves. Space syntax theory uses the measure of depth, which refers to the smallest number of spaces mediating the transition from one place to another. Networks that make depth asymmetrical by setting up non-interchangeable relationships facilitate control by limiting alternate connections (Mills, 1989). Windhoek's main and residential road patterns are highly asymmetrical, embodying relationships of categoric differentiation and control, and demonstrating that spatial relations are power relations. The city's hilly topography further distorts its street network, making it difficult to organise into a coherent or legible pattern (Fig 1). The effect this disorientating street network has on residents is to inhibit their mobility further, discouraging exploration and new spatial experiences and interactions. Participants' descriptions of daily unease and social discomfort can partly be ascribed to the negative influence of the city's illegibility on their sense of autonomy.

The mental maps of the Windhoek residents who participated in this research, even those who had lived in the city their entire lives, lacked cardinal orientation, Euclidean projections, common hierarchical cognitive organising principles such as a recognisable street pattern, views, or landscape topography arranging spatial layouts, with distortions unrelated to common spatial elements. Participants assembled abstract conceptualisations to compare contrasting, but not geographically adjacent, places. Their limited mobility was exacerbated by difficulties ordering the city's street network into a coherent pattern. These abstract

conceptualisations included describing places through social relations in an uncanny echo of colonial othering. This sense of social estrangement continues to reconstruct group identities and influence residents' spatial movement patterns in Windhoek 32 years after independence, thereby creating the uncanny psychological discomfort characteristic of participants' descriptions of Windhoek.

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## Rethinking Public Open Space in Khartoum's Low-income Neighbourhoods. Lessons from African Cities

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### Abstract

For half a century, continuous political and economic challenges in Khartoum, Sudan have perpetuated social inequity in the urban environment across generations. Poor-quality informal public open spaces compensate for the absence of accessible developed public spaces for the urban poor. Although there is a high supply and distribution of public open spaces within low-income neighbourhoods, yet, they are hardly noticed as a development opportunity for enhancing an aspect of life quality. Thus, this paper attempts to utilise the above-mentioned possibility by asking the question of how can public open spaces in low-income neighbourhoods be utilised? Aiming to identify suitable strategies of improvement. Through an exploratory investigation with an inductive component on public open spaces in developing countries, with Khartoum State in Sudan as a focal point, the methods are based on observations, desk research, literature review, and analysis of case studies. Furthermore, by highlighting the importance of public open spaces to individuals and local communities in the literature review, this study generates an Integrated Tri-pillar Framework (ITF) that is based on society, built environment, and economy to define overlapping contextual placemaking approaches and strategies for improving neighbourhood public open spaces in developing countries like Sudan. The framework links theory to practise, and is mobilised through analysing and interpreting analogous case studies on the success of public open spaces in African cities that share similarities in context with Khartoum, Sudan. The analysis hints at the possibility of empowering groups to take control in shaping their surrounding environment could lead to a greater sense of ownership and responsibility towards public spaces, potentially contributing to the creation of more active inclusive spaces. Finally, this study attempts to add to the limited academic work on this topic in Sudan, and concludes with holistic recommendations for upgrading public open spaces at the neighbourhood level.

**Keywords:** informal public open spaces, spatial injustice, Khartoum, Africa, bottom-up

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## 1. Introduction

Excessive privatisation of land, produced an oversupply of private open space or facilities that are inaccessible to the urban poor in deprived countries because of its fees (Skinner et al., 2018). This is the case for Khartoum, Sudan where majority of open spaces originally assigned for public use became privatised (Gali, 2017), and therefore, inaccessible for the urban poor. Thus, prioritising the pursuit of improving existing neighbourhood public open spaces (POS), especially in least-equipped neighbourhoods is warranted.

Today, Khartoum is projected under a tired light, showing the built environment in a poor state due to many contributing factors. Yet, the dominant variables in this equation are the challenged political and financial state of the country. These two issues are deeply intertwined as the deteriorated economy is broadly linked to the government's corruption and inability to manage the country's resources, an overarching theme on most difficulties the country has faced. As a result, social inequity has been perpetuated in the urban environment for generations.

The spatial injustice in Khartoum's public realm is portrayed in many ways. Lack of accessible POS is one (Alhuseen, 2015); forcing low-income groups, which make up an estimated 75.2 percent (World Bank, 2020) of a population of 46 million, to adapt to informal alternatives that function as active POS but located within undesirable environments. Underdeveloped yet lively, these POS are a natural result of bottom-up adaptations that manifested across low-income groups/neighbourhoods in Khartoum. Entitling these spaces to be rethought as social breathing spaces in the least, or fully active good-quality spaces that can benefit low-income groups at best.

The broad intention of this research is to identify strategies to improve POS in low-income neighbourhoods, particularly for the advantage of low-income groups. Thus, this paper *focuses on integrating three dimensions as pillars of centred focus - society, built environment, and economy - to explore a variety of available strategies that can be implemented in three phases to optimise POS in Khartoum's low-income neighbourhoods.*

To achieve the research's aim, three objectives will be met. The first objective would be to define a holistic framework encompassing suitable strategies to optimise POS for resource-poor countries. The second objective under the title 'Framework Validation' is to demonstrate the framework's versatility and potential for practical implementation in specific contexts. The third objective titled 'Wider Patterns Across Contexts' will be an extraction of recommendations to inform decision-making in developing neighbourhood POS in Khartoum.

In that fashion, the literature review will explore the intertwined concepts, impacts, and attributes of successful POS. It will also exhibit the contrasting reality of POS in developing countries, while focusing on the role of politics in the spatial injustice of POS, with Khartoum as a focal point. The literature review will conclude by presenting an Integrated Tri-pillar Framework (ITF) for enhancing POS. Furthermore, after describing the methodology, the framework validation section and the first part of the discussion section will satisfy the second objective; with an analysis and interpretation through the lens of the established framework, of existing pilot projects (case studies of action) done by UN-Habitat on POS in similar contexts to Khartoum. Finally, the second part of the discussion will construct a trajectory towards Khartoum's context and achieve the third objective.

## 2. Literature review

### *Concepts & Definitions*

Urbanists and scholars have varying definitions of public space. Most agree that public spaces could be simply defined as those facilities and spaces between buildings that are open to the public and accommodate activities. For example, Carr et al. (1993) define public spaces as those platforms embedded in cities that provide people with spaces to enjoy activities, celebrate occasions, and casually socialise. Similarly, Tibbalds (1992) and Madanipour (1996) define the public realm as functional spaces that are accessible visually and physically in the urban fabric. They acknowledge the human factor associated with space by claiming that public spaces are where most human interactions happen. It is clear that accessibility, use, and social inclusion are important aspects of public spaces. Madanipour (2003) also adds that public spaces are associated with public functions and meanings. According to him, public realm and public space's functions interrelate, in the sense that 'public realm' is the social display whereas 'public space' is the stage accommodating social displays. Moreover, urban societal scholars like Lynch (1960), Whyte (1980), Gehl (1987), and Madanipour (2010) agree that 'places' are spaces that are interpreted by people in a unique way, which makes one place different to another. According to Lynch (1960), 'place identity' is a space with individuality attributes that make it recognised separately from other spaces. The Creation of 'place identity' depends on the physical settings of space, activities that occur, and meanings assigned to it by people (Carmona, et al., 2010).

Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of public spaces was compiled in 2015, when the Italian Institute of Urbanism (INU) in Rome produced The Charter of Public Space, in an attempt to unify definitions of public spaces:

“Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. Each public space has its own spatial, [...] social, and economic features. [...] [They] are a key element of individual and social well-being, the places of a community's collective life, expressions of [...] cultural richness and [...] identity [...]. The community recognizes itself in its public places and pursues the improvement of their spatial quality. [...] All public spaces should become 'places' [...] made accessible without barriers [...]. Public spaces which are not yet accessible and/or usable must be considered as 'potential public spaces', and therefore as a precious resource for the strengthening and renovation of the existing system of public space and, thus, of urban quality as a whole” (INU, 2015, para. 6-12).

### *Typologies*

Formal public spaces encompass a wide range of types, from roads and pedestrian streets, to open and green spaces (i.e., parks and gardens), or public facilities such as markets, community, and educational centres, among many others (UN-Habitat, 2015). Informal public spaces on the other hand, can be given the same definition and types as above. The difference is that they are spaces that lack official oversight by authorities. In developing countries, they typically exist in forms of vacant land, combining emergent elements from all the above typologies in one space (Balikowa, 2015). Physically

characterised with undesirable attributes such as having litter, solid waste, and being generally uncomfortable for users. While providing a vague platform and a needed outlet for recreational uses; and informal -yet successful- economic activities (Bhan, 2019) in contexts where there is a lack of POS supply.

To simplify: formal public spaces are planned spaces whereas informal public spaces are emergent (Hamdi, 2004). However, it is important to note that the distinction between formal and informal public spaces can sometimes be ambiguous, and there may be spaces that combine attributes from both. Moreover, the definition and perception of these spaces can vary across geographical, social, and cultural contexts.

In the context of Khartoum, Balikowa's (2015) description of informal POS seems to closely resemble the characteristics of low-income neighbourhood POS (Figure 1), which will be the primary focus of this paper.

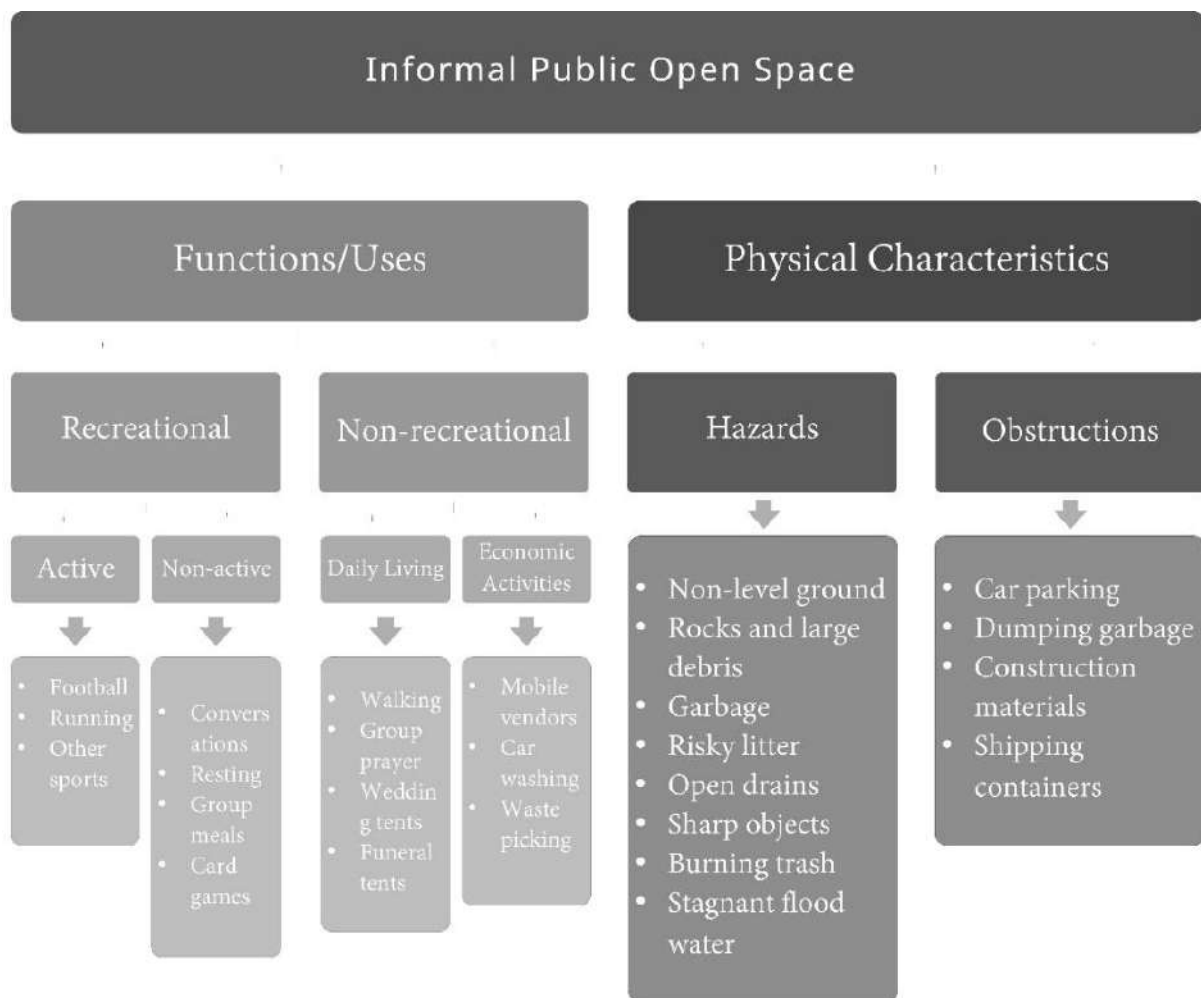


Figure 1: Characteristics of informal POS (based on Balikowa, 2015).

### *Attributes and Impacts of Successful Public Spaces*

The significance of high-quality POS was thoroughly discussed in the disciplinary fields of sociology and urban design in the work of scholars such as Lynch (1972), Whyte (1988), Gehl (1987), and Lofland (1998); who all addressed the impacts of active POS on cities. This significance remains today - with Goal 11.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 11.7) to “provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities” (United Nations, 2015). The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG, 2014) also contributed to a growing body of knowledge on public space that influenced global policies, in the belief that activating public spaces can work as a way to improve life quality and reshape how cities function.

The definition of ‘high-quality’ varies between contexts and regions. Nevertheless, high-quality public spaces could normatively be described as places that prioritise local community needs in the design process; are comfortable, enjoyable, and attractive; are safe, accessible to all and promote walkability, create a sense of place and belonging, and improve land value. They also facilitate social cohesion by being full of people, active, and vibrant, accommodating complex uses, and are financially, socially, and environmentally sustainable (Kaw et al., 2020). Cox and Streeter (2019) claim that people who live in neighbourhoods containing high-quality public spaces are less isolated socially and trust others.

Consensus among scholars affirms that when public spaces operate adequately, they can invite micro investments, generate income, and create wealth (Simone, 2015; Bhan, 2019; Hamdi, 2004; Abdel Ati & Al-Hassan, 2016). This is particularly relevant in contexts where informal economy is present: revitalised POS can become a platform for informal enterprises to operate legitimately, providing the urban poor with livelihood opportunities (Simone, 2015). This includes Khartoum, where the informal economy constitutes 35.5 percent of the total GDP and informal workers comprise 65 percent of the labour market (Abdel Ati & Al-Hassan, 2016). To these groups, roadsides and POS frequently function as pivotal sites wherein informal street vendors and traders operate. (ILO, 2022).

### *2.1 Circumstances of Public Open Space and the Urban Poor in Khartoum*

Before the 1956 independence, the British colony laid out Khartoum’s first masterplan and implemented a policy of classifying residential neighbourhoods into ‘1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>’ classes (Eltayeb, 2003) as shown in (Figure 2). Land plots were distributed according to the socio-economic status of groups (Awad, 2011). Neighbourhood class determined the size of plots (Figure 3) that were given to residents (Pantuliano, et al., 2011). On top, parts of the city were named ‘*Khartoum: One, Two, Three*’, which extended this classification from the physical dimension to the social by further categorising groups (Ahmed, 1992).

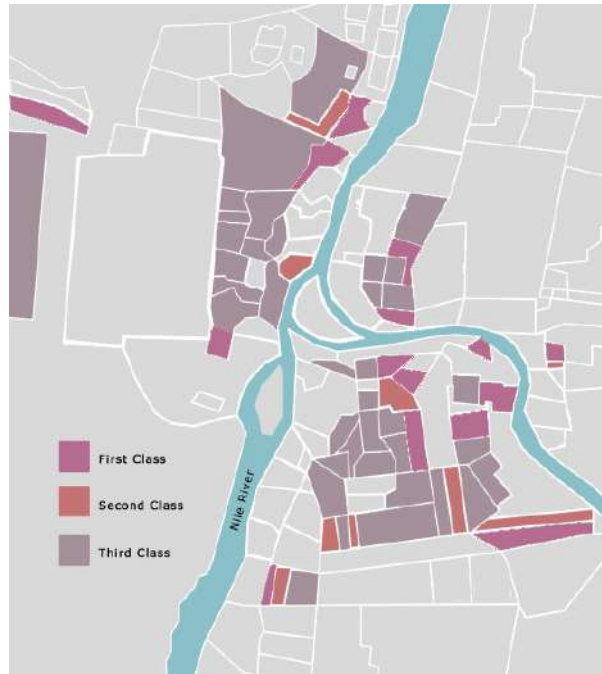


Figure 2: Khartoum Neighbourhood Classification (based on Eltayeb, 2003). Source: Understanding slums: Case studies for the Global Report on Human Settlements, pp. 101

Neighbourhoods	Land Plot Size	Net Population Density
1 <sup>st</sup> Class	500 m <sup>2</sup>	80 Persons/Hectare
2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	400 m <sup>2</sup>	95 Persons/Hectare
3 <sup>rd</sup> Class	200 m <sup>2</sup>	190 Persons/Hectare

Figure 3: The inverse correlation between land plot sizes and population density in neighbourhood classes (based on Awad, 2011).

After independence, the public realm has witnessed a steady deterioration due to political instability (Figure 4) in terms of the following aspects: environmental degradation, insufficient maintenance, and notably, POS inaccessibility (Ahmad, 2000). Lack of 'pro-poor' urban agendas was starting to manifest heavily through gentrification and ad-hoc urban planning decisions were made gradually, impacting the city's residents (Hamid & Bahreldin, 2013). Particularly when the 'Inqaz' government (1989-2019) privatised POS while trying to cover financial debts through selling important public lands to private owners (World Bank, 2011). This was paralleled with a culture of land grabbing and hoarding by the ruling party, which created an imbalance of power due to city-wide POS privatisation, leaving Khartoum's urban poor with a limited access to formal developed POS (EIKheir, 2017).



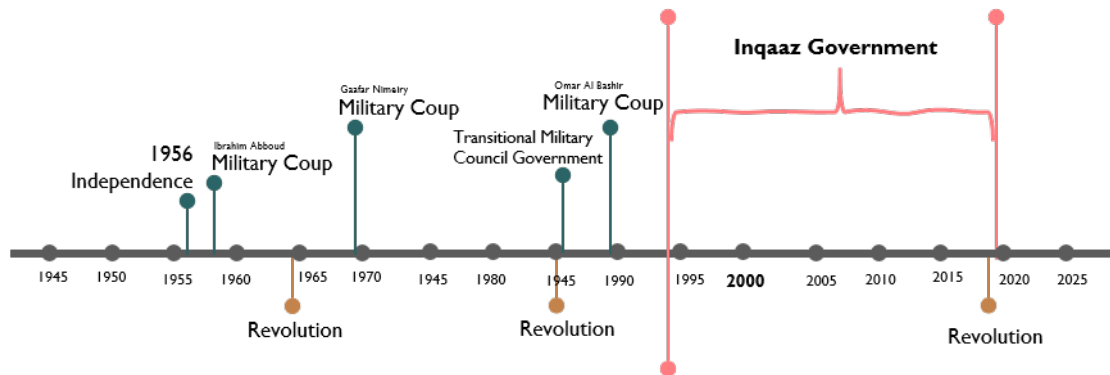


Figure 4: Timeline of political instability in Sudan post-independence, highlighting the duration of Inqaz era. Source: (Author)

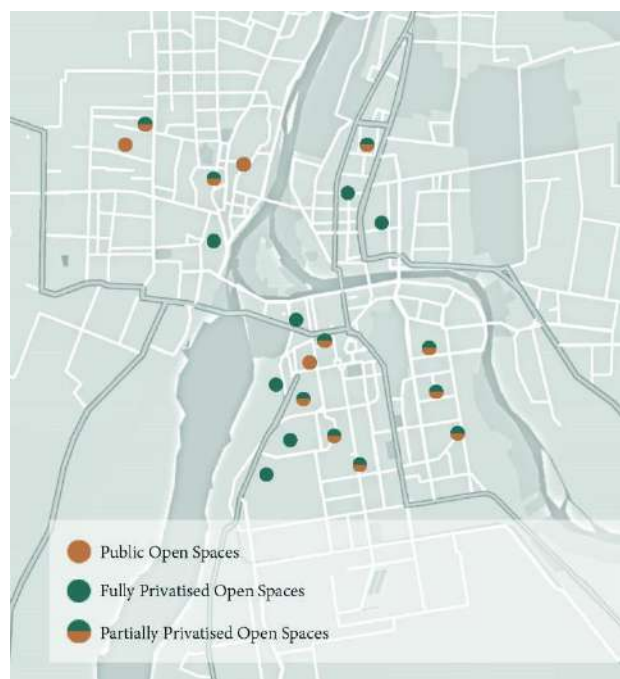


Figure 5: POS that became fully or partially privatised during the Inqaz era (based on Gali, 2017).

For example, (Figure 5) shows a sample of twenty open spaces that were officially assigned for public use in previous eras. Ranging in size between 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> – 135,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Half of the spaces were partially privatised, and some had imposed entry fees to the spaces, while another 35% became fully privatised and converted to a different use such as private housing or a mall for profit. This left only a 15% of underdeveloped POS in Khartoum state (Gali, 2017).

Albeit, POS were privatised, leading to gatherings with a familial and sterile atmosphere and potentially impacting the democratic empowerment of people; which may have had implications for access to developed spaces, especially for low-income groups. Furthermore, as land sales were treated as open commodities, they were mainly

affordable to high-income groups. This, paired with a transactional selling of POS to people who had direct ties to the system, led to the creation of gated recreational parks with entry fees (Ahmad, 2000).

In brief, the duality of endorsing private land investments and dictating the use of POS by the 'inqaaz' government may have significantly affected the accessibility of low-income groups. Consequently, the socioeconomic disparity and spatial injustice experienced inflation (Figure 6), potentially contributing to the creation of exclusive environments within urban areas.

However, this issue is juxtaposed with an opportunity that the following sections will address; i.e., despite the underdeveloped state of neighbourhood POS in Khartoum (Figures 8-11), yet, they are abundantly distributed (Figures 12, 13) (Awad, 2018). Entailing the rethought of developing these neglected spaces into alternative open spaces distinct from their developed or privatised counterparts (Figure 7).

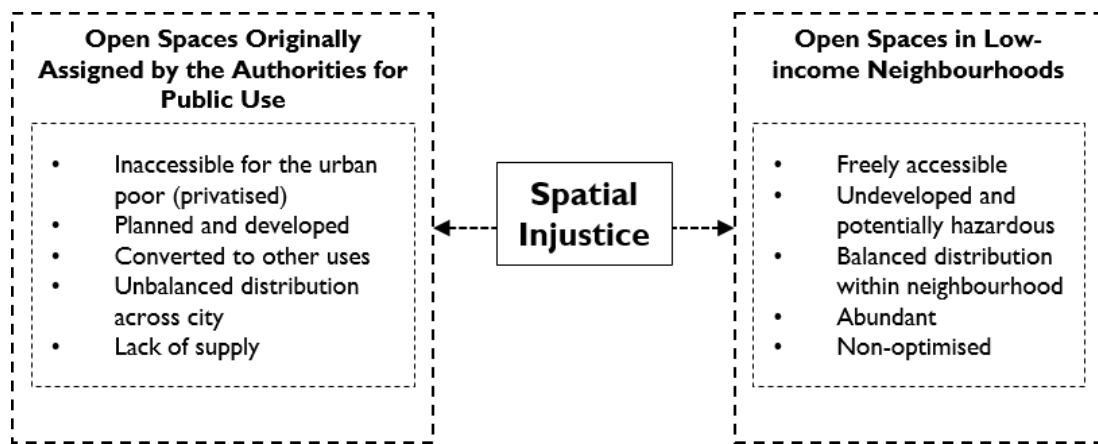


Figure 6: Spatial Injustice in Khartoum's urban open spaces – development without access vs. accessibility without development. Source: (Author)



Figure 7: Samples of privatized developed POS in Khartoum's high-income neighbourhoods. Source: (Awad, 2018)



Figure 8 (left): During the occasional rainy season, POS's poor drainage leads to flooding. Source: (Author)  
Figure 9 (right): the state of a neighbourhood POS in Khartoum, with men playing football in undesirable environments. Source: (Author)



Figure 10-11: Low-income neighbourhood POS. Source: (Author)



Figure 12: Location of 'Al Sahafa west' – a low-income neighbourhood in Khartoum.  
Source: (Author's based on Google Maps)





Figure 13: POS amount and distribution in 'Al Sahafa West'. Source: (Author)

## 2.2. Public Open Space: Phases and Contextual Strategies

### Phases: Planning, design, and management

Top-down action from governments toward revitalising POS is exemplified in some developing countries through establishing technical guidelines and standards alongside incentives for their implementation (Kaw et al., 2020). Context-specific factors influencing planning public space in cities include: cultural behaviours, economy, urban fabric, and legal policies to name a few (Garau, 2015). Place-based design requires users to be involved in the process of planning and design to incorporate their perceptions and ensure improvement is clearly directed towards benefiting the public.

On top, Hamdi (2004), Garau (2015), and Kaw et al., (2020) agree that management responsibility -especially in developing countries- of POS initiatives can be assigned to community-based organisations (CBOs). An effective supervision structure can be modified according to the place and context, all while taking into account the resources for funding.

### Approaches and Strategies

'Placemaking' is a holistic multi-layered strategy of planning, designing, and managing public spaces that maximise assets of local communities and create accessible spaces, boosting happiness and well-being (PPS, 2019). In this sense, the (human, place,

economy)-centred approaches in (Figure 14) focus on society, the built environment, and economy respectively, as intertwined pillars that work together in the placemaking process to achieve active developed POS.

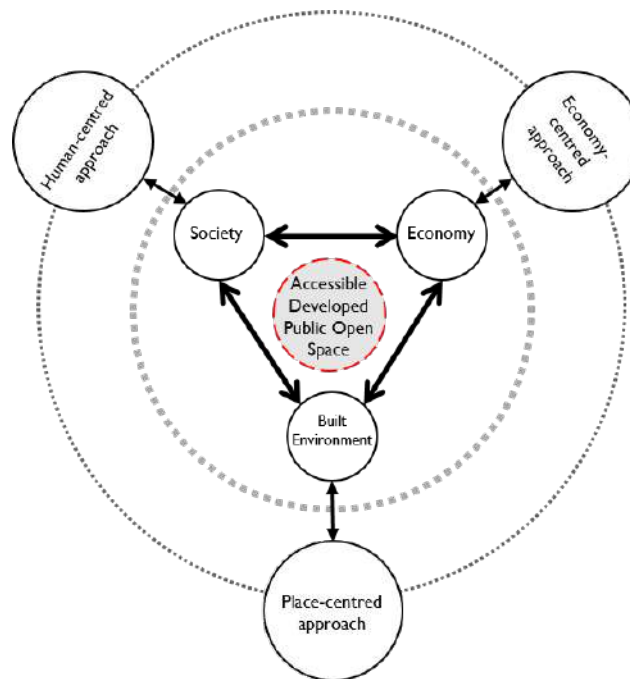


Figure 14: Three integrated pillars of focus in placemaking to develop active public spaces.  
Source: (Author)

### 2.2.1 Human-centred Approach

At its core, this section echoes Lent and Studdert's (2019) idea that empowering local communities by facilitating their ownership to take control of their neighbourhood POS is beneficial in improving well-being and social cohesion (Habitat III, 2016). Challenging the governmental and private sector's notion of authorship and transferring power to communities, therefore, increasing their ownership towards their public spaces. This can have two layers:

#### a) Designing for Local Communities

A human-centred approach places the specific needs, habits, cultural inclinations, and conditions of neighbourhood inhabitants into the core of the design process. If the process is informed by these facets, the resulting POS may potentially become inviting to local communities, and in turn, encourages higher engagement while creating a sense of place and belonging (Gehl, 2010). Moreover, when a POS resembles a social hub that stimulates interactions, it may lead to opportunities for exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge (Katz & Wagner, 2014). Additionally, when the POS is accessible and inviting, communion between local communities across socioeconomic divisions may create a dynamic of brief suspension of inequality between these groups – thereby fostering a sense of shared responsibility toward the public realm (Lent & Studdert, 2019).

*b) Participatory Process*

Actively engaging neighbourhood inhabitants in the design process of their POS is an approach that utilises their direct insights on their needs, environment, and their collective desire to promote change (Garau, 2015).

By harnessing the collective knowledge and local wisdom of inhabitants and other stakeholders, this approach can help achieve several goals: 1) An understanding of the POS's intended users, which may lead to a better design response 2) Access to context-related insights and information sources, which helps in producing innovative solutions, 3) promoting a sense of ownership, which aids in maintaining the quality of POS, and 4) Promoting inclusion, for example, engaging women and girls helps create a gender balance, while involving children, and the elderly in the process creates diversity.

Additionally, participation may extend to management as well. In developing countries with communities relying on volunteerism, entrusting the management to CBOs funded by local budgets and fund-raisers can be a practical scenario of management (Kaw et al., 2020). This approach could be particularly compatible with the Sudanese society given their familiarity with collective civic stewardship and their long-standing social traditions of volunteerism to address various communal needs, known locally as "Nafeer" (Kushkush, 2013).

Moreover, the enjoyment of developed POS is connected to the behaviour of citizens (INU, 2015). However, the relationship between governments and communities may impact their engagement level with the public realm. In Khartoum, for example, people may prioritise caring for their homes' interiors over exteriors and streets due to a variety of fiscal and municipal challenges (Hamid, 2015). Some individuals may experience disconnect to areas outside their homes, and there could be expectations for the government to take responsibility for these spaces (Elkheir, 2017). This observation sheds light on how they perceive their city and their position within it, and how factors like apathy may contribute to certain aspects of the city's condition. Thus, encouraging people to actively participate in the process of developing POS may foster a stronger sense of ownership and connection to these areas, leading individuals to perceive them as an extension of their homes' vicinity.

*2.2.2. Place-centred Approach*

Developing and utilizing existing spaces in innovative ways incorporates identifying undeveloped land plots or areas in need of urban revitalisation, and considering investing in them in order to repurpose their use to become active places. The UN-Habitat (2015) recommends variety and mix in the types of POS strategies to corroborate spatial justice at neighbourhood level.

*a) Urban Acupuncture*

Architect and urbanist Lerner (2014) claims that small-scale interventions can multiply towards bigger impacts in cities. Stating that accessibility and supply of public spaces is more important than large footprints (i.e., developing small well distributed spaces can have a bigger impact on communities than one big space). Moreover, Shaftoe (2008) points out the value of smaller places, as 'breathing' spaces in neighbourhood layouts.

Incremental place-centred approaches have shown positive results; evidently in cities that have active public spaces correlating with high user satisfaction when transforming poor-quality POS to colourful inclusive spaces (Gehl, 2010).



### b) Cost-effective Strategies

There are several forms of strategies to be applied in the design stage of public spaces. Deciding the best strategy is context specific. However, successful initiatives in developing cities share common strategies:

#### - *Tactical Urbanism*

Minor alterations to the physicality of the space ripple out bigger impacts of improvement (Whyte, 1980; Lerner, 2014). Nevertheless, these strategies have a short lifespan if not systematically supported by governments in terms of planning, ownership, and management.

#### - *Utilising Local Materials*

Using available local resources that neighbourhoods have can enhance spaces with low-cost solutions (e.g., recycled solid waste and billboard scraps can be used in fabricating furniture for POS like benches and seating, while paint can add vibrancy and colour to the space). Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) also denote the importance of greenery on aesthetics and how people psychologically perceive spaces. Seeking plants and creepers that grow with a minimum amount of water is a low-cost solution to provide shade and counter pollution in hot climates. Using mortar made from sand and earth to hold sun-baked bricks can be another low-cost solution to create walkways and pavements; mud can also substitute plaster for finishes (UNESCO, 2016a).

#### - *Synergy with Local Culture*

Cultural identity of neighbourhoods can be strengthened by investing in POS as a way to reclaim POS by using them for cultural activities. (UNESCO, 2016b). Urban public art is a vital ingredient in enjoyment of public space aesthetics and is cost-effective if connected to a master strategy. It can attract talented individuals or groups to a common space, fostering local community participation (Garau, 2015).

### 2.2.3. Economy-Centred Approach

This approach seeks to derive economic value from POS to benefit local communities. This value can be created in different levels: 1) Individuals, 2) Small businesses, 3)

Neighbourhood. POS becoming a hub for informal vendors and micro enterprises helps create a direct means of sustenance. In developing countries, informal artisans and street vendors portray a big share of informal economy and employment. For these groups, cities can become an engine to steer socioeconomic development by facilitating POS as hubs for local enterprises (Bhan, 2019; Simone, 2015; Skinner et al., 2018). Case studies suggest that informal vendors are willing to buy their feeling of security and legal stability for a reasonable amount of their returns (Dobson & Skinner, 2009).

Subsequently, the increased economic activity and traffic may attract complimentary small businesses adjacent to the POS.

Lastly, an active POS area could passively create value appreciation of neighbourhood land/properties that benefit communities. However, unintended consequences (e.g., gentrification) should be considered regarding the increased rent for residential and commercial real estate.

Additionally, financing and sustaining POS may be achieved through investing local funds and re-investing the returns back into the POS in this manner:

a) *Investing to foster economic activities*: Small investments in POS can achieve impactful results in strengthening communities in social and financial ways (UN-HABITAT,

2012). Capital can be endowed from a combination of private investors and community funds.

b) *Re-investing to create Self-sufficient POS*: Through implementing tax policies on land that has an increased value from the active POS, by guaranteeing a return to the managing stakeholders (communities, private sector, or governments). Then reinvesting the returns back into the public space to upgrade it and improve its amenities. Local enterprise establishments adjacent to developed active public spaces increase, and consequently, increase returns to the city.

### 2.3. Integrated Tri-pillar Framework (ITF)

(Figure 14) was unpacked in section (2.2.), and in this section, the figure is expanded to encompass a summary - represented in an Integrated Tri-pillar Framework (ITF) (Figure 15). Developing informal vacant land through incremental improvements in deprived neighbourhoods can indirectly generate income and create jobs for people if it is converted into a formal POS. Strategically prioritising a POS for gradual improvement brings powerful outcomes that can reduce poverty, provide development opportunities, and optimise land use. However, the cornerstone of success is creating human-centred inclusive POS through design, with the participation of users and stakeholders. Community engagement can yield fast results due to the high capacity of collectivist communities to be involved in projects improving their livelihood. Furthermore, managing the assets of public spaces in financially sustainable contracts include legitimating and triggering revenue from informal businesses. Therefore, the literature indicated that a developed accessible POS (Figure 15) is: 1) *socially and physically inclusive, aesthetically pleasing, and accessible*, 2) *active and lively*, 3) *strengthens civic pride and local identity of communities*, and 4) *heightens the economic potential and cultural activities*.

## 3. Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory approach with an inductive component. The iterative process of data collection and analysis allows for the exploration of emergent themes and patterns, contributing to a deeper understanding of the strategies that can enhance POS in low-income neighbourhoods. While an inductive component of case studies analysis helps to validate and strengthen the initial framework in order to generate new insights. Thus, the methods are based on desk research, literature review, and analysis of pilot projects as case studies. The presented data are from secondary sources collected from published books, academic journals, governments' publications, organisations' reports, conference papers, and internet search databases.

The literature review achieved the first objective and defined a theoretical framework encircling contextual approaches and strategies for improving informal POS in developing countries (POS-ITF). The framework will be validated through case studies analysis from countries that share commonalities in the geographical context with Khartoum. The descriptive nature of the research question in finding out what kind of strategies can improve POS, made the method of analysing case studies relevant to this study. Moreover, the main motive of the selection is to derive exemplars from the cases (Yin, 2018) to mobilise the framework. The analysis technique relies on matching patterns across the phases mentioned in the framework. Thus, the selected cases are confirmatory and presume practical replications. The protocol of selecting the case

studies aims at choosing cases of informal POS that closely relate to Khartoum's POS the most. Hence, the selection criteria were based on i) location, ii) type, and iii) scale. Firstly, all the cases are from African developing countries. Whilst each country in Africa has its own unique character and customs, however, there are prominent similarities on the state of POS and the collectivist nature of local communities. Secondly, the cases are similar in typology – they are all informal POS in low-income neighbourhoods that share characteristics with Khartoum's neighbourhoods. Thirdly, the cases vary in scale, contrasting in size of spaces and population. Finally, all the cases implement overlapping approaches (human, place, economy-centred) and strategies from the framework in (Figure 15).

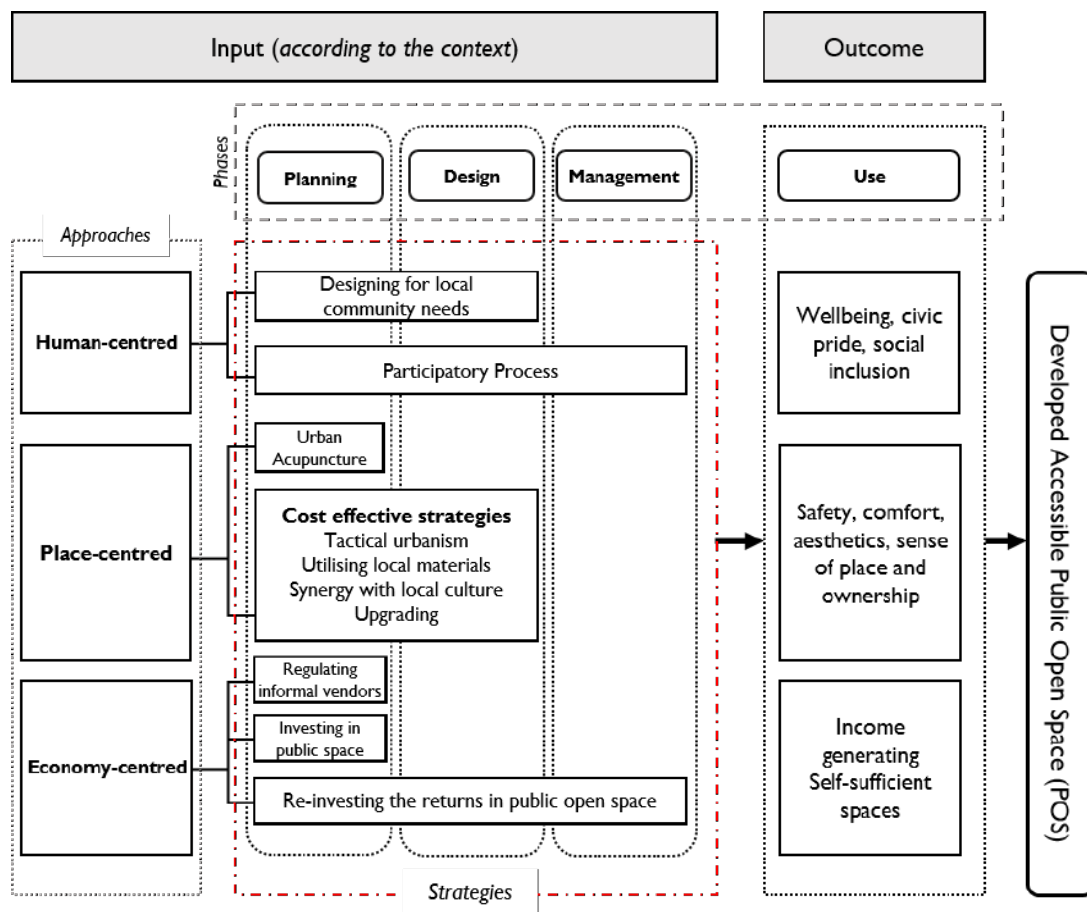


Figure 15: Integrated Tri-pillar Framework (ITF) Source: (Author)

Furthermore, each case study description is organised through reporting the context description, the input strategies, and the outcome. Followed by pattern-matching the input strategies according to the phases of public space. As a result, generalizable knowledge across contexts will be extracted in the form of recommendations for Khartoum.

#### 4. Framework Validation: Case Studies

On bridging the disparity gap, a collaboration was initiated in 2018 between UN-Habitat, HealthBridge (a Canadian NGO), and local organisations in developing countries. Successful pilot projects were implemented for low-income populations - on holistic POS development. The following selected cases are located in Ghana (Mmofra Foundation, 2018), Uganda (APS, 2018), and Niger (Peaceful Roads, 2018). Which all appear to have *the significant lack of formal POS and the undesirable quality of POS* in common with Sudan.

##### A) Teshie Park – Accra, Ghana

*Context:* A vacant land (Figure 16) used mainly by children and youth, deteriorated and became a dumping ground and a space for storage for a municipal office. The POS functioned as a ground for training the football team of local youth and fitness enthusiasts, in addition to being the prayer ground that gathered religious groups. The site had challenging aspects, such as burst water pipes and overflowed storm water that caused regular flooding.



Figure 16 (left): Case (A): Site pre-intervention. Source: (Mmofra Foundation, 2018)  
Figure 17 (right): Case (A): Site post-intervention. Source: (Mmofra Foundation, 2018)

*Input:* The primary objective of upgrading the space was to enhance recreational opportunities for the local community. This involved collaborative efforts from labourers, residents, and diggers to clear the site, replace pipes, and construct a sandbag barrier for drainage. Water tanks and taps were added, and the site's perimeter was secured using cost-effective, locally-sourced fencing materials. The fencing types varied, offering unique features such as a tire and wood fence allowing children to see into the area, and a steel mesh fence for advertisements. The existing sports area was divided to create a versatile pitch. Additionally, handcrafted play elements like painted steel frames, swings, recycled tire seats, and more were incorporated. Shading devices, painted walkway stones, and a bamboo maze were also added for further enhancement.

*Outcome:* After implementing the major physical upgrades to the park (Figure 17), the number of users significantly increased, because there were now places for adults to sit and zones for children to play. The users' increase correlated with an increase of diversity in the user groups. School children visited the space regularly after school to play and do homework. Local community members often occupied the seating areas in

midday and evenings. In addition, the space attracted vendors that catered to the increased user number, and the mesh fence generated income through advertisement boards.

Project	INPUT				OUTCOME
	Approach	Planning Phase	Design Phase	Management Phase	Use Phase
Teshie Park Accra, Ghana	Human-centred	Collaborating with labourers, diggers, and residents	Residents collected materials Skilled local crafters prepared design components	Local community members	Increased diversity in user groups
	Place-centred	- Aiming to increase safety measures - Including the residents in informing physical design decisions	- Securing site parameter by building different types of fencing. - Replaced the pipes, and built a sandbag barrier near the drainage to omit regular flooding from burst pipes. - Installed handmade play components. - Shading devices made from waving reed structure was installed on top of the seats. - Added bamboo maze	N/A	New playground area attracted more children New seating attracted more adult occupants
	Economy-centred	N/A	Use of low-cost materials: old tires, leftover paint, recycled bricks. Mesh steel fence	Generating income through hanging advertisement boards	Increased user activity in space attracted local vendors

Table 1: Case (A): contextual application of placemaking approaches and strategies. Source: (Author’s based on Mmofra Foundation, 2018)

### B) Lukuli Playground – Kampala, Uganda

*Context:* community-owned POS, predominantly used by male adults and youth for playing ball sports. Located in a low-income area where the local community’s recreational needs are neglected. Lukuli Playground was intended to cater to a large population of 12 parishes. The space had a combination of a playground, a sports ground, and green space. Local residents used it to dry laundry, graze animals, mine sand, and dispose garbage. Although the playground was accessible, the space lacked children play facilities. The low quality was clearly seen in the playground and amenities shortage was demonstrated in the only existence of goal posts. The space was hazardous, with litter thrown around due to lack of trash cans (Figure 18), broken pieces of glass and sharp stones on the ground, in addition to lack of lighting, seating, water taps, toilets, and first aid facilities. The unlevelled ground, open drains, and stray animals also created safety concerns.

*Input:* The main priority for the upgrade aimed to address installing toilets, managing waste, and halt flooding. The project provided a building that contained disabled-inclusive toilets, changing rooms, and an office for the POS management. The drainage in the site was fixed, the ground was properly levelled, football and netball courts were added, and a significant number of tree seedlings was planted and wrapped with used mosquito nets to prevent their abuse by stray animals. Additionally, a play area for children was created and it included wood hand crafted swings, benches, and small cars – created by a resident who was a local carpenter.





Figure 18 (left): Case (B): Site pre-intervention. Source: (APS, 2018)  
 Figure 19 (right): Case (B): Site post-intervention. Source: (APS, 2018)

**Outcome:** Adding a netball court and children's area significantly boosted children's enjoyment (Figure 19), as older football players no longer posed barriers. Inclusivity heightened diversity and tripled users - netball court drew women, playground attracted disabled children. Flood issues tackled, space turned active even before construction completion. The new facility building catered inclusively, meeting majority needs.

Project	INPUT				OUTCOME
	Approach	Planning Phase	Design Phase	Management Phase	Use Phase
Lukuli Playground Kampala, Uganda	Human-centred	Meeting with local residents to extract design ideas and inform needs and decisions	Local carpenter hand crafted wooden swings, wooden benches, and wooden small cars in children play area	Local Community	Total user number increased by 190%
	Place-centred	Discussions on: installing toilets, managing waste, stopping flooding	-Levelling the ground -Constructing a facility building in the space -Creating a playground -Vegetation planting	Vegetation protected with recycled mosquito nets	More disabled children and women were able to access the space and enjoy it
	Economy-centred	N/A	N/A	Facility building contained an office for the public space management for the local residents	N/A

Table 2: Case (B): contextual application of placemaking approaches and strategies.  
 Source: (Author's based on APS, 2018)

### C) Yantala Open Space – Niamey, Niger

**Context:** Niamey's low-income neighbourhoods lack formal public spaces, and the existing ones are of poor quality and at risk of privatization. Despite rapid city growth, only two parks out of seven are functional. Among them, 'Yantala Open Space' stands in a traditional neighbourhood within a grouping of lower-income communities. Initially vacant and lacking amenities (Figure 20), this area was regularly utilized by residents, mainly for football. Its proximity to a mosque further enhanced its status as a popular community gathering place.





Figure 20 (left): Case (C): site pre-intervention. Source: (Peaceful Roads, 2018)  
 Figure 21 (right): Case (C): site post-intervention. Source: (Peaceful Roads, 2018)

*Input:* The project employed an inclusive participatory approach through a Minecraft workshop (Block by Block, 2018), involving various local community members and governmental bodies. Their collective focus was on meeting recreational needs, such as introducing a playground and play facilities. Throughout the design phase, community engagement continued through site events, contributing to both physical changes and subsequent management efforts. The project encompassed 35 infrastructure enhancements, including a community garden for produce, swings, colourful tire fence representing the Niger flag, tire tunnel, toilets, refreshment centre, and fish ponds. Additionally, football and pétanque grounds were built, while addressing waste management and water availability.

Project	INPUT				OUTCOME
	Approach	Planning Phase	Design Phase	Management Phase	Use Phase
Yantala Open Space Niamey, Niger	Human-centred	implementing an inclusive participatory process through 'Minecraft' game workshop and collaborating with school children, women, and the elderly	Inviting community participation through site events  Responding to the needs of the local community	Joint management between local residents and a parliament member	Increase in activity within the space Increased feelings of ownership and enjoyment
	Place-centred	Fulfilling recreational needs	Enclosing the space with a recycled tire fence. Creating a 'refreshment centre' within the space. Creating playground and play facilities for children. Connecting water to the space through developing an irrigation system. Constructing a football and petanque grounds.	N/A	Four times an increase in users from diverse groups (women, children, elderly)
	Economy-centred	An added value of economic activity within the space	-Community garden. -Fish pond.	-Gardening and preparing vegetables. -Fish farming.	Creation of monetary returns

Table 3: Case (C): contextual application of placemaking approaches and strategies. Source: (Author's based on Peaceful Roads, 2018)

*Outcome:* The project provided the local community with a safe, comfortable, and inclusive place to socialise and relax. The playground resulted in an increase in children and youth users from day till night (Figure 21). Other infrastructural changes resulted in an increased number of women, elderly, and football/pétanque players. An irrigation system was specifically developed for the project and connected water to the community garden and toilets. Moreover, the fishponds were used for fish farming purposes, and the local community sold the prepared fish in the refreshment centre, generating income for the park. Implementing this project was considered a good model for the rest of public spaces in the city. Provoking public space policy changes in Niamey, as a local parliament member supported the park financially and technically.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Patterns across phases

The input of the cases is organised according to the phases that contained the strategy, and the stakeholders at each phase. Planning, design, and management phases constitute the input, while the outcome is demonstrated in the POS use phase - post intervention.

#### *Planning Phase*

The international and local NGOs in all cases were the main facilitators of each intervention from the start. Positioning the local community as the main active stakeholder, while the government was a passive stakeholder that supported the projects technically and monetarily (e.g. case C).

In this phase, data from the local community was collected to inform what changes each space needed, while also involving the people in the decision-making process of the type of interventions to be implemented. This stage forms the foundation for all other stages; therefore, an appropriate amount of time needs to be spent to assess the quality of the space in order to identify what is needed.

Throughout the cases, the spaces started at an underdeveloped level, which made them a blank canvas to work on. Denoting the importance of the participatory process especially in this phase. One of the tools used was the *Minecraft workshop* that allowed diverse groups of all ages to add their voice to the discussion through visuals. Perhaps the element of incorporating 'play' attracted more people, especially younger groups. However, it is worth noting that the use of Minecraft may not be the most cost-effective approach. Adding the element of fun and play is not exclusive to a workshop that requires computers and devices which could be hard to acquire in some contexts. Opting for other low-cost means of adding the play element can be through papers and crayons or chalk and a blackboard to draft ideas by the participants. The main goal here is to have pulling factors that attract diverse participants, so the voice of most is heard and considered, without imposing potential financial burdens on the stakeholders.

As many people in low-income neighbourhoods might be sceptical at first due to a potential mistrust in authority, the use of traditional techniques alone might not bring many participants unless there is a compelling reason that brings them. Socialising opportunities with neighbours or play opportunities for kids can be factors that attract sceptics.

For this reason, the initial process of raising awareness is crucial and works as a conversation starter, while the workshop extends the conversation to achieve practical

objectives. In addition, it injects excitement in the participants from the targeted local community, motivating them to participate in the following phases.

#### *Design Phase*

This phase marks the realization of significant infrastructural changes aligned with the identified needs from the planning stage. The local community, central as stakeholders in each case, transforms plans into tangible actions with the guidance of NGOs. Procuring materials, including repurposed items like old tires and recyclable waste, becomes a focus. Neighbourhood carpenters and metalsmiths play a role in crafting these materials into functional amenities.

Moreover, local residents contribute what they can, from plants to reusable materials, expediting the process as seen in case C. Capturing and channelling the initial enthusiasm of volunteers onto the site is crucial during this phase. Witnessing neighbours taking the lead can inspire more locals to participate. However, disorganization and technical hurdles resulting from poor planning can lead to delays that dampen the spirits of initial participants. Thus, sustaining excitement throughout this stage is pivotal. Strategies like organizing construction events to attract more residents or conducting opening ceremonies post-completion can maintain momentum. Granting targeted local communities influence in the planning and design phases results in heightened ownership and responsibility (Lent & Studdert, 2019).

#### *Management Phase*

Communities handled cases independently, overseeing security, facility administration, and generating income (case C). This phase's completion sets an example for policymakers in replicating inclusive processes for informal POS. Neighbourhood committees, trustees, and vendor groups managed spaces in cases (B) and (C). Empowered individuals feel responsible and motivated for ongoing management post-NGO involvement. Self-driven planning, design, and management lead to enduring protection, sustaining advantages of formalized POS. Conversely, without rewarding efforts, excitement fades, causing gradual deterioration.

#### *Use Phase*

The use phase results from prior stages' integration. Despite short implementation, cases yielded impactful evidence. Informal spaces formalized, awareness of POS significance surged (cases A, B). User growth and community involvement paralleled increased ownership, showing community-responsive spaces foster activity. Trust heightened between local communities and government (Daniel, 2018), bridging bottom-up and top-down. Data ambiguity exists on impact, visuals possibly biased, but user increase and time spent indicate active, enjoyable spaces (Gehl, 2010).

#### *5.2. Wider patterns across contexts*

The observed similarities in physical attributes and typology that these POS -pre-upgrade- have with Khartoum's low-income neighbourhood POS make them exemplary analogies on how POS can be developed to become inclusive spaces that are fully active and responsive to residents' needs. With case (C) being the closest in character to Khartoum's low-income neighbourhoods. While these strategies were implemented across contexts, yet, they exhibited successful results mainly because they were tailored to the specifics of each context in the planning phase.

Although the framework's intertwined approaches are overarched by the 'human' factor, it also heavily overlaps with 'place' and 'economy' dimensions. The three outlooks work together through connected strategies, to eventually produce successful POS. Through this lens, the following recommendations summary is extracted:

Firstly, evidence supports the notion of engaging people in the process from the start as the core catalyst is a pivotal element in the success of any urban project (Habitat III, 2016). Thus, learning the local community's needs in Khartoum's low-income neighbourhoods is the first step in a responsive human-centred approach. Followed by involving all parts of the community, especially the groups that do not have an active voice like women, children, and the elderly, ensures social inclusivity and results in diversity, empowerment, feelings of belonging, and a shared responsibility (Lent & Studdert, 2019).

Secondly, the study suggests the important element of mobilising government officials in Khartoum's localities into realising the livelihood and monetary returns that formalised POS in low-income neighbourhoods can generate. An economy-centred approach, in the least, ensures community street vendors and informal traders are benefitted, which facilitates diversity in the space, and at best, provides self-sufficient POS, which ensures long-term sustainability.

Lastly, the case studies analysis provides insight into employing low-cost strategies and utilising local materials in the infrastructural implementation stages creates comfortable - aesthetically pleasing spaces. Informal POS in Khartoum's poor neighbourhoods can become more than sandy polluted football fields, and upgraded into beautiful vibrant places that residents of all groups seek as a destination, reaping their financial rewards, and most importantly - enjoying their stay.

Certainly, prioritising POS agendas in Sudan can minimise the negative impacts that lack of accessible socially-inclusive spaces create. The economic value alone justifies motivating research bodies, policymakers, government officials, and most importantly, the local communities to focus on public space advancement in Khartoum.

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## Fleeting public place and lasting communities. Dog walking in Johannesburg's Killarney Park

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### Abstract

South Africa's history of purposefully segregated public space as a stage on which the anti-cohesion ideals of various colonial governments played out is well known. What is less known is the rich history of public space resistance which accompanies this, particularly that of the People's Parks. These collectively driven public places which emerged as pop-ups in public space captured the imagination of communities seeking to activate new norms departing from state-enforced segregation. Reading current public space through the lens of the People's Parks thus presents an opportunity to uncover and better understand the existence and impact of fleeting places in public space, with lasting impacts in terms of building engaging communities. Drawing on immersive participant observation in Johannesburg's Killarney Park, this paper focuses on a community of local residents and their dogs. Brought together first by their pets but later by strong in-group social bonds, this group demonstrates the potential for communities to grow from and in public space entirely organically, not reliant on infrastructure or physical planning and design interventions. Instead, an often invisible and seemingly intangible place is created with very real dimensions for those who co-create it once a day in coming together. This paper explores the space that is Killarney Park, and the place that is the dog walkers' circle, in an effort to better understand these dynamics and suggest possibilities for further research on public space in Africa.

**Keywords:** public space; Johannesburg; animal geography; dog; city; community

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Of the numerous avenues of public space research currently gripping urban scholars' imaginations, the connection between space, place, and community stands out as warranting further attention from an African perspective. Drawing on Johannesburg (South Africa) in particular, it is clear that a history of deliberately exclusionary social fragmentation has left a somewhat indelible mark on the city to date (City of Johannesburg Department of Development Planning, 2016). Public space particularly was historically a heavily policed site where segregation was enforced. Intertwined with this history is a narrative of struggle and resistance, taking shape in what is known as People's Parks. These parks constitute a series of collectively-created and locally-initiated community parks which emerged in Johannesburg (usually Soweto) around 1985 and were always demolished by the state (Goldblatt, 1986 as seen in Stevenson, 2007; Jochelson, 1990; Sack, 1989; Steyn, 2002, 2013). These temporary, moving places within public space open up interesting analytic inroads for the conversation on community-building, placemaking, and public space in Johannesburg and cities like it. A significant body of existing research already looks at public space design, and particular places and spaces which bring people together (Aelbrecht and Stevens, 2019; Afacan and Afacan, 2011; Carmona, 2010, 2019; Gaffikin et al., 2010; Madanipour, 1999). However, less research specifically looks at fleeting and often invisible places in public space in Africa, and the communities which grow from them (though there is a wealth of global literature on public space, communities, and chance encounters) (Malefakis, 2019). Rooted in that background this paper reflects on Johannesburg's Killarney Park, asking: Can fleeting public places contribute to the community-building potential of public space? Written in the early stages of research on public space, place, and temporariness, this paper provides early conjecture rather than fully fledged arguments, seeking to open further discussion on temporal public space in Africa. Drawing on documentary analysis, observational research, and interviews, I focus on a group of dog owners and walkers living in the neighbourhood. I have observed them to regularly use the park, often simultaneously, in a process which appears to collectively produce a temporary place, and a loose community which transcends it. I begin by historicizing public space in the South African context, weaving in the examples of placemaking demonstrated in the People's Parks. Then I move on to explain Killarney Park and the rhythmically fleeting place created by its dog-walking community.

### **A note on methods and positionality**

The fieldwork generating this study's data results from immersive participant observational work in Killarney Park. This includes a previous study (Rawhani, 2021) spanning the 2018-2020 period, further targeted observational study in 2022. The latter drew on 37 visits to the park, and 8 interviews with interviewees who differed in length of time residing in the neighbourhood (ranging from 6 months to 20 years), dog ownership (some owned dogs, others were dog walkers, and others joined friends who owned a dog), and park usage patterns in general (AKR1, 2022; AKR2, 2022; du Plessis, 18 February 2022a; Lubinsky, 2022; Meise, 2022; Naidoo, 2022; Ross, 2022; Verhoogt, 2022). These individual virtual interviews were semi-structured, involving 11 questions, and lasting 10-15 minutes on average. Interview transcripts and fieldwork notes were coded through a content analysis approach on ATLAS.ti to locate commonly occurring themes. Earlier fieldwork was used to provide a point of departure, but not re-

processed beyond that. It was necessary to conduct the interviews virtually as interviewing individuals in the park would not have allowed for a private setting, and may have biased the answers I received. Unfortunately, it was impossible to avoid bias entirely as I, the interviewer, am also a member of the circle of dog walkers. This directly informed my decision to conduct interviews virtually despite ordinarily interacting with fellow dog walkers and owners in person. I drew on experiential and learned knowledge resulting from previous participant observation research in Killarney Park, demonstrating that it was not possible to have private conversations in a park of that size and social context (here referring to a small densely populated neighbourhood where many people know each other and approach each other) (Rawhani, 2021). Previous attempts at private or confidential conversations in the Park were not successful, and prevented me from guaranteeing anonymity or confidentiality. Regardless of my efforts to avoid bias in the interview process, it is possible that interviewees may have limited the candid quality of their responses as a result of knowing me, and that my analysis of their answers was impacted likewise.

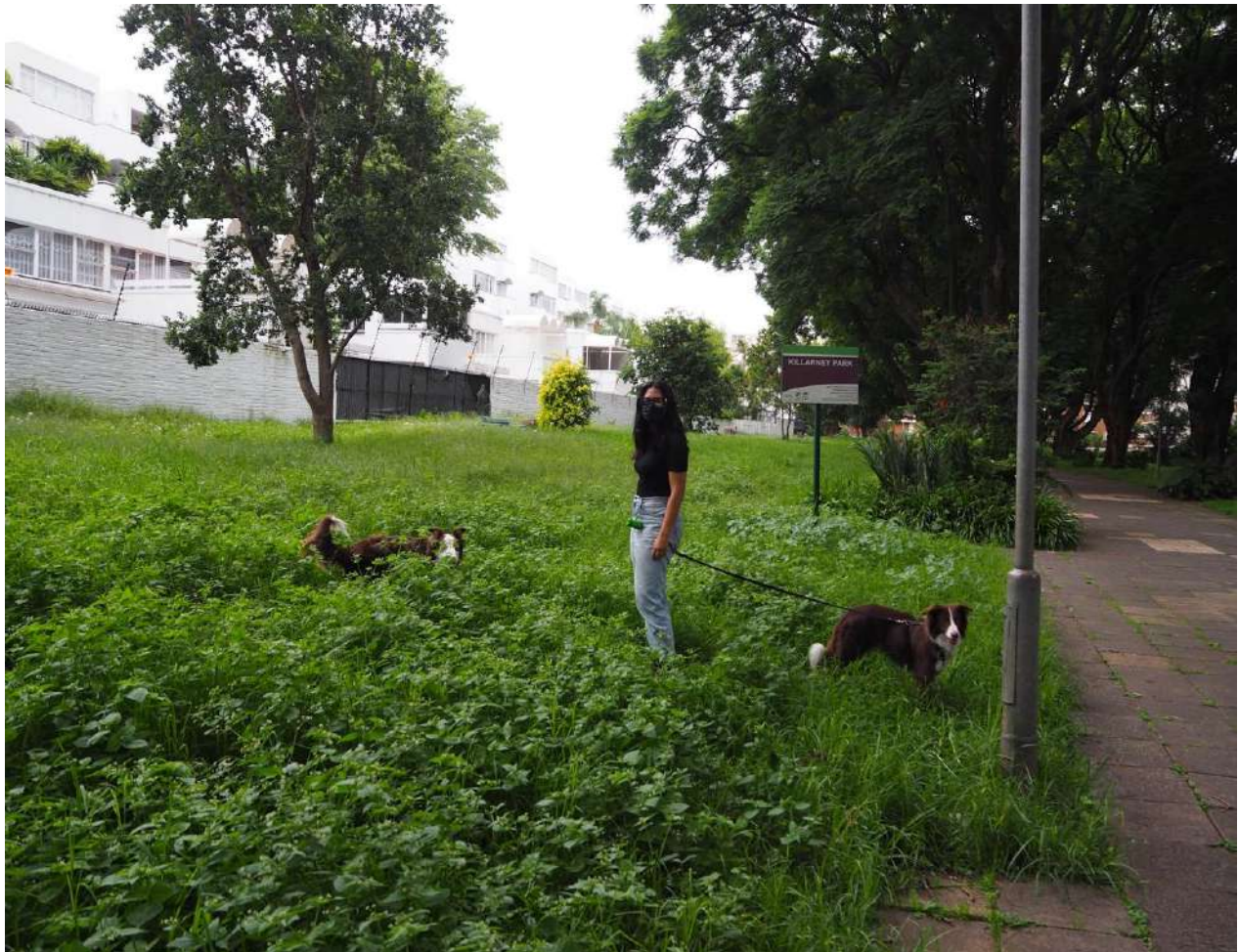


Figure 1. The Author and her Dogs in Killarney Park (du Plessis, 23 February 2022b)

### **Core concepts: Space, Place, and Fleeting Rhythmic Emergences**

Without seeking to contribute to the space vs place debate, I conceive of space and place as interrelated but different. Not every space is a place, though some portions of public space (in itself a place at times), become specific places, or sub-places. Space is the location where the creation of society takes place, per Aristotle and Plato, but it is a creation inherently influenced by freedom and restriction, inequalities, and social capital (Wang, 2018). Indescribable as any one specific object, space is a set of relationships which may originate as conceptions in mental space before they are enacted and begin to create place (Lefebvre, 1991; Patricios, 1973). Space is a geographic coordinate, often demarcated, zoned, and imagined to potentially serve a particular purpose if it becomes activated as a place (Tuan, 2002). On the other hand, per Tuan, place:

“[...] has a history and meaning. Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning (1979: abstract).

Thus, place represents that space where, at the individual and social levels meaning and attachment have emerged (Cresswell, 2014). Finally, in examining Killarney Park as an example of public space in Johannesburg, through the lens of temporary place such as the People's Parks, I uncover what I call rhythmically fleeting place. While my work on this concept is at an early stage a tight definition may be premature. However, here I provide a working description, emerging from my fieldwork observations and analysis, which delineates key characteristics. Temporary or rhythmically fleeting place refers to places which appear and disappear rhythmically, leaving little discernible physical trace in space, but a lasting social impact through the memory of the recurring place. Rhythmically fleeting place is temporary, emerging and disappearing in accordance with the lived pattern of the everyday unique to those who use and invent such places. Its existence, though very real, may be invisible and undetectable when it is not in use. This sets it apart from installed infrastructure like a playground which demarcates the place where space occupies a play purpose and social functionality, for example. It is not transient, neither can its impact be erased through the erasure of the physicality of the space which it occupies, as its placeness and associated memories and attachments ensure its impactful legacy. It is originally spontaneous, but later planned even if informal. Finally, it appears it might be associated with in-group and out-group politics. In this way it shapes and is shaped by relationships, and identities, solidifying identities at the margins of power and inclusion, and possibly mainstreaming new behaviours and practices (potentially positive *or* anti-social).

### **A History of Public Space in South Africa**

During 1948-1994 controlling public space as part of systematizing segregation became central to the Apartheid regime (Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo, 2009). Numerous laws and statutes such as the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act 49 of 1953 served to entrench this (for a comprehensive list see Strauss, 2019). Beyond legal statute and policy frameworks, photographic archives of public space in South Africa confirm the infiltration of these exclusionary principles into public space by 'othering' a segment of

the population (here, Black people) and spreading fear of encountering them. In one poignant photograph from the era two Black men walk toward a residential settlement and pass a sign which reads “CAUTION BEWARE OF NATIVES” (Ejor, 1956). This is further visible in signs reserving taxi stops, lawns bathrooms, seating areas, and sometimes entire public spaces, for different racial groups (with White people receiving preferential treatment) (Almasy, 1950; Campbell, 1986a, 1986b; Cook, 1988; Gubb, 1982, 1988; Hewison, 1971; Keystone staff, 1976; Thomas, 1982). These Acts engineered into apartheid and pre-apartheid society the notion of unequal and inherently exclusionary access to the public, through planning and subsequently controlling space and place to separate people.

An example of this can be found in Johannesburg’s first state-owned and created public park, Joubert park. This was intended to ‘civilise’ working class white labourers in the city and separate them from Black labourers (Bruwer, 2006; Mavuso, 2017) through its “the conspicuous display of wholesome leisure” (Cane, 2019: 147). Unfortunately for the city’s segregationist government, urban public space constantly presented the organic opportunity for mixing. This was exacerbated by political in-fighting over the question of segregation. Ultimately these political divisions lead to the regime encouraging exclusion by progressively creating an idea of strangers as dangerous: intimacy was to be feared (Posel, 2011).

### **Temporary, fleeting places of inclusion**

This summary of the exclusive nature of public space in South Africa focuses on physical, formalised spaces and places. These were planned, funded, and created through the management of the state. However, this must not erase the rich history of Black public urban life. Indeed, the introductory words of the 2003 book *Emerging Johannesburg* sums up spontaneous, planned but informal, powerful spaces of resistance, beautifully, stating that “there was one official Johannesburg, all others were hidden” (Tomlinson et al., 2003: ix).

One such example of these spaces is captured in the case of the People’s Parks. Here I do not delve into these in great depth as this is currently the subject of archival research undertaken by Cane, Twalo, and Murray as part of the African Critical Enquiry Programme. In summary, the People’s Parks are best understood as “spontaneous public art... [appearing] in the form of small ‘parks’ or gardens on patches of wasteland, heavily decorated with found materials” (Sack, 1989: 6). Also known to some as Peace Parks, these places emerged variously through the efforts of several individuals and groups. These included the Soweto-based NEAC (National Environmental Awareness Campaign), its once chairperson Japhta Lekgheto, yard committees, the (then) political resistance parties including the African National Congress and the United Democratic Front, as well as local students, families and individuals who came together to make these parks a reality (Jochelson, 1990; Steyn, 2002). It is clear that the emergence of these parks was first spontaneous, then part of a planned pattern even though they were inherently informal from the perspective of the state. The parks in question were not built or even imagined by the state. Instead, they were linked to greening initiatives which sought to improve the quality of life in South Africa’s Black townships (Learn and Teach Magazine, 1989). Photographs in the People’s Park Archive capture these fleeting moments and places in public space. They show people gathered in parks bearing

slogans such as “True love promised land”, “We are the world”, “Unity is strength”, “Love and peace”, and even “Protect our environment. Apartheid makes our townships dirty. Cleanliness is Godliness” (Sack, n.d.). In this way it appears that the parks were intimately associated with identity, in-group and out-group politics for people at the socioeconomic margins of society, and the creation and mainstreaming of new norms surrounding aesthetics, self-worth (being worthy of beautiful spaces), cleanliness, and values contributing to the common good.

While the parks in question were sadly always demolished, their temporary quality does not negate their impact. They stand out as evidence of the power of localised community building through collective public space interventions. Further, they exemplify the organic creation of place in open public space to meet the needs of the community living there. Without doubt, these parks demonstrate the association of meaning and attachment (place) with geographic coordinators in space. The endurance of their legend and memory proves that their fleeting quality does not detract from their placeness. While many iconic public spaces live on and can be visited today so that their planned, physical dimensions can be experienced and studied, these now disappeared fleeting people’s parks offer a new approach to public space research. Recently, Jonathan Cane, Sinethemba Twalo and Noeleen Murray have suggested that these parks present “a generative entry point for interrogating ... fugacious or fleeting moments of conviviality” (Cane et al., 2022). Drawing on the People’s Parks’ short-lived quality alongside their enduring impact, questions organically arise about such fleeting places. This inspires research on places, in public space, which are not entirely permanent, physical, easily tangible, demarcated, state-planned and created, expertly designed, and formalised- yet by no means transient. Instead it invites us to read public space and opportunities for community building by looking for places which are organically and collectively created. This includes those places imagined and lived outside of the imagination of the state and its army of experts, lawmakers, and policies. Such places are temporary, fleeting, perhaps even invisible at times, yet capable of building and sustaining a community. This encourages us to ask: How can fleeting public places help to build lasting communities? Here, Killarney park’s community of dog-walkers provides an interesting example, which extends the discussion to more-than-human conceptualisations of public space too.

### **Rhythmically fleeting place: The invisible making and remaking of communities in public space**

Killarney was once the Hollywood of Johannesburg after well-known film producer Isidore Schlesinger purchased 43 hectares where the neighbourhood is currently situated. Schlesinger’s vision was for Killarney to be a park neighbourhood, choosing to designate most of its stands as public space rather than allow for too many buildings. Today, only the central Park remains, and the neighbourhood is far more built up (Gorelik, 2016).





Figure 2 (left). A park heritage plaque marks the 2013 centenary of the neighbourhood (du Plessis, 23 February 2022c).

Figure 3 (right). Killarney Park within the neighbourhood of Killarney (author's sketch, 13 October 2021)

Killarney Park covers an entire street bloc between two rows of apartment buildings on either side. A straight path stretches directly from one entrance to the other, with several benches and bins alongside it. Tall jacaranda trees surrounded by flower beds line the path, showering the park in fragrant purple blossoms every spring, and providing welcome summer shade. In a corner, small food gardens pop up where kale, tomatoes, and potatoes can be harvested.



Figure 4. Killarney Park's Central Pathway (du Plessis, 23 February 2022d)

Figure 5. Killarney Park's Food Garden (du Plessis, 23 February 2022e)

When the park first opens (between 6:00 and 7:00am) joggers, dog walkers and people rushing to their jobs in the area silently pass through. Bins are cleaned at least on a weekly basis when the city collects refuse. Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo intermittently mows the lawn. Following the lunchtime rush when people come for a walk, a hot drink, or simply to socialize, nannies flock to the jungle gym, often bringing



their own children as well as the children they are paid to watch. The nearby water fountain decorated with images of indigenous birds invites children to enjoy a refreshing drink.



Figure 6. Killarney Park's Jungle Gym (du Plessis, 23 February 2022f)

Figure 7. Killarney Park's Water Fountain (du Plessis, 23 February 2022g)

Later, teenagers pass through on their way home from school. Finally, as the workday winds to a close, dog walkers return, as do parents who bring children, enjoying the space and greenery before the park closes again as it gets dark (the street lights in the park have not worked for several years).



Figure 8. Killarney Park Bench (du Plessis, 23 February 2022h)

When I first studied Killarney Park, in 2018, the gathering of dogs and their owners or walkers did not strike me as remarkable. This was perhaps in part due to the increase in the number of dogs I observed in the park during fieldwork post-COVID 19. My interest was originally drawn to points of interaction in physically tangible places such as the jungle gym or food garden. More recently I revisited Killarney Park both literally and intellectually. I came to reanalyse previous data and fieldwork notes, with the history of People's Parks acting as a lens. Adopting this framework, I was immediately struck by the significance of what I now call the dog walkers' circle.

Daily, on weekdays, between 16:30 and 18:30, five to eleven dogs of various sizes and ages can be seen playing together in the park. Around the dogs, variously sitting and standing, their owners (often two people per dog) and walkers stand. Half engaged in conversation, half ensuring their pets do not stray too close to the park's central path (or worse, out of the gate and into the road), the owners gravitate toward one another based on no rule other than group membership (AKR2, 2022: 2; Meise, 2022; Naidoo, 2022; Ross, 2022). No particular meeting place is set, and unlike other Johannesburg parks there is no subdivision which indicates dogs should be relegated to a specific zone in the park. Often, whichever two dog owners arrive first will indirectly decide on the dog walker's circle meeting point for the day, simply based on where their dogs begin to play and attract the next dogs to arrive (du Plessis, 18 February 2022a; Meise, 2022). Usually, however, everyone gathers around a bench (Figure 8) close to the centre of the park. They take care to keep the dogs away from the children's play area, as well as other amenities such as the fountain and bathrooms, out of courtesy to park users who may not be comfortable around animals (AKR2, 2022; Lubinsky, 2022; Meise, 2022; Naidoo, 2022; Ross, 2022).

Should anyone arrive in the park outside of these hours, they may well see one or two dogs being walked (especially between 6:00 and 8:00 in the mornings), but there is no sign, physical or otherwise, that a particular place emerges in the park, with a community of its own, on a regular basis. No footpaths have been trodden into the grass there. No litter, and certainly no demarcation of the visible sort (save for the odd occasion when somebody may forget a tennis ball) give away the significance of this location. Further, there are 10 benches in the park identical to that shown in Figure 8 in terms of style, proximity to a bin, and being located away from the path and entrances. Additionally, a further 16 benches are dotted around the park which are likewise similar but do not attract any particular community or grouping, with the exception of 3 benches directly overlooking the children's play area where parents congregate. All signs seem to point towards this as a mere location, a physical context within which something might be created, but no tangible place is ordinarily visible, i.e. there is no hint of memory, attachment, relationships, or social significance beyond a plastic seat. Interviews, however, reveal a rich community of diverse interests. Here the common thread of loving dogs and caring for them brings people together once a day, in what they perceive to be a very real community and place (AKR1, 2022; Lubinsky, 2022; Meise, 2022; Naidoo, 2022; Ross, 2022). A generally unspoken agreement exists to meet around 17:00 on weekdays, and interestingly it is one which is spoken only to new dog owners in the neighbourhood, actively inviting them to bring their dog and join in (Lubinsky, 2022; Ross, 2022; Verhoogt, 2022). Certainly, the dogs are causal in this interaction. However, beyond that, human socialization and interaction occurs which leads to bonding, friendships, and community-building at a level which transcends the

dog walkers' circle itself. Examples include joining one another for braais (South African colloquialism for barbeque), dinners, pub quizzes, and joining one another's fantasy football leagues (AKR2, 2022; du Plessis, 18 February 2022a; Lubinsky, 2022; Naidoo, 2022; Ross, 2022; Verhoogt, 2022). The group emerged spontaneously at first, and then repeatedly, regularly, rhythmically, though not formally in the traditional sense or in any manner leaving a permanent physical place imprint in space. During a period when several individuals adopted animals recently and found themselves using a space without a clear animal-friendly place, the dog walkers' circle appears to create and reinforce a shared group identity.

Interesting in-group and out-group dynamics persist as a result of this shared and co-shaped identity. One interviewee indicates that group members hold one another accountable to picking up after their dogs, whereas a few individuals who opt not to join the group are frequently seen leaving dog faeces behind (Naidoo, 2022). This is one clear example of mainstreaming behaviours and norms. Others indicate that members of the dog walkers' circle try to ensure good behaviour on the part of all of the dogs, so as not to provoke the irritation of other park users (AKR2, 2022: 2; Lubinsky, 2022; Ross, 2022). This is a clear demonstration of solidifying in-group identity associated with specific ideals.

Interestingly, 7 of the 8 interviewees highlight a tense coexistence between those who use the park to walk their dogs, making an effort to ensure they do not infringe on others' space, and other park users who dislike dogs or are afraid of them. I witnessed these tensions flare up even when I perceived no threat to be posed and the animals were leashed and far away from other park users. Perhaps this perception is shaped by my own bias as a dog owner. Despite the unmarked amorphous spatial quality of the place that is the dog walkers' circle, numerous interviewees indicated a preference for some demarcation. This might allow for dogs to be walked in a particular area, with some suggesting a short fence be erected around the children's playground so that concerned parents have less to worry about (AKR1, 2022, 2022; du Plessis, 18 February 2022a; Lubinsky, 2022; Meise, 2022; Naidoo, 2022; Ross, 2022). One core theme emerged time and again across all of the interviews conducted: Figure 8's seemingly insignificant park bench and its surrounds transcend space and occupy a very specific place conceived of and practiced into everyday rhythmic reality by its co-creators. Knowledge exchange, co-caring for their animals, in-group vs out-group dynamics, intergroup asymmetries and politics, and other significant interactions create meaning and attachment associated with this space, elevating it to the significance of a place which fluctuates between physical and mental.

### **Leaving the park**

The brief nature of this case study and the early phase of this research in general precludes in-depth analysis. It does, however, propose two important questions for researchers, city government, and other stakeholders who help to manage and co-create public space and place. First, without abandoning design and planning, how can rhythmically fleeting co-created place and the communities it builds be better understood, researched, and supported? Second, with pet ownership on the rise in South Africa, how can local parks departments better equip public space for multiple

users and include more-than-human conceptualisations of rights and access (Gaunet et al., 2014; Haynes, 2021)?

These questions, and the study itself, draw attention to the need to better study, understand, and discuss temporary public space in the South African context, as well as others where similar places exist. This paper indicates that these spaces are temporary, and while fleeting they are rhythmic. These places may lack physically permanent features. However, they create and are created by deep, rich relationships that are connected with solidifying group identities and mainstreaming new norms among the creator-participants of such place. These emergent understandings of a distinct framing of public space and place in Africa lead me to argue for a comparatively novel and little-explored reading of such places. Building on this, I propose that reading public space through the history of the People's Parks allows researchers to better uncover and understand rhythmically fleeting public places and the significance it holds to the communities which it creates.

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## From Kibera to Kalobeyei. Public Space as a Catalyst for Transformation and Integrated Planning

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### Abstract

Public spaces are key to inclusion and sustainability in urban Africa. Too often, public space is seen as an add-on, to be included at the end when funding or space allows. In this paper, written by two collaborating organisations working on public space in Kenya (and beyond), we argue that public space should be seen less as an optional outcome of sustainable development and more as a necessary and active agent in catalysing such development. We illustrate this with two case studies of public space initiatives in very different settlements. The first case study - in Kibera, Nairobi - demonstrates how a series of co-designed public spaces can address local, site-specific objectives within an informal settlement context, while responding to regional-scale challenges, including the development of stormwater management and infrastructure that improves access to public health, economic opportunities, education, transport, social equity and emergency services. The second case - in the Kalobeyei settlement in Kakuma - represents a paradigm shift in refugee settlement design, demonstrating the critical role of participatory public space design within an integrated planning strategy to promote the socio-economic integration of host and refugee communities. Other benefits include improving the safety of women and children, providing shelter and respite from inclement weather exacerbated by climate change, and improving access to economic opportunities, basic infrastructure and services.

A common feature of the projects is the way in which communities have been substantially involved in all stages of planning, design and construction. By analysing the process, we draw lessons for replication in other neighbourhoods facing the challenges posed by the intersection of climate change, social inequality and rapid urbanisation. Overall, we hope to demonstrate the potential of public spaces developed through localised and participatory design approaches as an accelerator of sustainable development in African cities.

**Keywords:** public space, sustainable development, inclusivity, refugee settlements

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Public spaces are key to inclusion and sustainability in urban Africa. As communities in these cities and around the world look to advance sustainable development goals, public space can, oftentimes, be but one of the elements in a long list of strategies. All too often, public space is considered as an additive, included toward the end if funds or space allow. Public space should be seen less as an outcome of sustainable development and more as an active agent in catalysing such viable and vibrant cities. Using the work the authors have undertaken in designing, planning, and building public spaces in dense and dynamic urban environments in Kenya as case studies, this essay explores the potential role of public spaces in catalysing transformation and integrated development. In the informal settlements of African cities, characterised by normalised socio-spatial inequality due to a dearth of basic infrastructure and public facilities and owing to resource constraint, public spaces are a critical and complementary entry point through which residents can access infrastructure, services, and livelihoods essential for a dignified standard of life. Beyond the traditional benefits of providing spaces for recreation, community gatherings and interactions, as well as promoting improved air quality, our experience demonstrates that introducing new public space can confer a long roster of other benefits to residents of informal settlements, serving as a catalyst for sustainable development.

For too long, public space in the context of sustainable development has tended to be seen from a North American or European lens, in the aesthetic tradition of picturesque gardens and in the patronage model of *grands projects* - civic undertakings that are the result of considerable investments and years, if not decades, of planning and execution. But while that approach may have worked for the large urban parks of the 19th and 20th century in the capital cities of Europe and new cities in North America, that model also created extreme public space inequity, and no longer meets the needs of communities around the world most in need of safe and healthy public space - and least able to afford such spaces. What that European model assumes is a kind of fixed spatial context, where urban areas slowly evolve around formal parks, transportation infrastructure, and accretions of capital. In a global 21st century context, though, where cities rapidly urbanise and change and where infrastructure can be less formal, new models are needed that allow for growth and adaptability to change.

Recognizing the shortcomings of formal urban parks model, it is imperative that actors explore localised models that are appropriate under such circumstances covered above. Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI), a non-profit design and planning firm, delivers public spaces in a more equitable way using processes that under-resourced communities can afford and that deliver change more expeditiously. Since 2007, KDI has had an active footprint in Kibera informal settlement, where, together with a roster of local partners, it has planned, designed, and delivered a growing network of 11 new public spaces along with a range of other public space-related initiatives, including urban flood resilience strategies. Globally, UN-Habitat works with partners to build inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and communities, and capitalises on urbanisation as a key catalyst to achieve these goals. KDI and UN-Habitat have been working together since 2012 on public space development in Kibera and elsewhere in Nairobi and, in 2021 have been able to bring together their programs to work on the assessment and design of public space further afield in the Kalobeyei Settlement.

In this essay, we present two projects that each, in different ways, represent a model for sustainable development initiated and catalysed by public space design. In one, the

Kibera Public Space Project, a series of new public spaces within the context of an informal settlement address both highly localised site-specific goals, including recreation and sanitation, while, in aggregate, they respond to regional-scale challenges, including the development of stormwater management and infrastructure related to public health, economic opportunity, education, transportation, social equity, and emergency services. In the other example, the Kalobeyei integrated settlement through its spatial plan, public spaces are used as a way to improve the immediate day-to-day conditions in a refugee settlement as well as to incorporate a series of measures meant to render the settlement a permanent and sustainable community.

## Kibera

Set in Kibera, an informal settlement in Nairobi, the Kibera Public Space Project (KPSP) is an innovative approach to deliver new public spaces in dense urban environments that do not otherwise have the underlying infrastructural framework for new public spaces. Led by KDI, the project is an ongoing initiative that has created not only needed change in a community long overlooked by (and, in many cases, actively harmed by) traditional design and planning processes, but it has also served as a vehicle to support broader sustainable development goals, including environmental resilience, income-earning opportunities, education and childcare program, communication infrastructure, public health and safety measures, and enhanced transportation.

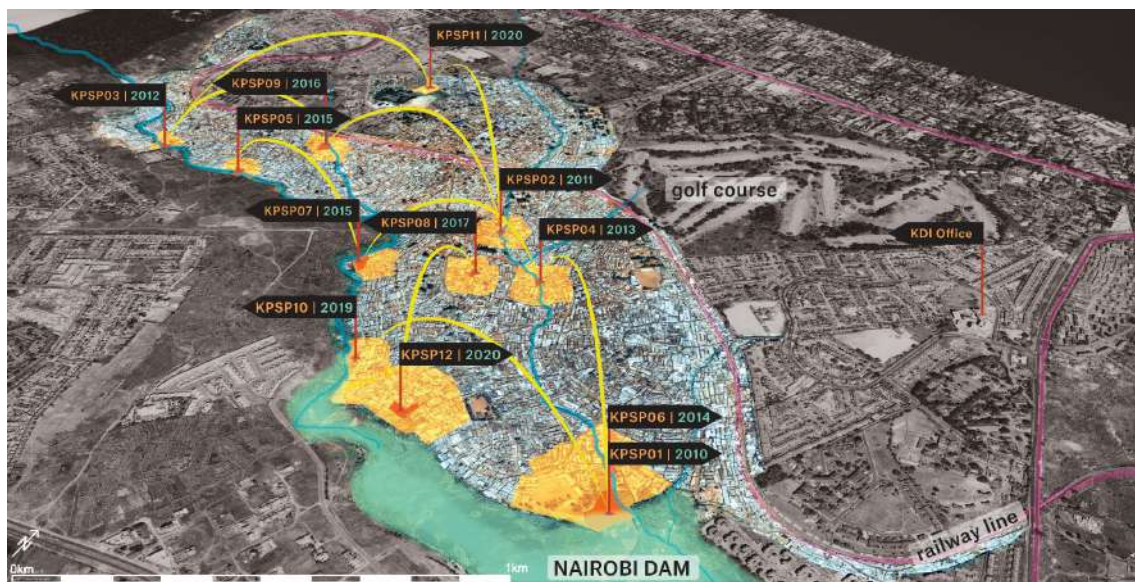


Figure 1: Map of the network of public spaces forming the Kibera Public Space Project.  
Source: Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI), 2022.

There, KDI has developed an incremental strategy, delivering projects at a scale, cost, and delivery schedule that allows them to be realised relatively quickly, allowing these projects to address urgent needs. As a collective network, they create demonstrable regional impact, mitigating flood risks, addressing long-running sanitation and public health-related challenges, introducing income-earning opportunities for local residents, and adding to essential civic services.



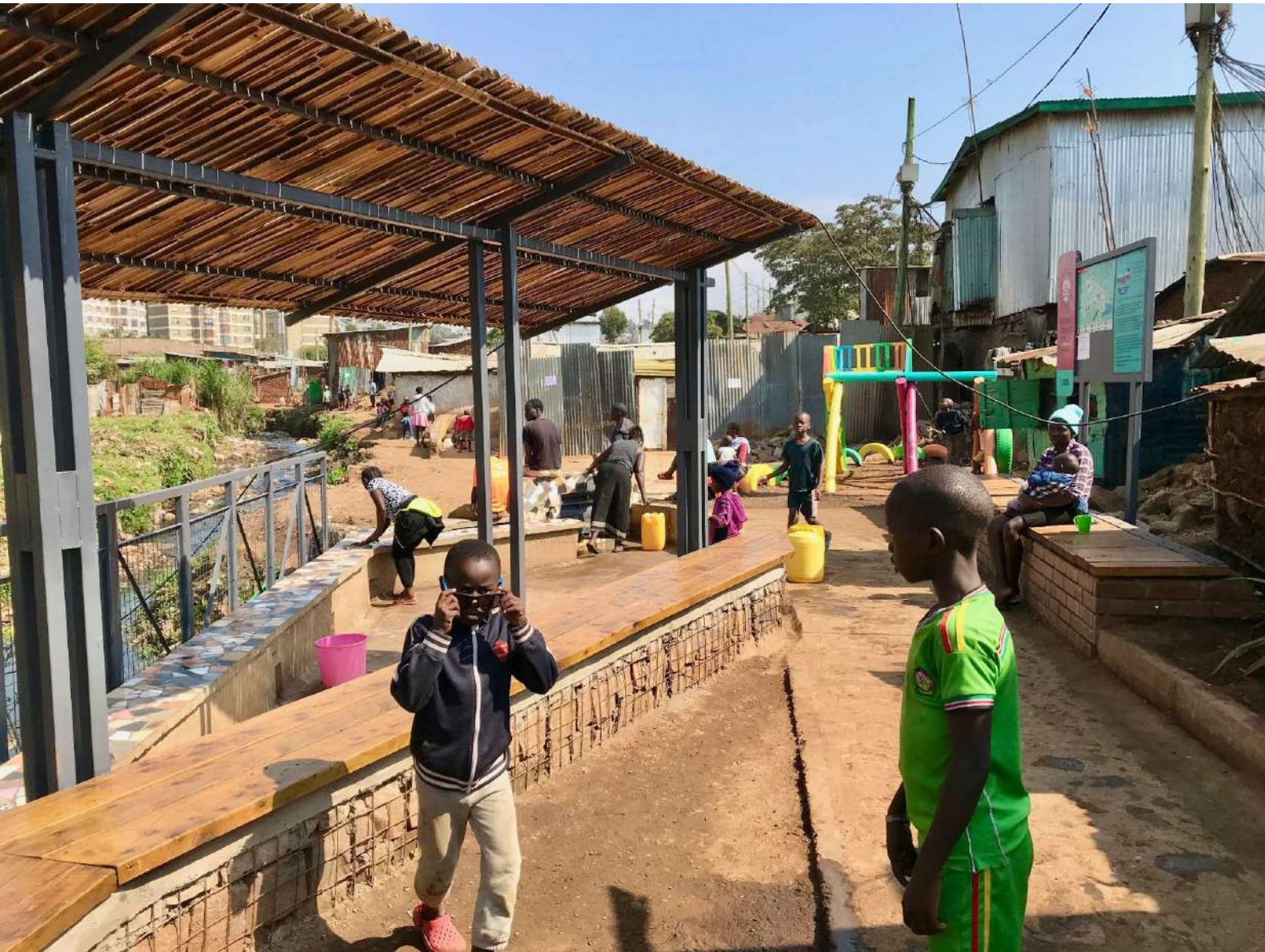


Figure 2: A KPSP public space in Kibera adjacent to the Ngong River providing multilayered benefits to residents including recreational facilities for children, relaxation areas for women, men and youths, flood protection, a community laundry pad and water vending income generating opportunities.

Source: Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI), 2022.

KDI undertakes a participatory approach to design, planning, and construction, giving local residents full agency in decision-making. Structured in this way, the project has been an effective way to meet the most immediate needs of residents. Each new public space is programmed with community groups, meaning that residents identify the types of amenities and services each new public space will include. The outcome of this approach has been the introduction of new schools, sanitation services, health facilities, income-earning opportunities, greenhouses, and flood-resistant pedestrian routes—all integrated into new public spaces.

Collectively, these public spaces have galvanised social bonds throughout the community, serving not only as places for residents to gather collectively, but also as



ongoing projects in which community members have shared stakes. Though they function as such in a year-round basis, during the Covid-19 pandemic, this effect was all the more pronounced as the public spaces in KPSP (and the organised network of residents that administer programs in these spaces) became places to safely gather, vital nodes of public health information, and a network through which to distribute critical health and education supplies.

### **Kalobeyei Settlement**

KDI is now adapting this approach in geographies around the world, including in several states in the USA and in Argentina. The firm is also working on a similar strategy in Kenya's Kalobeyei Settlement in support of UN-Habitat's efforts to bridge humanitarian-development-peace nexus and spur sustainable development in the Kakuma-Kalobeyei area. This settlement, which UN-Habitat has been developing since 2016, under the Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Programme (KISED), is a pioneering model for refugee settlements across the world. Key planning principles that guide Kalobeyei Settlement's sustainable development, including providing opportunities for integration of host and refugee communities, promoting self-reliance, and developing inclusive service delivery are also integrated in the planning and development of public spaces throughout the settlement.



Figure 3: A bird's eye view of Kalobeyei Settlement's Village 2, 2019. Source: UN-Habitat, 2019.

Under the KISED framework, Kalobeyei Settlement has seen continued efforts to improve permanence of infrastructure that both host and refugee communities can come to rely on. This includes micro-grids powered by solar energy, construction of permanent shelters and social infrastructure, and implementation of resilience infrastructure like water dams. UN-Habitat's Advisory Development Plan helps to guide

these developments in a sustainable manner, as opposed to traditional approaches in provision of services and infrastructure in ad hoc ways, which creates a landscape of improvisation and impermanence. In reality, refugee settlements are most often long-term propositions, with refugees taking up residence for many years. The UNHCR estimates that more than 84 million people globally are currently living as refugees, after having been forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence and climate change (2021, p. 1). This figure is on a steep growth curve.



Figure 4: Kalobeyei settlement Spatial Plan. Public spaces were included and allocated land in the plan. The sites for the public spaces are all strategically located along main transportation spines as they are meant to catalyse and sustain the mobility strategy of the entire settlement. Source: UN-Habitat, 2017.

Over the years, the settlement continues to see a protracted situation with increasing influx of refugees and host communities settling in the area. This is further compounded by existing challenges, including conflicts and tensions between host and refugee communities, sustainability of the settlement in the long-term, environmental risks including droughts and flash flooding, and resource constraints. The design of public spaces in such circumstances requires an integrated approach, which saw a collaboration between UN-Habitat and several partners including KDI - building on a collective experience in urban planning and implementation in humanitarian settings, multi-stakeholder engagement including with the communities, and development of inclusive, safe, and healthy spaces for all.

KDI and UN-Habitat are planning a series of three key public spaces, which, like the ones in Kibera, will provide the community with shared open space, but will also deliver a range of other benefits, including income-earning opportunities, water distribution, and much-needed shade. The public spaces, key nodes in Kalobeyei Settlement's three villages, are built upon UN-Habitat's strategy to improve walkability, interconnectivity, and safety by integrating the public space as part of a network of streets, parks, and green corridors. Two of these public spaces have been built, while the third is in design.

KDI's work includes retrofits to improve the first two and develop a design for the third based on the collective experiences from implementing the two public spaces in Kalobeyei Settlement and eleven in Kibera.

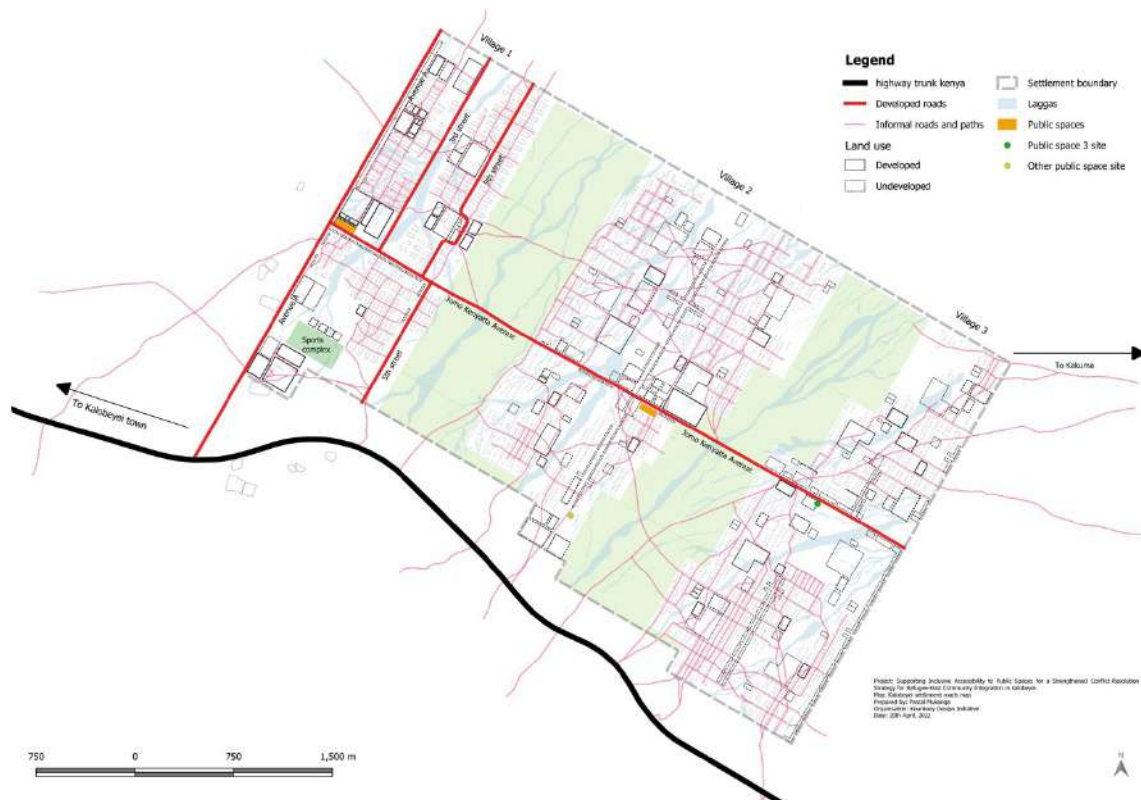


Figure 5: Map of the Kalobeyei settlement showing location of the connected public space sites. From the left is Public Space 1, developed in 2018 and currently being rehabilitated. In the middle is Public Space 2 where construction is ongoing. The third site is where a third public space is proposed and a co-design process for this is ongoing. Source: KDI, 2022.

These public spaces will offer many benefits to communities. Equipped with sports fields and playground equipment, they will offer an environment to engage in healthy physical activity and to assist with childcare. As Covid made clear to communities around the world, public spaces are essential elements of comprehensive public health strategies, and in Kalobeyei, these public spaces will allow residents to safely gather outside. They will also provide a venue in which to vend goods, giving residents much-needed income-earning opportunities. And, as they do in Kibera, they will become critical tools for regional environmental resilience, providing shade from intense sun and becoming integral to water-related infrastructure and water delivery.

Beyond these direct and measurable outcomes, though, the Kalobeyei Public Space Project will also support objectives that are harder to define, but no less important to the overall health and safety of the community living there: that is, the role of public spaces in building social cohesion. Research clearly demonstrates the critical role of social bonds in building a community's resilience and opportunity, and, in this regard, the Kalobeyei public spaces have become essential tools. In refugee settlements, social bonds are of paramount importance. Not only can populations quickly fluctuate, but



they also tend to include blocs of different nationalities, cultures, languages, and religions. Relationships between refugees and host communities can also be challenged, as they were in Kalobeyi.

Given the cultural hybridity of these settlements, public space can serve as a critical tool in establishing and reinforcing social bonds. In 2021, KDI conducted a survey of Kalobeyi residents and UN-Habitat staff based in Kalobeyi, and the social dynamics of the new public spaces were a recurring theme. As one UN-Habitat representative put it, “within neighbourhoods, public spaces can provide a space for refugees from different nationalities and tribes, arriving at different times, to gather, interact, and build relationships.”

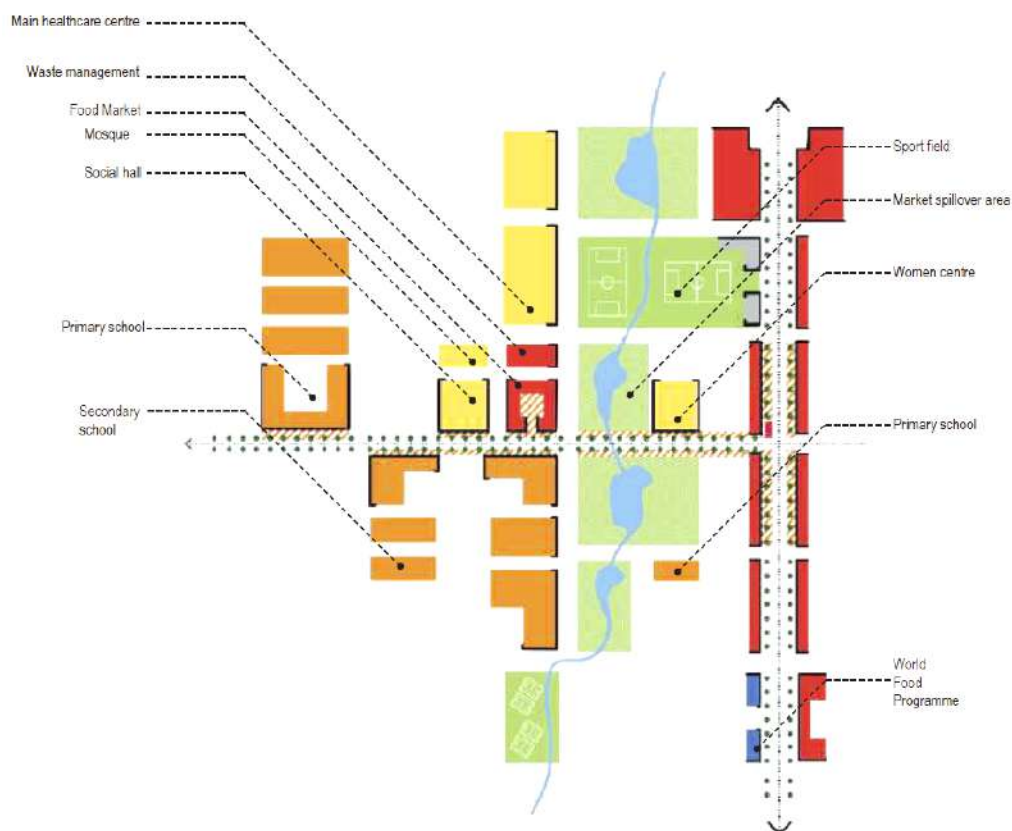


Figure 6: Proposed neighbourhood concept under the Spatial Plan for Kalobeyi settlement with public spaces as key supporting and connective infrastructure. Source: UN-Habitat, 2018.

And as another UN-Habitat representative remarked:

*Neighbourhoods in Kalobeyi are made of communities of not only different countries of origin, but also with a very diverse cultural background. Public spaces not only offer a place to engage in common activities, but also offer a rare chance to these communities to learn various cultural aspects that may be different from their own. This sort of learning entrenches trust that gradually grows into relationships such as inter-community trade, inter-community sports and even inter-community marriages.*

For every public space project undertaken, a participatory design and planning process is applied, creating platforms for people to engage—in substantive and meaningful ways—in the design of their own community. In Kalobeyei, the approach was no different. To ensure these public spaces meet the needs of a diverse community comprising people from multiple national backgrounds and languages, we created a novel participatory process. For each public space in Kalobeyei, 60 residents were engaged in a long-term design and planning collaboration. 20 of those residents were men, 20 were women, and 20 were youth (with 10 girls and 10 boys). These groups also drew from a range of different nationalities and cultures, ensuring each group was adequately represented.

## **Conclusion**

Though each of these ongoing initiatives—the Kibera Public Space Project and the Kalobeyei Settlement Advisory Development Plan—has different environmental, cultural, architectural, and governance-related contexts, both share a common aim: creating inclusive and sustainable communities where residents have equitable access to opportunity and civic services. And, importantly, both share landscape design as a common vehicle to achieve those sustainable development goals.

Because they emerge from cultural engagement and ecological analysis, both designs are fundamentally site specific and tied to their place and time. Yet they both provide a replicable framework to adapt elsewhere, to places that face the diverse challenges introduced by the intersection of climate change, social inequity, and rapid urbanisation. In making public spaces that address immediate environmental needs (stormwater management, relief from heat, air quality) coupled with programs identified by the local community as high priorities, the model is eminently adaptable to other sets of circumstances in other geographies.

What makes these projects successful, though, is the ways in which the communities were substantively involved through all phases of planning, design, and construction. All too often, sustainable development can be conceived from afar by teams of well-intentioned designers, planners, and administrators who approach challenges remotely, through fields of data. With this approach residents can shape the decisions that in turn influence and activate the development of the wider neighbourhood.



Figure 7: Kalobeyi settlement public space with children play area and basketball court in view. Extreme heat due to a semi-arid climate limit use of the public space, with shaded zones of the public space experiencing high usage in the afternoon, especially by young and older men. Source: KDI, 2022.



Figure 8: Kalobeyi settlement public space with children play area and tree shading in view. Swings are tied up in the afternoon to discourage usage by children due to extreme heat which poses significant health and safety risk to children, and adults as well. Source: KDI, 2021.





Figure 9: A workshop within a community pop-up event in Kalobeyei public space to understand public spaces in Kalobeyei, and the challenges the host and refugee communities face regarding access and inclusion in public spaces. The community pop-up event included participation from KDI, UN-Habitat, and the host and refugee communities in Kalobeyei settlement. Source: KDI, 2021.

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## Hoop it up, Loop it back, Repeat. A Decade of Memory and Interconnectivity at a Johannesburg Basketball Court

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### Abstract

An inner-city Johannesburg basketball court has served as the backdrop for a decade of intertwining relationships, creating a home away from home and a secondary family for the members of this community. The fence surrounding the space serves as a threshold through which one enters a separate world, distinct from the city that surrounds. The space is reminiscent of a nostalgic hip hop basketball culture, yet also keenly local and unique. The cyclical, repetitive nature of each day at the court allows for the development of deep personal connections and communal safety within the court space. The cuts and ruptures that occur are built into the nature of the culture in the space and while disruptive, are also what allows for growth and change and deeper intertwining. These concepts are explored through conversations amongst court community members and artworks reflecting on this research. While the pivotal elements that develop this community are the people, the physical infrastructure is also key in allowing this day-to-day consistency to lay the groundwork for such a sense of home and belonging.

**Keywords:** basketball court, interconnectivity, crochet, repetition, Johannesburg

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## **Part I: Step Into a World**

The criss-crossing of the chain link fence, cold metal, bent yet rigid, creating a pattern, a mesh that triggers nostalgic memories: for some of a far-off place, for others of realities in their youth. It surrounds the court, reaching up over six metres and with just one opening to enter the space. And once you pass through, you've entered a new world. This new world is "the court." Back in the day, when we went to the full court near Park Station from time to time, and would take taxis up to play at Zoo Lake on the weekends, we called it the half court. But generally speaking, it's the court. Where to find someone? The court. When to talk about something? The court. How to settle a disagreement? The court. The ball never lies.

Formally speaking, it is the basketball court at Ernest Oppenheimer Park, a public space in the Johannesburg inner city. It was added as part of the redevelopment of the park in 2010 by the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) alongside a new linear outdoor market behind the old post office.

For many of us, myself included, the court has become a way to understand the larger world and ourselves. The people we connect with through this place become core and consistent interactions in the midst of the rest of our lives (for me, my most consistent over the past decade). The court is the backdrop to a chosen family full of memories and history.

*Author: I think I wanna just start by saying, or asking, like, tell me about the court?*

*Mawere: I would say it's an amazing place, it's a place where you, say you're stressed, and you get to the court, and you like, you don't think of anything else, you just think of basketball. It's like a home.*

*Mike: It's a de-stress area.*

*Mawere: It's like a second home. A home away from home. You know, like you have another family there, besides your biological family. That's how I would describe the court. So it's something, I would say home away from home.*

*Mike: To me it's like something I can't live without. You know, because you know at some point you get to that time when you're like, you're at work and you just think, ay, here I'm done, I gotta go. It's about time.*

*Mawere: It's about time.*

*Mike: It's five o'clock.*

*Mawere: It's five o'clock.*

*Mike: When it gets to three o'clock, you'll be stressed you'll be like you want to go to the court. Whether you're working or you're doing what, you want to go to the court, because you-*

*Mawere: If you don't for a day-*



*Mike: For a day yeah, you feel like something's missing.*

*Conversation amongst Author, Mike, Mawere and Chrispen  
19 September 2020, at Author's flat in Johannesburg  
(Chawa, Chawa and Mawere, 2020)*

The court exists as a physical space: a frame in which there is tangible infrastructure built up to indicate the kind of activity meant to take place there. In a way, that makes the space sacred to those of us who play basketball, who seek out such spaces which are limited in Johannesburg.<sup>1</sup>



Figure 1. The fence from within the court, pick-up game, photograph from Author's collection, 2012.

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<sup>1</sup> Basketball is not a prominent sport in South Africa, and it can be challenging to find public courts at which to play.



*Hoop it up, Loop it back, Repeat*

But this research is not focused on the physical space, rather it is interested in the energy and relationships flowing amongst the people within the space. This energy and the links and connections that have been built are influenced by not only the space, but also the game and the culture of basketball. The hoop, the benches, the rules, the music, the sun, the ball, the shoes, the lighting, the lines, the water, the weed, the sweat, the beers: each element present in the space affects how we relate to one another and what grows and builds out of this separate world that we have made for ourselves.

*Author: And home - you still think of Joburg as home?*

*Gunz: Yes. Especially the basketball court... that's home to me because a lot of things happened there. Family, got to know other people's cultures and stuff like that, so to me, yeah it's home.*

*Author: When you say family what do you mean?*

*Gunz: My family, I got to know people from, like you, the guys from Congo, from all parts of the world. Yeah I didn't, I only knew my culture so I got to know a lot of different cultures and how people are. Yeah, so it was comfortable, yeah.*

*Conversation between Author and Gunz*

*6 September 2020, telephonically between Johannesburg and Amsterdam  
(Mhlanga, 2020)*

At this particular court, most people who play or are a part of our community come from outside of Johannesburg. I arrived from the United States, others had immigrated from other African countries including Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Tanzania, as well as South Africans from other provinces, townships and suburbs. This commonality of migrancy is perhaps part of what has made many of us closer than just passing acquaintances - each of us detached from a former belonging and seeking a new sense of home. In Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, he discusses the idea of migration as a way to form bonds: "The 'journey' between times, statuses and places as a meaning-creating experience" (Anderson, 2016, p. 53). I first arrived at the court in 2011, the year following its construction. Now, 2022, over a decade later, there have been various iterations of the court "family" with people coming and going, and a handful of us still around from the start.

*Author: And what- do you remember like, what made you come actually inside and sit down?*

*Skylah: The people! It's the people, the basketball players here are so welcoming, they're so loving. They're just, they make you feel at home away from home, you know? Yeah, they understand, like, family values and stuff. They make you feel comfortable, you know?*

*Author: Yeah.*

*Conversation between Author and Skylah*  
12 January 2022, at the court in Johannesburg  
(Peterson, 2022)

Our interactions and flows echo a story by Italo Calvino called “Trading Cities” in which he describes a nomadic society: “In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city’s life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or grey or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency” (2012, p. 123). Such dynamics of connection and bonds (made visible by Calvino’s invention of Ersilia) are what root the people at the court in something much more complex than the space or the sport of basketball. The relationships we experience include those of friendships, mentorships, business collaborations, romantic relationships and so much more. Calvino continues the story: “When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain” (2012, p. 123). The court may stay in its same physical space, but the relationships that hold it together have been broken down and built back up many times over the past decade - perhaps due to these invisible “strings” becoming too dense for us to pass through and build upon. This magical “separate world” set apart from the rest of the city by a chain link threshold at times is not so magical and falls back into an unremarkable space that is no longer so far apart and distinct from the rest of the city. As a visual artist, my research and practice reflect upon these remnants and memories: the elements that may be unknown to those within the space now, yet that still serve as the foundations for the court to come. Calvino ends the story: “Thus, when traveling in the territory of Ersilia, you come upon the ruins of the abandoned cities, without the walls which do not last, without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spider-webs of intricate relationships seeking a form” (2012, p. 123). These “spiderwebs” of relationships still exist in the court space and they rebuild and retwine with new people - people who are not even aware of the walls that have not lasted. Sara Ahmed and Anne-Marie Fortier challenge Anderson’s theories on the development of communities in *Re-imagining Communities* which seeks to be “a critical intervention into our understandings of community, conceived not as a resolution, nor as a seamless, conflict-free zone shaped along the familial models of intimacy and love” (2003, p. 257). While much of my memories of the court include a strong sense of family and strength, ultimately these bonds are unresolved, continually breaking down and building up. It is all of us collectively striving to attain the idea of community, and often falling short, but still trying.

In this research, “we” refers to this group of people who have played at the court over the past decade, myself included. Individuals within this group, to varying degrees, have become a family to me<sup>2</sup>. We have come and gone over the years, some play more often than others, some are within smaller circles of close friends, some only spent time at the court for a year or two and some have been there all along. This family, as in all families, has complex dynamics and occasionally toxic relationships. There are layers of

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<sup>2</sup> The individuals that make up this group are each important persons within the whole “we.” Due to challenges with immigration, justice systems and other complex social dynamics, many individuals will remain anonymous and not described in detail unless I have gained explicit consent to include their names in this research.

societal norms and expectations as well as events that cause upheaval and chaos. There is also love and comradery, a sense of mutual understanding and common ground and ultimately a safety net (though at times weak or withheld). I view myself within the court in this way, part of a dysfunctional, loving family. This family at the court has shaped my understanding of my identity and self-expression as well as my perception of the society that surrounds me.

As a member of the court community, my research took the form of casual conversations with court community members, music that we associate with the court's basketball culture and my artistic interpretations of these interpersonal dynamics and the court infrastructure that engenders them. The routine and ritual of basketball (the game, space and culture) has allowed me and others to find meaningful connections, becoming "family" to one another.

*Author: That feeling of like, secure, like you just said, feeling secure, feeling safe, feeling comfortable. Why do you think the court is like that? Because everyone says that, everyone says that as soon as you walk through that chain link fence you feel like you're somewhere different.*

*Gunz: Yeah, I think it's 'cause people are happy there. You can see everyone there, the way they will welcome you, yeah, everyone gets comfortable. Plus it's a beautiful place, it's a beautiful place with beautiful people. We know Joburg, it's not, uh, very comfortable, but that court takes everything away. You just see Joburg as heaven when you're at the court because there's nothing to be scared of. People just do their thing - play basketball, they enjoy, get to know one another and stuff, it takes a lot of pressure off people doing things, so yeah people get comfortable coming to the court because they feel relieved, they have something to do.*

*Conversation between Author and Gunz  
6 September 2020, telephonically between Johannesburg and Amsterdam  
(Mhlanga, 2020)*

In my artistic work, crochet, linking and looping are suspended from hoops in a gallery space, evoking the intertwining, soft nature of our relationships. "Step Into a World" is a piece that acts as a threshold upon entering the gallery space, mimicking the fence and also reminiscent of a net. Crochet and embroidery throughout the spaces of the piece paint the memory and history of interlocking and divergence. The piece is meant to confront the viewer, and to move past it and enter the space is like choosing to pass through the opening in the fence at the court and step into a new world.

To further explore this place that exists as the backdrop to this investigation, one must recognize the degree to which a "separate world" has been entered. Using hip hop music that we would play at the court, one can consider KRS-One's "Step Into a World (Rapture's Delight)," which opens with a chilling, high-pitched sound, setting the tone for stepping into a new world. It is significant to understand what that transition means in a cultural context - stepping into a fenced-in court.



Figure 2 (previous page, 3 (this page). Step Into a World, artwork by Author, photographs by Sizakele Angel Khumalo, 2022.

Rap and hip-hop music<sup>3</sup> run parallel to the culture of basketball, particularly in its American-centric context. The music video for the track “Rapture’s Delight” includes scenes of KRS-One outside of a chain-link fence. At this court, rap and hip hop take centre stage. When I asked friends from the court what tracks reminded them of the court, Ante Up by M.O.P., Worst Comes to Worst by Dilated Peoples, Play No Games by Rick Ross and many more in the 90s-00s American hip hop genre came up. These tracks often speak to community and crew, locale.

This world of basketball and hip-hop culture may be a consistent undertone at public courts around the world, but what lies through the chain link, past a threshold, partially obscured until you are inside, is something specific to its own space and context. The community there is “repped” and defended like a family. At our court, one will see the common elements of basketball shoes, backpacks and jackets strewn across the seating, Coca-Cola and American hip hop music. Look closer and the elements of amakipkip and Black Label, the occasional interspersing of amapiano, dancehall or rumba, and language switching from English to seTswana to Lingala to Shona every few minutes create a court space that is both familiar and distinct.



Figure 4. Court community members, photograph from Author’s collection, 2020.

Tricia Rose’s *Black Noise* elaborates on this idea of the crew or locale as a visualisation of hip hop style that serves to “affirm rap’s primary thematic concerns: identity and location... rap video themes have repeatedly converged around the depiction of the

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<sup>3</sup> Rap and hip hop at times are seen as the same genre, at other times separate. Rap refers more to the lyrical spoken element of hip hop music and hip hop as a term can refer to the larger cultural context including music, rap, dancing, graffiti, fashion, etc.



local neighbourhood and the local posse, crew or support system. Nothing is more central to rap's music video narratives than situating the rapper in his or her milieu and among one's crew or posse" (1994, pp. 9-10). In a similar way, most depictions of the court include shots of the collective. Rose continues, "The hood is not a generic designation; videos... often capture the regional specificity of spatial, ethnic, temperate, and psychological facts of black marginality" (1994, pp. 10-11). While these scenes at many courts or many music videos may seem similar, they are also keenly unique.

*Author: You've mentioned a few times the fence, the chain link fence. It came up in a few different things that you said. Um, I wanted to know like why, why is that visual or that like component of the space so significant to you?*

*Pule: Uh, to be honest, I think most of it has to get something to do with Hollywood. How blacktop basketball was, you know the old music videos, 90s hip hop, there was always a guy behind the fence you know, holding it, and sort of rapping through the fence kind of thing. Which is a, I think, you know in hindsight, I think some weird symbolism to being jailed, you know what I mean, behind bars kind of thing. And uh, a lot of the rappers would use it in the music videos in New York. So you have, the camera is on the outside, looking through the fence. And there's the rapper on the fence and behind the rapper a couple of guys are playing basketball, you know what I mean? So that's where the fantasy element comes in. And at least from the location, what makes the location magical is that it can, it taps into your nostalgia, you know? And then if I'm to take it a step further, it's- it could be so many things. For example, Junior4, I don't know what the hell he's up to over there, but he came into this very specifically perimetered area, in the fence, he was a different person, I'm sure. I could see this guy, this guy is trouble man, but he was somewhat calm there, do you know what I mean?*

*Author: Yeah.*

*Pule: He was somewhat calm there, it was a safe little square block where everybody was safe and everybody was chilled, you know what I mean? And maybe the fence was representative of that. Maybe the fence was representative of the safe space and a world out there which is big and bad for some, which is neutral for some, which is pretty good for some. You know, you don't know what the people are going through. It was an area where, you know it was like being in a zoo, we are the zoo animals, and people from the outside are looking in and seeing how we behave and they can literally see the community of these animals who choose to go into this, into the zoo, into that space because it's a safe space for them. You know?*

*Conversation between Author and Pule  
30 August 2020, telephonically between Johannesburg and Frankfurt  
(Mathebula, 2020)*

The fantasization of such an environment or scene draws spectators, some pass through the threshold to observe from within, others passing by stop and look through from the

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<sup>4</sup> Not the individual's real name

outside. One memory at the court highlights this concept of a separate world and also speaks to the race and class divide existing in Johannesburg.

*Author: Do you remember, there was one time we were playing, I don't know if you were there and I don't know if I've already asked you about this. But there was like a group of tourists, mostly white people, on some like walking tour, they were walking by and they started taking pictures, so it did very much feel like the zoo thing and someone, I think it was Mawere or Gunz, one of the two or both of them, they went and got their phones and started taking pictures of the people outside. Were you there?*

*Pule: I was there, yeah, I was there.*

*Author: I felt like that was a very like, I don't know, important moment or just like a way of seeing things.*

*Pule: Yeah, for sure, I uh, for me, I can, if, you know, I don't know what was going on through their minds, but um if I was walking through New York somewhere and I saw guys playing basketball, you know, behind a fence, I would feel sort of a moment of magic just like, man I saw this on TV and now it's here in real life, but that would be my reasoning, I don't know what the hell their reasoning was. If it was the zoo thing, if it was 'oh cute little black kids playing ball,' I don't know, who knows. But I would take it a step further and want to go join those guys. Which I don't think those cats wanted to do, they were just being, you know, typical sort of, you know tourists, you know, again, outsiders coming in to take the photo and then bounce. But I remember that, I remember. I don't remember who took the photos, but I remember, there was like yeah, a big group of them, like 9 of them, yeah, they entered from what's that street, from Joubert, yeah from Joubert they were walking across towards Marshalltown side. Um, yeah, but I mean, something must have caught their eye, something must have interested them, that would be, that would be what I would want to find from those cats, why exactly did you find that interesting, because I'm sure wherever you're from, I'm sure you see people playing basketball all the time, I'm sure you don't take pictures of them. What about this space is so different that you want to take pictures of people playing basketball?*

*Author: And through a fence, like not even coming in to take the pictures inside, why do you want to be outside the fence?*

*Pule: Yeah exactly, so you see that fence plays a big part, plays a big role, plays a big role. Um and I don't see it as a negative thing. I don't see the role it plays as a negative thing, but I guess it's up to the individual to sort of translate the fence however they see it.*

*Author: Definitely.*

*Conversation between Author and Pule  
30 August 2020, telephonically between Johannesburg and Frankfurt  
(Mathebula, 2020)*

Judith Butler touches on this concept of reframing a context in her text *Precarious Life, Grievable Life* before entering a more nuanced discussion around frames of war. She states, "the frame tends to function, even in minimalist form, as an editorial embellishment of the image, if not a commentary on the history of the frame itself... but as we know from Trinh Minh-ha, it is possible to "frame the frame" or, indeed, the "framer," which involves exposing the ruse that produces the effect of individual guilt...to call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn... something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things" (Butler 2010, pp. 7-8, my emphasis). In this story, the frame is physically the fence surrounding the court, but also a sense of "us and them" regarding city-dwellers and outsiders, poor and wealthy, black and white. The action of turning the camera back to the tourists was a deliberate action to "call the frame into question" and expose the nuances of the context and situation. The threshold changed its function in this moment, although still fully transparent, it now altered the way in which social groups on either side were perceived. Turning the camera back was a form of expressing agency and understanding the role of the threshold as not a cage nor a predetermined frame. The scene the tourists were thought to be capturing did not conform to their expectations and contained a world that caused a rupture in their understanding of the space.

My research and practice on this topic intend to continue to call the frame into question and to look at the court from my viewpoint as a member of the family - as a network of intertwining complex relationships that serve as the foundation for genuine connection and support. Both viewing the court through the frame or threshold that surrounds it and also moving past that threshold and into the deeper connections. As a member of the court community, my orientation to the court is from within the space, past the threshold. This interpretation is meant first and foremost to speak to my court community - to reflect my appreciation for the support and family structure that I have gained through this group of individuals. Consequently, the work also speaks to other viewers: colleagues from institutions that create and maintain urban infrastructure, artists who interpret these worlds and other community members who are not part of the court family. To these individuals who normally view the court from outside of the threshold, the work aims to redirect the discussion around public space towards a more personal and nuanced view of who has access - not to the physical space itself, but to environments in which one can express oneself and develop one's identity and connections. I argue that by becoming aware of these thresholds, intangible webs and safety nets that are formed amongst people in public spaces, then those with power over the development of such spaces<sup>5</sup> can better allow groups and by default, individuals to develop and thrive.

## **Part 2: Day-to-Day Repetition**

*Author: Yeah, ok um, do you have any specific memories of a moment when you were at the court and you felt very much at home?*

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<sup>5</sup> The development I refer to includes public physical infrastructure, various forms of community accountability and adjustments to formal policing, cleaning and maintenance etc.

*Hoop it up, Loop it back, Repeat*

*Skylah: Every single day. Every single day. This is like, no matter where I am, I could be coming back from PTA around 5, I will drop my bags and I will run here. I could be coming from school, I could be coming from a game, after a match from Randburg I run I come back here, or from practice. I make sure that I don't go home before passing by here first. Because this is where I get most of my peace.*

*Conversation between Author and Skylah  
12 January 2022, at the court in Johannesburg  
(Peterson, 2022)*

A steady rhythm - interrupted yet consistent - like the rest of the city. The squeak of shoes on the court surface, trash talking and fear hidden beneath boastful voices. Smiles, high-fives, fist bumps. Day in and day out. Pushing and getting pushed back. The past decade has laid the repetitive, consistent groundwork and locale for our court family - those of us who are consistently present in that space. On any given day, showing up at the court means familiarity: you are able to count on the game - it is structured, there are cheers and responses. Sound, rhythm and repetition at the court (the way we greet each other, the places we sit, the bouncing of the ball, our interactions) is what defines the atmosphere and makes it a home. The music prevalent in the space is hip hop and rap, predominately American but also local: genres that feature repetitive beats to reinforce the rhythmic tone of the space. The court's cyclical flow and foundation serves as an underpinning to the other complexities, relationships and disruptions that may occur. The music and repetitive sound present at the court is expounded by Tricia Rose's chapter "Soul Sonic Forces" in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* with 1) the nature of rhythm and repetition, particularly in African and Afrodiasporic worldviews, 2) the cut, or the spaces in between and 3) the return to foundational repetition after the cut. Such rhythm and patterns are visually present at the court as well: the chain on the hoop, the holes in the bins, the chain link fence. The relational dynamics can also be metaphorized as repetitive chains, loops, weaving and knotting.



Figure 5-6-7. Pattern and repetition at the court, photographs by Author, 2021.

Community is reinforced by such visual and auditory elements within a space. Benedict Anderson notes this when describing how nations, as imagined communities, transitioned at the start of the 20th century, away from being religious and dynastic and towards being intellectualised. He articulates that “we are faced with a world in which the figuring of imagined reality was overwhelmingly visual and aural” (Anderson, 2016, pp. 22-23). The full cultural expression of an environment brings together the individuals to see it as a shared experience, a unique identity in which bonds can be built. These visual and aural examples of pattern and repetition at the court: the music present, the quotidian proceeding of events and the visual elements - each include the notion of the spaces in between. Between the consistencies there are ruptures and breaks.

While the consistent rhythm and flow of the court, chains and music are certain, just as certain are the gaps and holes, the suspension of time and the in-betweens: a chat with “the high table,” a pause to the game because my dog ran away to chase a cat, a prolonged argument over whether a player stepped outside or not. These moments of transparency and break are where I believe the root of the interconnectivity amongst individuals at the court has developed. This is where memories take hold and build together to create a sense of community.

*Author: Um, I wanted to ask you a little bit about music, because I mean clearly that's like your thing. But I don't remember, aside from Hoop Mania, any time where you actually like, brought music and played it at the court. Is that true? Or am I remembering incorrectly?*

*Pule: Yeah, no, this is totally true. Because you know I was, it's, I was broke back then, like now I have one of these JBL boombox speakers, that when I go to the court here, I just take my thing, the boombox speaker and then I can connect bluetooth from my phone and play. But I did not have those resources back then, do you know what I mean? I didn't have resources back then. If there was ever a listening session, um, the guys would come back to my crib, and uh we would have a listening session. It happened a few times with Gunz and a few cats. I was just playing them some hip hop stuff because they were just hungry for some rap music. But at the court, not really, nobody had a bluetooth speaker, nobody, it just wasn't. I think, yeah, woah woah woah, I think there were a couple of times where, um, I think it was a Saturday, yeah, and I brought an extension cord, yeah, this did happen a few times, Author. I took the, there's the one speaker, the Titan, I took it down to the court, with the extension cord and we connected it, because you could plug your phone with the cable. That did happen a few times.*

*Author: Yeah, but not often, I wasn't like a, I feel like there wasn't, especially back then, I think now because you know, bluetooth speakers now have gotten cheap, and people actually have them, there's music at the court a lot more often.*

*Pule: Ok.*

*Author: But back then it wasn't. But I think that there was still like, it was like there was music even though there wasn't, do you know what I mean? And I don't know why, I don't know, I don't know if you have any insight into that?*



*Hoop it up, Loop it back, Repeat*

*Pule: Yeah, I see, you remember there being music but you don't remember a speaker there, yeah this is true. I think maybe cats were playing it on their phone? But there was just, that's what it is, basketball is music, um, you know you will rap or sing to each other, do you know what I mean, it's, there's music in the movement, you know what I mean, um I don't know but I know what you mean, I know what you mean.*

*Conversation between Author and Pule*

*30 August 2020, telephonically between Johannesburg and Frankfurt  
(Mathebula, 2020)*

In discussing memory and collective experience in *Materials, Memories and Metaphors*, Solveigh Goett notes, “The knowledge of memory is not a collection of empirical facts, but arises in the weaving together of felt and imagined experience” (2015, p. 125). Daily routine at the court: shooting around evolving into a game of twenty-one, then choosing teams to play 3 on 3 in which games are played to 7 points, then the winning team takes on the next team outside until there are no more teams. Then things dissolve into 1 on 1 or shooting around until it is decided to leave and lock up<sup>6</sup>. These rhythms create a woven shared felt and imagined experience, the foundation for a deeply intertwined community.

### **Responses to the Inevitability of Repetition**

Repetition in day-to-day life, imagery and music is not a unique phenomenon. Yet the ways in which different cultures and communities react to its existence is distinct. Referring to repetition in music, Rose in *Black Noise* articulates, “Unlike the complexity of Western classical music, which is primarily represented in its melodic and harmonic structures, the complexity of rap music, like many Afrodiasporic music, is in the rhythmic and percussive density and organization” (1994, p. 65). In *Music, Society, Education*, Christopher Small suggests that “the repetitions of African music have a function in time which is the reverse of (Western classical) music - to dissolve the past and the future into one eternal present, in which the passing of time is no longer noticed” (1977, pp. 54-55). The comfort and repetition I always felt in spaces meant for sport parallels the rhythm of this music. The court ecosystem has become an “eternal present.” As a member of this court community now for over a decade, when reminded of the year we started and the year we are in now, I am continually in awe of just how much time has passed.

In my crochet work, each stitch creates a monotonous looping of material that seems to be getting nowhere. As I continue though, the shape, pattern and structure develop and become something substantial. This method can be used to make a blanket or a bag, a functional material of use to someone, just as the repetition in the court space can create a community that could support an individual as they navigate their life in Joburg.

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<sup>6</sup> The locking up comes and goes depending on our relationship with the CID (City Improvement District) management - at times we are kicked out at a predetermined locking time.



Figure 8. Unravel, artwork by Author, photograph by Sizakele Angel Khumalo, 2022.

Independently of function, these movements of repetition can create something that is simply beautiful to observe or to experience - an artwork born out of monotony and consistency, resulting in something much more complex when it has reached its full form. I have found that the interweaving of the thread or material I use parallels the ways that individuals at the court interrelate with one another.

I hand crocheted and wove together the pieces in this body of work about the court. I experimented and unravelled and re-stitched repetitively until each element expressed the concepts I intended to convey. In “Unravel,” I was able to quickly hand crochet a series of looping patterns of various types of yarn and linking together chain. Having developed a technique of working with the yarn over time, creating a piece that reflected this technique and repetition ultimately came together quickly, but entirely by hand. I feel that it mimicked the muscle memory involved in practising a sport so much that when it comes to a critical moment in competition, the ability to execute comes swiftly and naturally. “Unravel” starts from a basketball hoop mounted on the wall and cascades and drapes throughout the space, the instructions connected to this piece are for the viewer to pull on the loose end of the string, demonstrating how the repetition and time involved can be so quickly and easily undone. Creating, destroying, creating again is all part of the process, not only of these artworks, but of the court community itself.

Over time, individuals present in the space change, yet the nature of the interactions is still there, an amorphous community that philosopher and physicist Karen Barad might identify as an example of “intra-action.” She describes intra-action as the idea that “‘Individuals’ only exist within phenomena (particular materialized/materializing relation) in their ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring” (Barad, 2012, p. 77). Barad studied amoeba colonies as part of her research in developing this concept that calls into

question the binary between group and individual. Perhaps the nature of the sport and the routine of the court space has allowed for a similar phenomenon amongst our court community, one in which our interconnectivity is in fact what allows each of us to “exist” in a relational sense. Individuals may come and go in this space, as many have over the past decade, yet the nature of the communal remains.

One of the original court community members came to the court in 2020 after a while away and joined the (relatively new) WhatsApp group, and despite the many new names and faces, found that same sense of home.

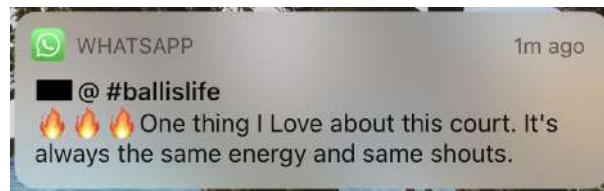


Figure 9. Whatsapp group text: 9 April 2021, Screenshot by Author

### The Cut

In my first few months exploring the concept for this research and practice, I wrote a comment in my notes: “How do you make any claim when the ground of your context is the certainty of uncertainty?” Through my research and practice, I am finding that the answer is in the quotidian, the repetition, the cyclical nature of the court and its culture. That foundational netting allows for a type of peace and stability amidst a consistently unstable reality. In his observations on the Johannesburg inner city, urbanist and sociologist AbdouMaliq Simone explains that “a certain stability to public spaces and streets is fostered by the sense that anything could happen to anyone” (2008, p. 80). The familiarity of this feeling of inevitable spontaneity in our surrounding environment echos the knowledge that for something to be repeated, a break must occur before the repeat, a break in which anything can happen.

*The moments in between the game, sitting outside: The question from Shady - ‘do you have airtime?’ The ‘who’s got next?’ The debates and wannabe bribes, the music and the drinks. The wanting to play when you’re injured. The seeing of an old friend known as “Ice Cream” after 5 years. The iTunes vs Spotify vs USB debate. The disappointed shouts when someone makes a good move but misses.*

*Note written on my phone while at the court 2021*

These are the spaces in between - in musical terms, the beat breaks - that take place outside of the court. This is where the magic happens and where the strength of the chains and connections that have been built over a decade are put to the test. Will they help us catch each other when we fall? Will they fail or take a pause? The chains can rust - these beat breaks can be filled with disappearances, betrayals and major shifts. Moving through these spaces in between can hype you up or tear you down.



Figure 10-11. The Cut, artwork by Author, photographs by Sizakele Angel Khumalo, 2022.

These gaps are present in crochet, referred to as “space” in which a stitch can be looped into or around or skipped altogether. Different stitches and patterns can create larger or smaller gaps in between and when developing the pieces for this body of work, I at times made larger gaps or smaller gaps intentionally to evoke transparency or tight-knittedness. At times I attempted to visually mimic the spaces in between that are present in the court environment: the chain link or the net. Other times I explored concepts of pattern or style, tencillity or slackness. The type of repetition and stitch and pattern I choose to make for each element is what allows any of these concepts to emerge from the material.

Musically, these spaces are known as the ‘cut’, further explained by James Snead in *On Repetition in Black Culture*: “If there is a goal.... It is always deferred; it continually ‘cuts’ back to the start, in the musical meaning of a ‘cut’ as an abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break... Black culture, in the ‘cut,’ ‘builds’ accidents into its coverage, almost as if to control their unpredictability” (1981, p. 150). At the court, this day-to-day way in which the people in the space connect to each other is what creates that consistent rhythm: the game, the conversations, the ball bouncing. The “cut” comes at the start of a new game, the unintended foul, the way that the beer bottles we enjoy on weekends can one day be broken and used as weapons.

The cut is also a phrase used in Barad’s description of intra-action. She uses the term “cuts” to refer to the creation of dichotomies and that the nature of intra-action erases this binary. She explains that, “differences are made, not found, and that dichotomies derive from particular cuts,” but that in her concept of intra-action, matter is entangling

and constantly becoming, enacting what she calls an agential cut, which “cross-cuts not only the notion of ‘itself’ but even the notion of the cut itself” (Barad, 2012, pp. 79-80). Perhaps the cut is not so much about illustrating the gaps, differences and binaries, but rather a space in which the collective dynamics play out and then realign. A Tribe Called Quest’s 1990 track *Youthful Expression* includes an outro that states: “With a rhythmic instinction to be able to travel beyond existing forces of life. Basically, that’s tribal and if you wanna get the rhythm, then you have to join a tribe.” (1990). The collective or the tribe is what roots one in a rhythm that allows for shifts and changes and second chances. Something core to our court experience.

### **Return to Rhythm**

After a disruptive event, people involved may stay away from the court. There is a shift, but there’s also an unspoken consciousness that the rhythm of the court allows for the return of any of its member. The intra-action possibly takes over and allows for another chance. Snead explains this as a key element in black culture: “In black culture, the thing (the ritual, the dance, the beat) is there for you to pick up when you come back to get it” (1981, p. 150). The foundational repetition is what allows for a return after the cut. At the court, this is what creates a sense of equanimity and home.

The cut and the return to repetition may seem like insignificant components of a hip hop track or of a community or culture, but as Rose emphasises, “These features are not merely stylistic effects, they are aural manifestations of philosophical approaches to social environments” (1994, p. 67). The inherent nature of being allowed to return, allowed to try again, to make mistakes in the beat breaks and attempt crazy things is what enables continual growth and movement - like the intra-actions of an amoeba colony. This is inherent to sport as well, learning a new play or basketball move requires patience and practice and continual failure until it clicks and works out. Our day-to-day at the court includes this, and continual striving to improve and win.

Returning to the visuals and patterns at the court, the chain of the hoop netting and the intertwining of the fence literally surround and centre the space. Rose also comments on such looping: “Rap music relied on the loop, on the circularity of rhythm and on the “cut” or the “break beat” that systematically ruptures equilibrium. Yet, in rap, the “break beat” itself is looped - repositioned as repetition, as equilibrium inside the rupture” (1994, p. 70). One can take that same thread that creates the structure to create the break and then to revisit a structure again.

This collective thread can be used to describe how the past decade at this court has included ebbs and flows in the way the space is used. These have directly connected to the people and nature of their social dynamics with one another. While the physical infrastructure bears influence on this, it must be argued that the physical is a byproduct of the social. The break-down in interpersonal allows for gaps in maintenance and repair of the physical, creating a cycle in which the key elements are the people, and the physical state is just a sign or representation of how those relationships play out.





Figure 12. Court community members before the renovations, photograph by Author, 2019.

This situation echoes AbdouMaliq Simone’s idea of “people as infrastructure” which he explains as “This process of conjunction, which is capable of generating social compositions across a range of singular capacities and needs (both enacted and virtual) and which attempts to derive maximal outcomes from a minimal set of elements, is what I call people as infrastructure” (2008, p. 71). At the court, there was a period of deterioration from 2016-2019 where the court physically fell apart, but also core members of the community faded away. Gunz moved to Europe, I moved to the USA for nine out of twelve months of the year, Denzel went to play professional basketball in Seychelles and others began going to other courts. By 2019 I had been back for a year and was able to get buy-in from the JDA to resurface the court and I oversaw the project. This was a rebirth in the space not only of the physical, but of the relational. People who hadn’t seen each other in years came back for a community meeting, people spent time at the court again before the renovation began. We weren’t even playing, the court was in too poor of a state for competitive play, but it was the reignition of the rhythm that once was.

The interest in keeping the court going, ensuring that it is usable and playable exists amongst each of us. Unfortunately, things can fall apart to a point of being unable to be repaired by those consistently in the space. We use the resources that are readily available to us to repair what we can, but there are limits, moments when we need public institutions to step in and support. While the relational threads that link us together are ultimately what make us thrive and bring value to public space, that space’s functionality is also necessary as the backdrop that allows a separate world to develop.

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## The State of Public Space in Lusaka. Garden Cities, Urban Development, Greenfield Sites

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### Abstract

Lusaka, a city of around 3 million people, faces massive urban growth challenges. Designed on the Garden City planning paradigm principles, the city currently lacks open public recreational spaces. The lack of public space is often linked to the high land value alongside the high demand for housing, the lack of national government prioritization of public space provision policies, and a general lack of financial resources available to Lusaka's local council.

This article explores the state of formal public spaces in Lusaka, its urban history, development patterns, and the effects of these factors on everyday life and social interactions. It also outlines different private sector attempts to make up for the lack of public spaces through the provision of private green spaces (e.g., green private entertainment centres, private play parks, private back yards, and front yards) and the commercial units and malls that cover some public space functions. It asks questions on where kids play (e.g., private play parks, mall play parks, etc.) and highlights the design elements preventing streets from becoming lively public spaces (e.g., walls and roads). The article also examines Lusaka's plans for creating green and open spaces networks inside the city and their applicability. It studies public space provision plans in Lusaka's Development Plan 2030 and older public space provision attempts. It highlights the urgency and the importance of taking serious steps towards public space provision in the city now. The article used field research, mapping, desktop research, and interviews.

**Keywords:** Lusaka, public space, garden cities, urban development, greenfield sites

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## 1. History of Lusaka

In 1934 the capital of Northern Rhodesia was moved from Livingstone to a more central location in present-day Lusaka (Mfune, 2015). An English professor, SD Adshead, designed an urban plan for Lusaka, a greenfield site, based on the principles of Garden Cities to create a "generous, gracious city" where every step of the development is regulated (Mukuka, 2001). The city materialized following the guidelines and thinking of Adshead: spacious roads, lots of trees, massive private lawns, and backyards with a complete separation of functions<sup>1</sup> (Bradley, 1935). The Adshead plan outlined everything from the placement of the different functions to the streets' width to the placement of the main buildings (Bradley, 1935).

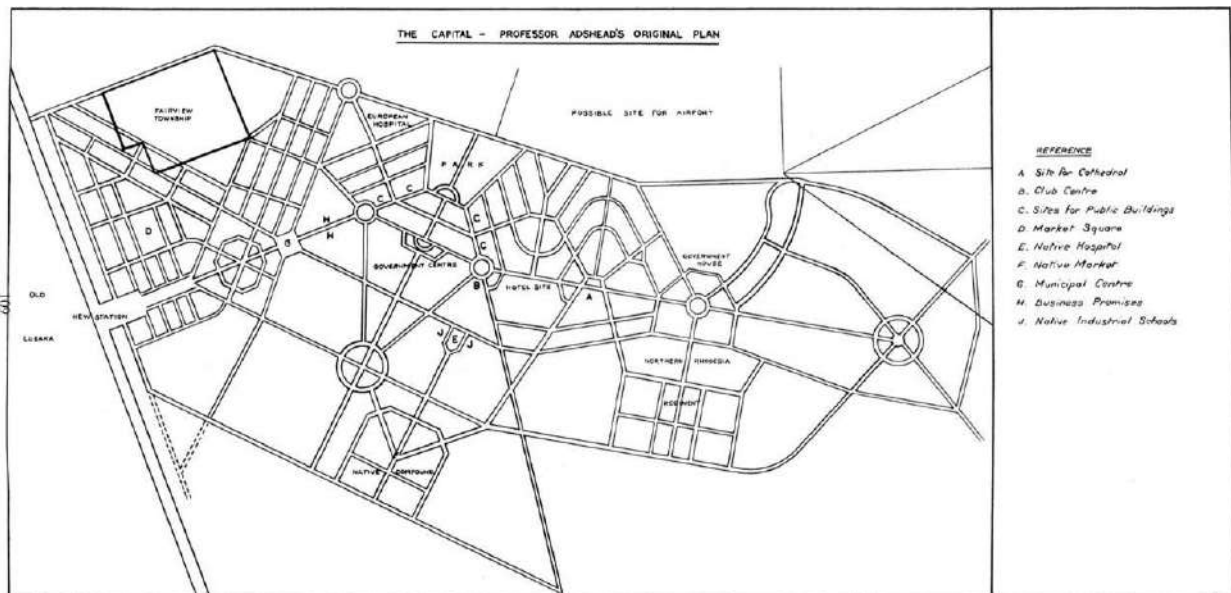


Figure 1 Adshead Original Plan. Source: Bradley, 1935.

It is essential to mention that the city was planned for Europeans (Mukuka, 2001). The natives were only allowed in the city for work, and registration papers controlled their existence and freedom of movement inside urban centres. African housewives and children were not allowed to accompany their husbands who worked in the city until the 1948 African Housing Ordinance passed, which allowed all Africans to reside in the city (Mulenga, 2003). The European residential area was segregated from the natives' housing, with European housing in more central locations and natives housing on the city periphery (Bradley, 1935). The governmental buildings and offices were designed in the modern imperial style of such architects as Herber Baker (Bradley, 1935).

## 2. Lusaka, today

Thirty eight percent of Zambian citizens live in cities. The UN projects that this number will increase up to 58% by 2050 (United Nations, 2018). Lusaka is growing every day,

<sup>1</sup> Trading areas, garages, sports ground, natives' housing, Europeans housing—each had a section in town completely separate from the other. With the natives' housing completely segregated from the residential area containing European housing.

with almost 3 million inhabitants today, the city is expected to double in size in 20 years. In the last few years, the city of Lusaka has been experiencing a massive boom with a rising middle class, which has coincided with the construction of urban amenities to cater to this middle class, including many more hotels, malls, and restaurants (Sladoje, 2016). Many residential units have been turned into coffee shops and restaurants in the CBD and different emerging middle-class neighbourhoods. Demand for the land has been increasing with rental prices soaring, and the city is expanding outwards but not upwards.

The colonial legacies of city-making have left the city with weak representative local governments, frail planning for urban growth, and insufficient infrastructure. While not enjoying financial independence, the Lusaka council serves as the planning authority for the city (Mulenga, 2003). Restrictive Garden City principles<sup>2</sup> are infamous for not planning adequately for urban growth (Dragica Gatarić, 2019). The historical segregation of Europeans and natives means that today the native townships have been left with insufficient infrastructure that's been unable to accommodate such a rapidly growing city. The initial design of the city did not account for growth or sufficient access to urban services for all citizens.

Most of the urban research on Lusaka focuses on managing urban expansion, congestion, transportation, and informal settlements and townships in the city (Tembo, 2014).

However, as middle and upper-class neighbourhoods increase, the decisions made today on the provision of public spaces will shape the future of public spaces in the city.

In Lusaka, public open recreational spaces are scarce, which is ironic for a city initially designed on Garden City planning principles. This article explores the state of formal public spaces in Lusaka, highlights all the other urban design elements found instead and examines the need for more public spaces in the city. It outlines the paradox of a Garden City with no public gardens or spaces. This article's data collection methods include desktop research, field research (mapping and observations), and semi-structured interviews with locals and experts in Lusaka.

### **3. In search of public spaces**

According to UN-Habitat (2018) Public spaces are areas established by urban planning to entice social and cultural interaction and facilitate economic exchange. Informal areas mark only 38% of the total land in Lusaka (Chiwele, 2022). This article will focus on particular on the public space's provisions in formally planned Lusaka, as formal land constitutes most of the land in Lusaka, and the distinction between public and private is less evident, without formal private property rights. However, further research needs to be done on the ways informal areas use spaces for recreational activities

The state of public spaces varies from one city to another, even from one neighbourhood to another. Some cities have a great abundance of open spaces like Tshwane in South Africa (Landman, 2015). Others have dilapidated and underused public spaces like Sarajevo (Hatice, 2020). Still others have public spaces that are in the

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<sup>2</sup> Garden city ideas aimed to combine the city's culture and economic advantages with rural ecological aspects. Garden City ideas emerged as a response the over crowedness of industrial cities in Britain. Garden City principles centred around low urban density and controllable population sizes—both principles are destructive for city growth, especially so in rapidly growing cities like Lusaka (Dragica Gatarić, 2019).



process of being commodified, like Alexandria, Egypt (Elhanafy, 2019). However, very few cities have no recreational public spaces; Lusaka is one of them.

### 3.1 Green Spaces on the Sides of the Streets

The city does not lack greenery like other African cities (e.g., Cairo); one can see trees and grass on both sides of roads almost everywhere (see Figure 2). This greenery has substantial environmental benefits in keeping the air clean and temperatures down, among others. However, they do not serve any recreational function. The recreational function is eliminated as a result of two main reasons. The first is the spatial distribution of greenery—the grass often occupies less than 2 meters of the sidewalks, and these green spaces are not central or spacious enough to be used as a small park. The second is the nature of the grass—the grass is almost never being cut, and the soil, especially in the rainy season, makes it impossible to sit on.

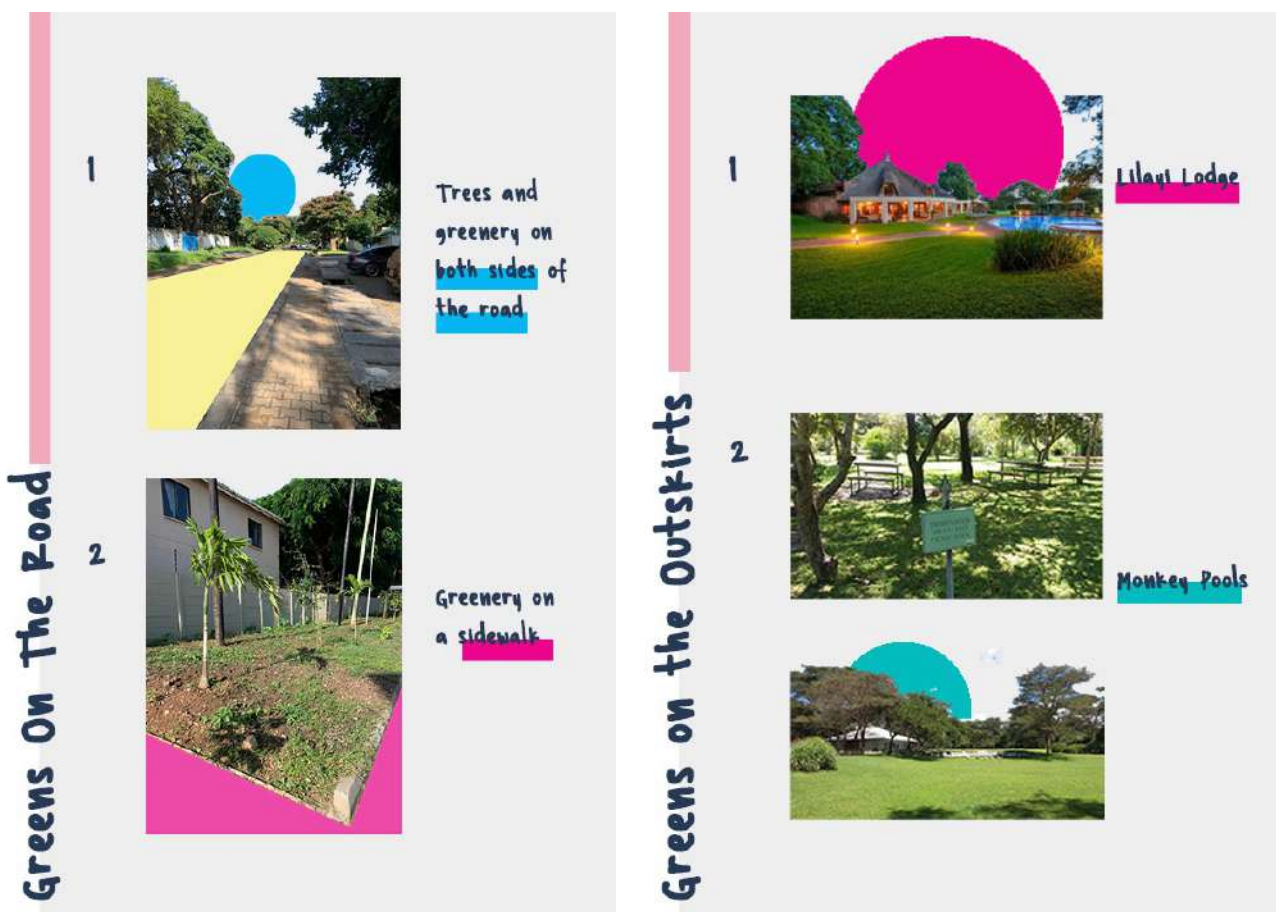


Figure 2 (left). Greens on the sides of the road. Source: Author, 2022.  
Figure 3 (right). Greens on the outskirts. Source: TripAdvisor, 2022.

### 3.2 Greenery on the Outskirts

Inner-city neighbourhoods lack central recreational gardens, with greenery limited to trees and grass on sidewalks. However, there are various green, open spaces on the outskirts of the city. Monkey Pools—a gated community with a vast park—attracts

families to enjoy green spaces and water activities over weekends (see Figure 3). It also offers open green spaces for Braai (southern African barbeque) and picnics (see Figure 3). Both spaces lie on the city's outskirts and charge a user fee to usually middle- and upper-class residents to use their facilities, making it difficult and expensive for average Zambians to use (other examples similar to Monkey Pools include Tiffany Canyon and Sandys Creation).



Figure 4 (left). Public Green Spaces. Source: Author, 2022; Google Maps, 2022.  
 Figure 5 (right). Private Green Open Spaces. Source: Tripadvisor.com, 2022; Mushiba, 2019.

### 3.3 Public Green Spaces

Except for a central green area next to the airport (which can be traced back to Adshead's initial plan), there are almost no open, green public spaces that can be utilized for recreational public uses. The initial Adshead design contained many traffic circles, most of which remain green to this day but again with no recreational use.

### 3.4 Private Green Open Spaces (Collective Goods)

Places like the golf club and the Mulungushi International Conference Centre contain open green spaces but are not used for public recreational functions. The Mulungushi centre is often rented out for events and conferences, and its vast open spaces are used to host those events. Several football pitches can be found (some owned by the council,

some by private companies) that can be rented by the hour. Several play parks in the city like Havillah Park and Joy Park are operational but are privately managed and owned, providing restricted access to green spaces within a few neighborhoods. The showgrounds -designed for the annual agriculture shows- have multiple green spaces that are used for horse riding, the open football field is rented per hour. The University of Zambia (UNZA) open green spaces are often used by students between classes but not used by the outside public UNZA for any recreational activities.

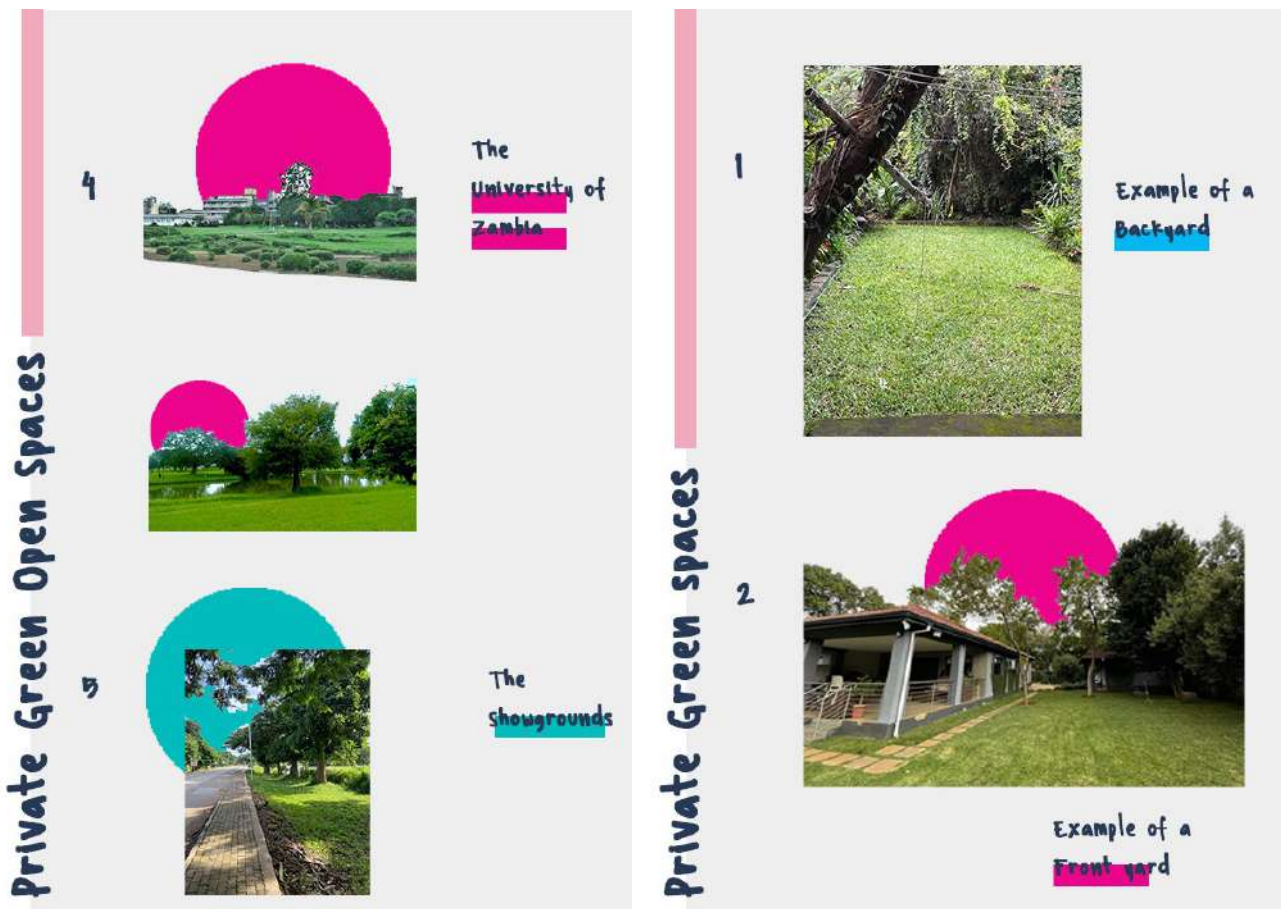


Figure 6 (left). Private Green Open Spaces. Source: Tripadvisor.com, 2022; Mushiba, 2019.  
Figure 7 (right). Private Green Spaces. Source: Author, 2022.

### 3.5 Private Green Spaces

Most middle- and upper-class residential units enjoy generous front and back yards, the size of which depends on the unit's price (see Figure 6). These yards are often used to invite friends over, for Braai gatherings, and for kids to play. High walls surround almost all the houses, so those activities in the yards are often entirely private with no spillover to streets. Some residential units have a shared yard with one or two neighbours.

### 3.6 Kids Playgrounds

The lack of recreational public spaces, of course, adversely impacts children most—as they have no open spaces to play in their neighbourhoods. Finding kids playing in the



denser areas of the city is a somewhat familiar sight on a good-weathered day, especially in the informal townships of Lusaka. However, in Lusaka's upper and middle-class neighbourhoods, kids do not utilize the streets for play and often stick to their front or backyards, providing safe spaces for physical play but often lacking interaction with other kids. The lack of open playgrounds for kids has enticed the malls to utilize some of their spaces to build indoor and outdoor playgrounds for kids to play, charging parents by the hour. Kids' areas can be found in private play parks like those mentioned above.



Figure 8 (left). Kids Playgrounds. Source: Author, 2022.  
 Figure 9 (right). Examples of walls in Lusaka. Source: Author, 2022.

### 3.7 The Streets and the Walls

Streets in themselves can be great public spaces and can induce lots of social interactions and activities. Streets are the main public spaces for more dense cities like Delhi and Cairo. In Cairo, streets are used by coffee shops, informal sellers, and even formal commercial units to showcase their goods, facilitating social interactions and creating lively streets. One feature in the streets of Lusaka is that they do precisely the opposite of facilitating human interaction. Walls surround most streets in the residential areas. Walls, cars, and roads are the most prominent feature of most formal neighbourhoods in Lusaka. Walls of all colours, sizes, and shapes are built around

Zambian residential units, offices, and even restaurants and coffee shops. Even the newly founded restaurants are also behind closed walls. Commercial units on ground floors often create good safe public life and “eyes on the streets” (Jacobs, 1964), but Lusaka's restaurants behind the walls do not contribute to public life.

### 3.8 The Commercial and the Green

The newly opened restaurants, coffee shops, and malls play a role close to those public spaces in enticing social interactions. Through a very curated and spatially restricted experience, Lusaka's residents get to meet and interact with each other in these spaces. Most restaurants in residential zones come with green spaces, and some even have playgrounds. These coffee shops and restaurants are not accessible financially to a considerable portion of the city population. Because of the high demand, coffee shops and restaurants proliferate, replacing one-story residential units.



Figure 10 (left). Commercial Units' Green Spaces. Source: Author, 2022.

Figure 11 (right). Lusaka's Markets. Source: Tripadvisor, 2021.

### 3.9 The Markets

Another public space that is often overlooked is outdoor markets. Arcades Market—a traditional crafts market held on Sundays in the Arcades Mall parking lot—is one example. The market is mainly used by tourists looking for traditional souvenirs. This



market is relatively controlled and limited in hours, and although it entices some social interactions between the buyers and sellers, it does not have any public recreational function. Another example is the Soweto Market, which is less controlled mostly used for canned goods, vegetables, and fruits. Soweto Market is one of the few places in Lusaka with less controlled and curated public life experience but, again, no recreational function.

#### **4. The Effects**

Comprehensively studying the effects of the lack of public space in Lusaka requires detailed social and economic studies across the city's different socioeconomic demographics. However, it is evident that the less financially able groups end up possessing very little access to any recreational spaces, as they cannot access coffee shops or restaurants, and there are no green or open spaces outside of these private, high-priced options that they can use. The interviews conducted with several workers indicated that they do not use any spaces for recreational use. On Sundays, they mostly spend their time in church or with family at home or a combination of both.

Another group affected by this is the emerging middle class, who often complain about how expensive it is to take kids outside or how much money it requires to spend time with friends in emerging coffee shops or restaurants. However, this group often lives in homes with back and front yards and is generally less affected by the problem as they still have the ability to access recreational spaces, even if on a lesser scale than more affluent classes.

Another issue noticed from the interviews is the complete unawareness of how the other class spends their weekend. "*I am sure they have places they go to,*" one interviewee answered when asked if she knew how the lower classes spend their free time or weekends. The lack of knowledge is, of course, a direct result of the lack of interaction that happens between different demographics in Lusaka

#### **5. Lusaka Development Plan 2030**

The Lusaka Development Plan of 2030 focuses on five main things: i) Industrial development ii) spatial development and land use, iii) urban centre development, iv) urban transportation, v) living environment and social services, vi) natural environment and green network development, and vii) infrastructure development (MLGH, 2009). In the Development Plan 2030, Lusaka's CBD is reimagined as a business core connected through public transportation system and a pedestrian network with mixed-use development to create lively, open, and green spaces. The plan also outlines links of public and green spaces connecting the CBD to other neighbourhoods in the city (MLGH, 2009). While the new green and open spaces are prominent in Lusaka's Development Plan 2030, almost none of these plans have taken place in reality so far.

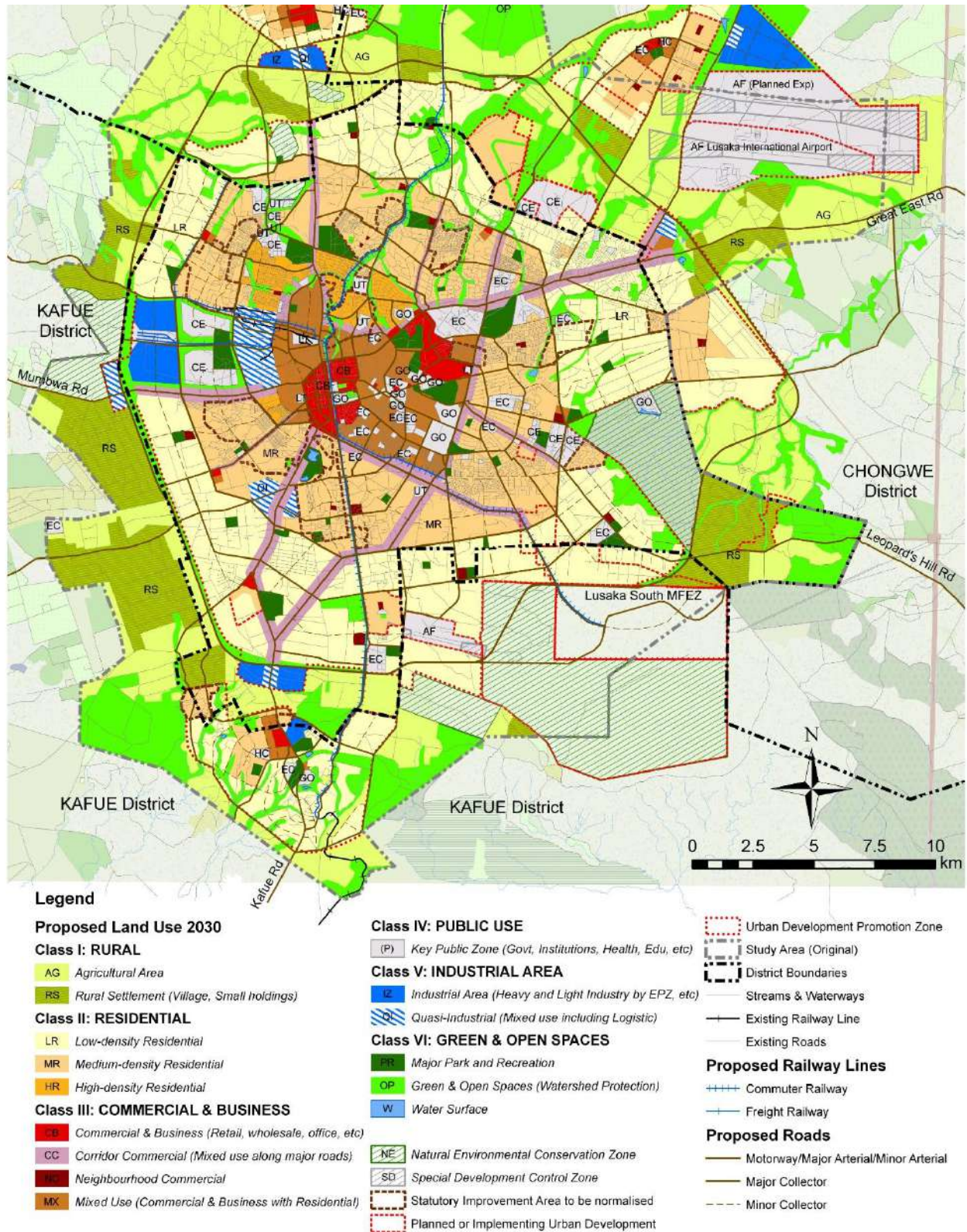


Figure 12. Lusaka Development plan 2030. Source: MLGH, 2009.

### 5.1 *Barriers to Implementation*

Several challenges impede the implementation of provisions for public and open spaces highlighted in the Lusaka Development Plan 2030. The first is the national government's long-standing record of not prioritizing public space compared to other infrastructure provision issues (Mushiba, 2019). The second issue is the lack of financial resources available to Lusaka's local council. The council is the main stakeholder responsible for implementing public spaces and mainly depends on national government grants, which delay many plans and often hinder their implementation (Mulenga, 2003). The third reason is the rising land values, housing demand with soaring rent prices, and complicated land ownership and acquisition processes that further raise the costs of urban development (Mfuno, 2015).

## 6. **Conclusion**

Public spaces are not a luxury but essential infrastructure to develop healthy and sustainable cities and communities (Kim, 2015). In times of transformation and growth, public spaces are essential for the exchange of ideas, stimulating political and community discussions, holding authorities to their promises, and integrating different social groups, and fostering a sense of cohesion (Project for Public Spaces, 2018). Besides the social importance of public spaces, markets, and green spaces also tend to increase the land values of their surroundings, thus helping cities and communities economically (KIM, 2015). They are also essential for the physical health of lower-income groups within the community—most importantly marginalized children—who are often confined to small residential units without proper ventilation or sun.

Lusaka is a growing city facing many challenges as it attempts to manage its rapid growth. The urban policies adopted today around public spaces will affect the city's urban form for decades to come. Lusaka needs to take concrete steps away from the Garden City planning paradigm that initially shaped the city. It needs to put people and their social needs at the centre of future planning decisions by planning for public spaces that are accessible to all. If Lusaka does not take the necessary steps to integrate public spaces in its development plans and ensure their accessibility and safety now, it will only get more complicated and costly for the city to retroactively find land and develop it for public space in the future. The time to act is now.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## Dialog-oriented Urban Design Processes and the Place-led Approach.

### Upgrading Informal Settlements in Maputo, Mozambique

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#### Abstract

This case study shows the contribution of the World Bank consultancy provided by the architecture and urbanism studio *superwien urbanism* to the Municipality of Maputo in the rehabilitation of twenty public spaces in irregular settlements of Maputo, Mozambique. The project consists of the rehabilitation of these spaces into multifunctional community spaces and neighbourhoods' centralities, as well as the rehabilitation of 20 km active mobility pathways to connect pedestrians and cyclists on the city scale. The development of the project was based on a dialog-oriented urban design process and the place-led approach, involving locals in all project phases. From the site selection to the final design, various local stakeholders and specialists had the main role in the project development, including local architects and urbanists, residents of the project area, local leaders and architecture students. In addition, *superwien* implemented a process to develop, adapt, combine and use various participatory tools in five pilot neighbourhoods, in order to approach the community in a meaningful way and achieve positive results. The findings of these participatory activities were shared with different stakeholders in the Maputo Urban Lab, which also included local architecture students. Within Maputo Urban Lab's various activities, the local students learned about the different participatory tools and had the opportunity to apply them in participatory workshops in the remaining fifteen neighbourhoods of the project area. Their results were presented to the Municipality of Maputo and the *superwien* team through a rapid design, where the students could make their own design suggestions for the spaces they visited. Finally, *superwien* has been developing the final 22 public spaces designs which aim to ensure an inclusive, diverse and accessible approach.

**Keywords:** Maputo, public spaces, informal settlements, participatory design process

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## **1. Urban transformation project Maputo**

In 2020 the Municipality of Maputo (CMM), Mozambique, received a USD 100 million-dollar grant from the World Bank Group (WBG) to prepare and implement the Maputo Urban Transformation Project (Projecto de Transformação Urbana - PTUM) in support of the main priorities of the Municipal Development Plan (PDM-2019-2023) in order to implement the most challenging and transformative investments and reforms in urban infrastructure. In the framework of PTUM WBG is deploying the Participatory Urban Design Project (PUD), which seeks to develop dialogue-oriented planning techniques to promote the integrated planning and design of open and usable public spaces in underserved areas. Furthermore, the project seeks to transfer knowledge and experience about participatory urban design processes to local governments (World Bank Group, 2021, p. 1).

Regarding the PTUM, the architecture and urbanism studio superwien urbanism was assigned to provide consultancy to the CMM and support the efforts to upgrade the informal settlements around the city centre of Maputo. This project targets twenty of Maputo's most vulnerable neighbourhoods and aims to invest in urban infrastructure and increase sustainability and inclusiveness within intervention through institutional, policy, or governance changes (Conselho Municipal de Maputo, 2020, p. 4).

The focus of this consultancy is on the rehabilitation of one open space per neighbourhood into multifunctional community spaces and neighbourhoods' centralities, as well as the rehabilitation of 20 km active mobility pathways to connect pedestrians and cyclists on the city scale. Our goal was to integrate residents, students and practitioners in a wide participatory planning process by applying a dialog-oriented planning and co-creative design approach, in order to develop successful and meaningful public spaces for the residents of Maputo.

## **2. Public space site selection in 20 neighbourhoods**

The project sites, 20 neighbourhoods (see Figure 1), comprise an area of approximately 17.26 km<sup>2</sup> and the project could benefit their 264,054 inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2019). As a first step in the planning process, the neighbourhoods have been prioritized under various criteria including: climatic vulnerability, poverty and poor access to basic infrastructures. These neighbourhoods are dense with a low green and recreational space distribution and most of the residents have limited or no access to water supply, solid waste collection, energy or sewage. In addition, the areas suffer from floods, given the poor drainage system (Conselho Municipal de Maputo, 2021).

In this context, we approached the public spaces as important elements in the informal urban fabric, essential as a meeting place for exchange, activity and recreation, just as much as for commuting and the fulfilment of everyday needs. The current COVID crisis has highlighted the many benefits of well-proportioned and organized public spaces but also the risks of poorly maintained, unhygienic and overcrowded places.

In an integrative diagnostic, the CMM has identified 107 existing public spaces spread over the 20 neighbourhoods in the project area and compiled a data set of detailed analyses of their condition and uses. The study revealed that those public spaces suffer from a lack of urban furniture and basic infrastructures, such as public toilets and shaded areas. In addition, most of them are in degraded conditions because of the lack of maintenance policies and flooding in rainy seasons is, for many, a reoccurring issue.



Figure 1. Map of Maputo highlighting the project area of 20 neighbourhoods (Superwien, 2021).

As consultants, it was very important to select public spaces where the rehabilitation would have meaningful impacts in the neighbourhoods and act as important elements in the further improvements planned in the PTUM. Therefore, superwien appraised important aspects of the CMM quantitative data with a focus on the accessibility of and to a) the public spaces and b) the existing and future public transport. To analyse the accessibility, we used “5 minutes walking distance” as a parameter to identify public transport stations, points of interest and road network in the surroundings of the public spaces. The 5-minute walk, which is approximately 400 m in distance, is the amount of time people are usually comfortable walking and can be seen as a neighbourhood unit for social interaction and access to public services, a concept first defined by Perry (1929). Within our analysis, the proximity of the public spaces to the road network ended up being considered the most important criterion for the final selection. However, we also took into consideration qualitative data regarding usages and perspectives from residents in each neighbourhood through surveys, emotional mapping and site visits. The flooding areas were also an important aspect and it became a criterion for the site selection. A GIS-based Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) was used to help make the best possible decision by looking at a wide range of factors where multiple favourable solutions may be presented. By taking into account international and local experts’ opinions, six criteria for site selection were determined (see Figure 2).

CRITERIA FOR PUBLIC SPACE SITE SELECTION

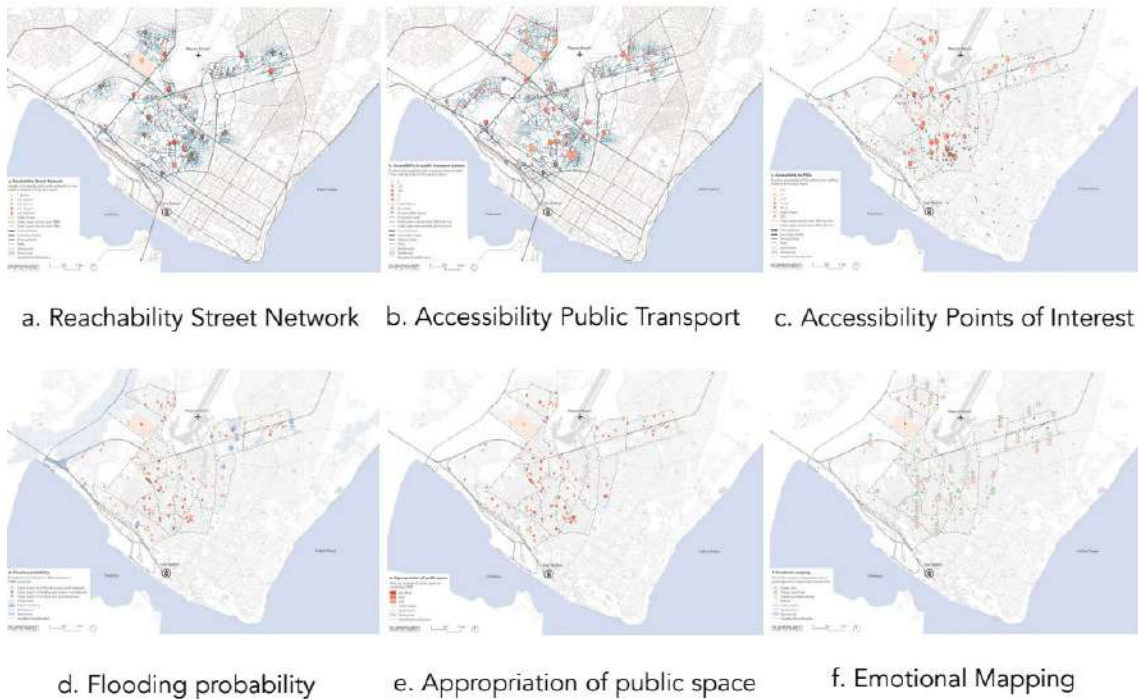


Figure 2. Maps with the results of the six criteria used for the public space selection (Superwien, 2021).

Furthermore, we weighted the importance of the criteria and performed a sensibility test by using different scenarios that provide an overview of the best public spaces for each neighbourhood by altering the importance of different criteria. After a detailed assessment of the different weighting options, we selected the most favourable one as the base for a coordinated assessment and selection with the stakeholders.

This task was an important decision since we wanted to provide them access to quality public spaces for as many and justly distributed within the whole project area. Also, the available public spaces were diverse in size, condition and overall access. Finally, we decided for the access through the street network was the most important factor, which led us to a decision for public spaces with a large range of sizes and well located in their own neighbourhood context (see Figure 3).

Within this process of site selection, the local superwien team started their first co-creative sessions, in the form of a first assessment by spontaneous interactions with emotional mappings and surveys with the local residents in each of the neighbourhoods. However, due to the large size of the overall project area at the time we selected the spaces, it consisted of site visits to all of the 20 neighbourhoods and the application of several participatory tools used in interactions organized together with the secretaries of the barrios.

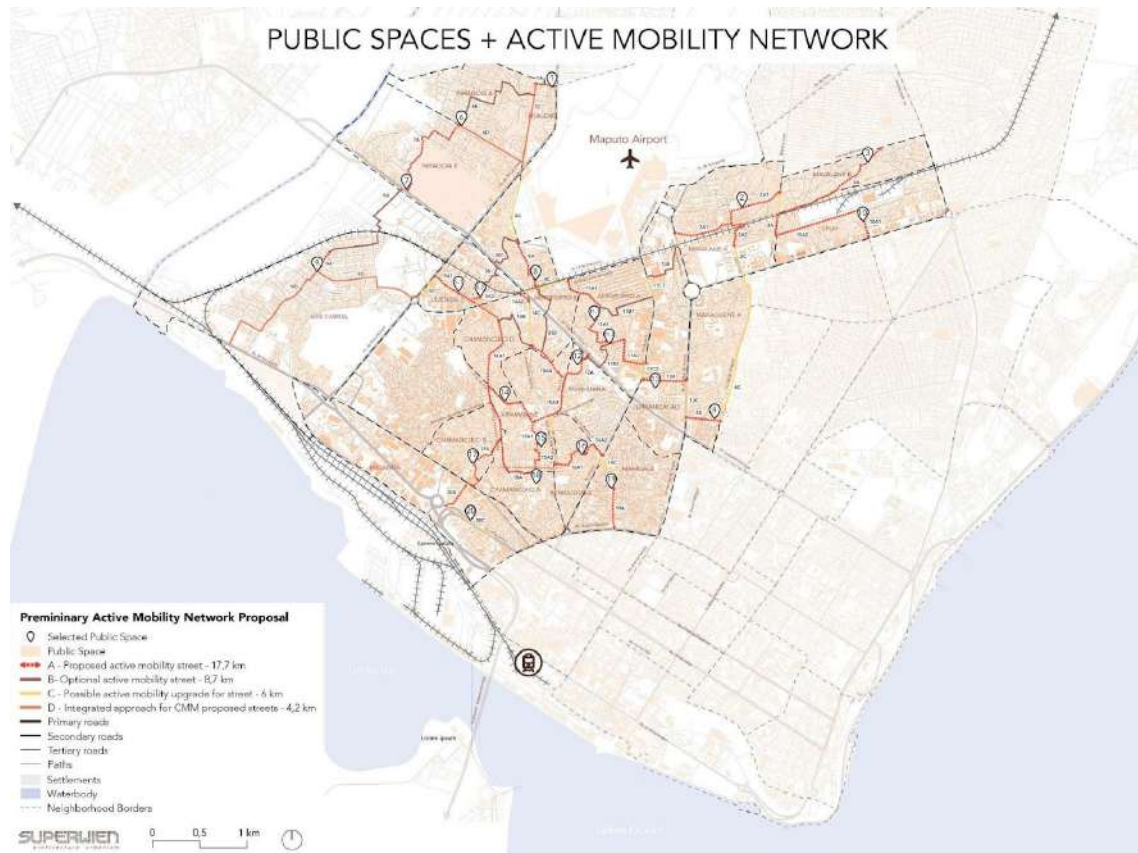


Figure 3. Map with the proposal for an active mobility network connecting the public spaces of the 20 neighbourhoods (Superwien, 2021).

### 3. A toolbox for the dialog-oriented planning process

Inclusive planning enables the population to take a central role during the development of a project. The participation of locals raises the community's awareness of the importance and benefits of space regeneration as well as other social and economic aspects. In addition, a participatory urban design process promotes a sense of ownership and belonging of the local communities, resulting in the long-term success of the intervention.

Superwien has developed and used participatory design tools that have been developed and used in different parts of the world, mainly in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also in Central and South Asia and Europe. In the heart of the so-called Urban Design Lab lies the integration of locals into the different phases of the design process (Krebs, 2019). These tools deploy creative ways to approach locals and involve them in a planning process including and by doing so, providing qualitative data for the design process. Based on the learnings and examples from previous experiences in many cities of the world, superwien collected and organized participatory tools in a "Maputo Toolbox" (Krebs and Mayr, 2023), which not only describe the hands-on application but also shows in which project phase it can be used, how to combine them in workshop sessions and adapt them for the specific project and local groups.



These tools present different possibilities to engage the public at various stages within a planning process, which follows a representative structure of four phases. The phases are named after their main objective in the stage of the process, the first being “local assessment & scoping” followed by “vision & goals”, “action planning” and closing with “feedback & evaluation” (see Figure 4).

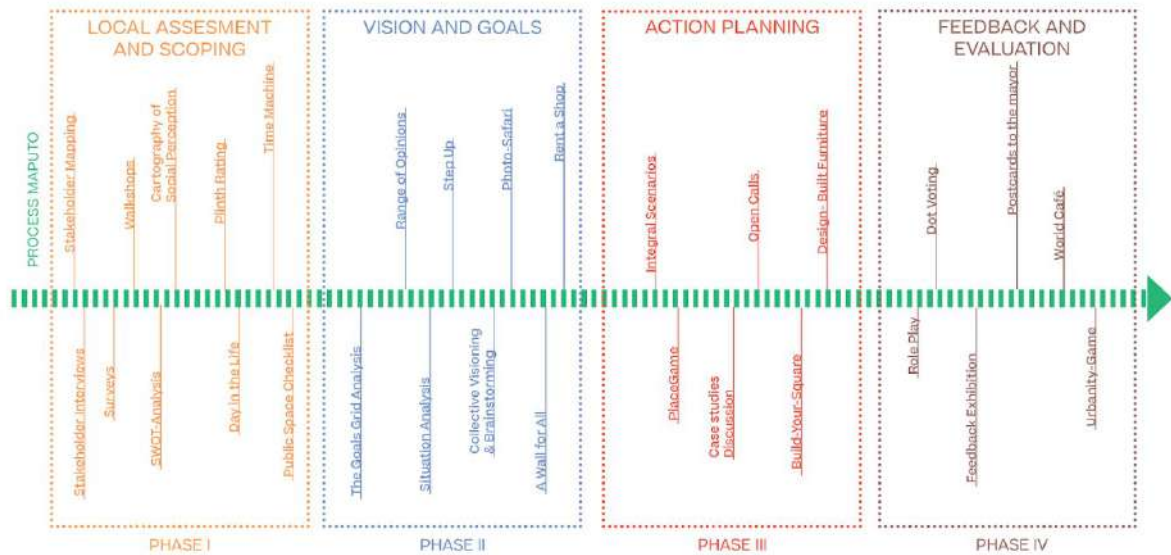


Figure 4. Diagram from the Toolbox showing the different possibilities of tools to be used in participatory sessions in different project phases (Superwien, 2021).

To analyse and assess the whole project area, we formed a local team of architects and urban planners in Maputo, who are an integral part of all project phases. They work on the ground, find the necessary information, conduct essential research about building materials and hold most participatory activities, in addition, they are an essential link between local and international stakeholders.

From the beginning, we focused on including locals in the project development, from local specialists and practitioners, who had a technical perception of the area, to local residents, who will be the future users of the rehabilitated spaces. Through the local superwien team, we were able to learn more about the intervention area, identify the emerging topics and reach important project stakeholders. In order to do so, participatory tools were used to approach the locals, such as: emotional mapping, with which we approached residents and asked how they feel about the public spaces in their surroundings; surveys with locals to better understand the characteristics of the public space’s users; and interviews with key stakeholders, to see the different perspectives to approach the public spaces. This gave us an overview of the area, including the current situation of the public spaces, the difficulties that they have with maintenance, characteristics of their current use and social groups who use them, and development potentials. In addition, the participatory tools supported us in the site selection previously explained. For instance, the output of the emotional mapping was used as a criterion for the site selection.



After the site selection, we felt the need to assess each one of the public spaces selected to get specific information on a small-scale level. We also aimed to involve even more the locals who live in the surroundings of the public spaces and will be their future users. To do so, we chose five public spaces of different sizes (micro, small, medium, large and football field) and searched for local residents, who have a relevant position in the community (such as block chefs) and could help to reach other interested residents to participate in our workshops. We called these residents “multipliers” and set the goal to employ at least one person for each of the twenty neighbourhoods of the project.

With the support of the multipliers, our team organized workshops with the local community in the five pilot spaces (see Figure 5), in order to try out and choose the tools which work the best in these informal settlements of Maputo. We used tools for local “assessment & scoping”, “vision & goals” and “action planning” and grouped them based on the type of community groups we would approach. We also had to adapt some tools to the local reality: for instance, the illiteracy of most of the participants and having only activities in open spaces, given the COVID-19 regulations, were important factors to which we had to adapt some tools.

PARTICIPATION IN PHASE 2  
PILOT NEIGHBORHOODS



Figure 5. Participatory activities with locals of the five pilot neighbourhoods (superwien, 2021).

Another interesting aspect was to make additional activities for specific community groups, such as women, children and community representatives. This allowed us to

hear different voices and see the perspective of minorities, resulting in a more integrative approach. The different perspectives can be exemplified in the workshops of one public space: in the workshop with the general population (mostly men), they said that the space is rarely used by women. However, in the workshop with women, they said that they use the space a lot, but mostly when men are not there.

To approach different community groups, it is also important to identify which tools work the best for each group. For the women's workshops, we tested many tools from the World Bank's "Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design" (World Bank Group, 2020), which were very successful in approaching gender minority issues and needs. Regarding children, creative and playful tools work the best to keep them interested and comfortable to share their opinions. Additionally, we developed our own tools, for example an urban game, called "Build-your-Square", which did not work well with the other community groups, but was very successful with the children and youth and enabled us to add their perspectives and wishes in our final design of the public spaces.

During the experimental pilot phase for creating the tailor-made co-creation tools for the design process in Maputo, we developed a method to apply the learnings of each pilot in the following one (see Figure 6). By doing so, we tested the tools and analysed which ones worked better in which community group. According to the lessons learned, we adopted the respective tools and found the best combination of co-creation tools for the upgrading of public spaces in informal settlements.

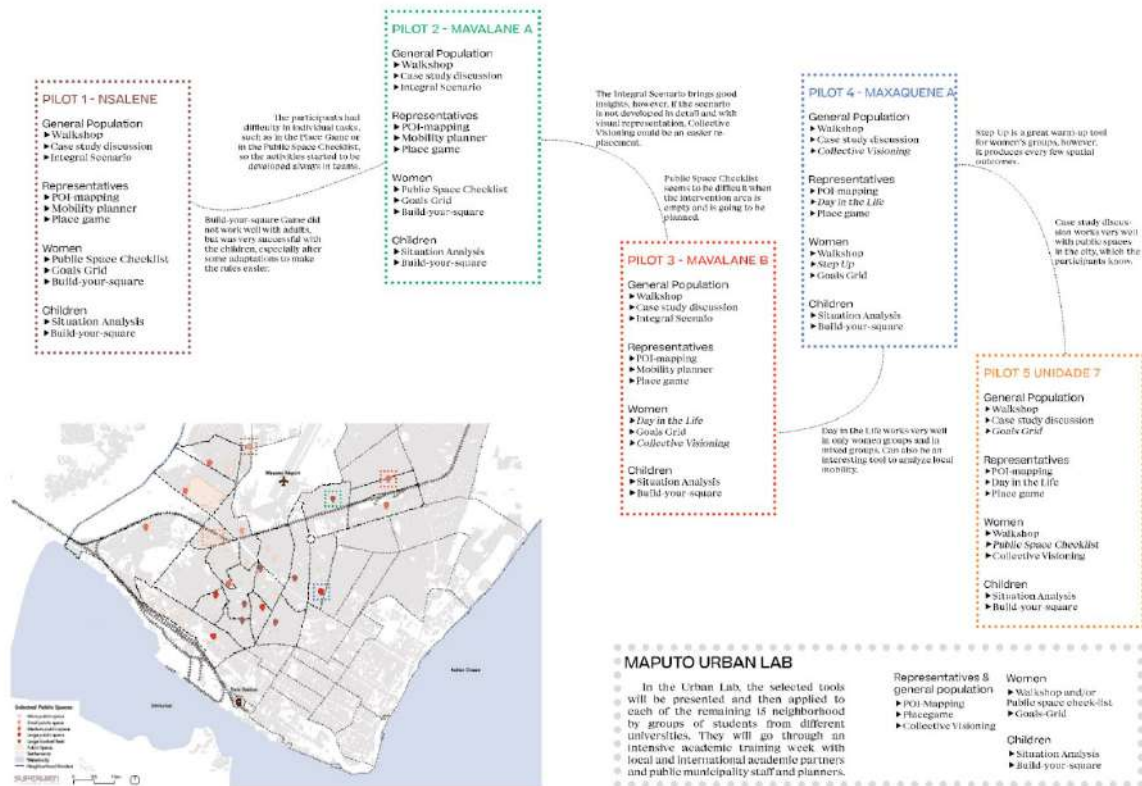


Figure 6. Diagram showing the tool selection process and how the tools changed until the final combination used in the Maputo Urban Lab (superwien, 2021).

#### 4. The Maputo Urban Lab

With the learnings from the pilot neighbourhoods and with the support of the multipliers, we were able to identify which tools were successful in involving the local community on the project and provided us with important results for the following tasks. To apply these tools in the remaining 15 neighbourhoods, we looked for local architecture students from different universities, who would be interested in expanding their knowledge of participatory urban design in being part of our team. Our idea was to organize an “Urban Design Lab” and engage the students in an urban think tank over several days of lectures, workshops, urban cinema and other activities as a space to connect and exchange ideas about the project area.

The Maputo Urban Lab has as its main goal to bring together the stakeholders of a project, in order to approach multidisciplinary topics and find solutions regarding urban challenges, as well as co-create design ideas. The goal was to involve even more locals in the project and give students the opportunity to apply participatory tools in a local project. We also expect that, with this strong background in participatory urban design, these students would feel comfortable in applying the participatory principle in many of their future work as architects and urban planners of Mozambique.

During the Maputo Urban Lab, we brought together specialists from superwien from Vienna and Maputo, CMM and more than 35 local students and 15 multipliers from the target neighbourhoods. The Urban Lab that was co-organized by CMM, superwien and the Ordem Dos Arquitectos de Moçambique (OARQ) enabled us to share the knowledge of each one of these parts together to think about the city of Maputo and its future. The Urban Lab had four days of workshops, from Friday to Monday, in different locations of Maputo, including places in the intervention area.

Among those activities, CMM shared their findings and contributions to the project, giving an overview of the PTUM’s goals, what has been done so far regarding the public spaces we were approaching. Our local team explained in detail our findings and the site selection, as well as the importance of participatory planning in the process. In addition, our Vienna team brought many examples of participatory planning in different cities of the world to show this concept can bring meaningful results in various contexts. Online lectures, movie sessions and discussions with locals and international specialists were organized who gave inputs to the students and visitors.

To prepare the students for their workshops in the remaining 15 neighbourhoods, we demonstrated the use of the selected participatory tools. We explained in-depth the participatory process and tools, focusing on our learnings from the pilots. The students met the multipliers and, with their support, put those tools into practice in the neighbourhoods and presented their findings to our team (see Figure 7). Sending students to 15 irregular settlements of the city and organizing multiple workshop sessions with locals in two was not an easy task. But even with unexpected events and issues, the students managed to apply the tools and achieve positive and relevant results in all 15 neighbourhoods. With their work and support and a dialog-oriented approach, we managed to collect information, ideas and visions of the public spaces to be intervened. We included locals of all the locations in our design process, with the focus laid on the co-creation of designs. The participatory tools applied with the local communities allowed a collaborative environment for deciding on important elements their future public spaces shall have.



PARTICIPATION IN PHASE 2  
MAPUTO URBAN LAB



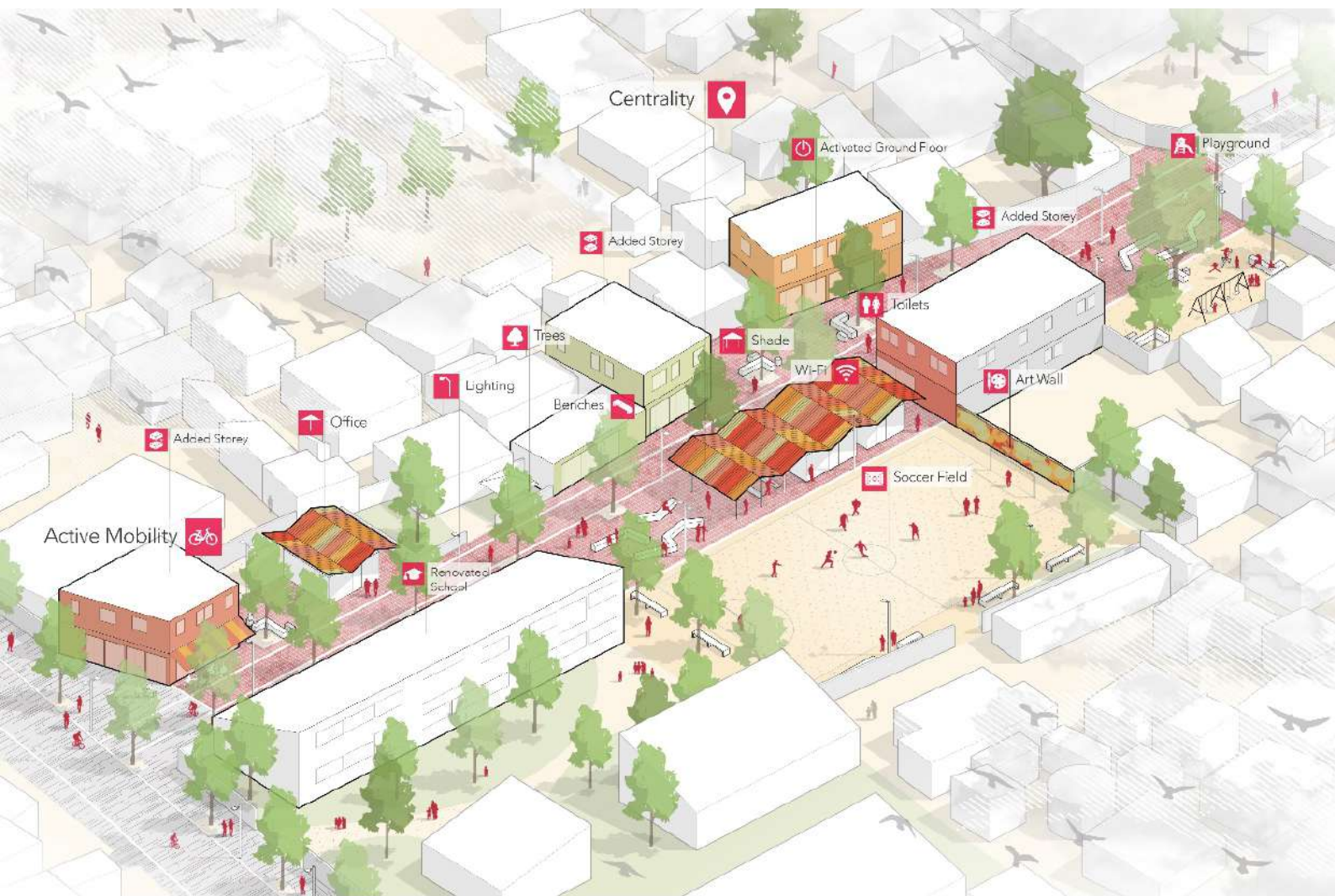
Figure 7. The various activities with local architecture students in the Maputo Urban Lab (superwien, 2021).

The most important result, however, was to open discussion and dialogues with the students and local participants after each activity, in order to see how different knowledge could be translated to the local reality. This step was successfully achieved with the active participation of the students in the discussions, who brought relevant information about the culture and costumes of Maputo society, information about material and construction costs, vulnerable groups of Maputo's irregular settlements and much more. Finally, the students had the opportunity to interpret their experiences and findings in analysis workshops. Through a rapid design session, they also worked on their own design for the public spaces they visited and translated the communities' wishes and needs in a meaningful project, which was presented for us, the CMM and representatives of the World Bank.

## 5. Next steps

The Maputo Urban Lab was an exciting experience that allowed the exchange between practitioners, the chamber of architects, university students, local residents and the municipality. Many ideas, concepts, designs, comments and more were collected that had to be organized and processed. The task of designing quality public spaces for such

a large project area is a challenging topic, where many stakeholders have differing opinions that have to be taken into account. Working with this variety of opinions is great input for an inclusive design process and the design outcomes show how an inclusive design process has successful results (see Figure 8-10). We envision articulated urban spaces designed as centralities for each of the 20 neighbourhoods and accessible through an active mobility network. We identified seven key design elements and strategies to be applied in the context of each of the 22 public space designs.



Maputo | Maxaquene A | Future Development



Figure 8. Design of a public space rehabilitation in Maxaquene A within the participatory process (superwien, 2022).

The first strategy was to maximize public spaces and area densification, which relates to the low number of public and open spaces and their limited size. The second key design element was a community porch as a centrepiece for the local community of each neighbourhood in form of a multifunctional community centre that combines many



functions, such as an office for the municipality, toilets, a lecture and workshop space and a library. The third strategy was the economic reactivation of the area, acknowledging the importance of encouraging commercial activities in public space designs and multifunctional community spaces, specific marketplaces for both formal and informal commerce and the activation of the existing ground floor. The fourth key element was the use of diverse and inclusive urban furniture not to limit the possible usage of the public spaces to one age, gender, or functional group. This is shown in the design of specific sports zones, multipurpose fields, playgrounds for children, Ntxuva (African chess) tables for different age groups, varied seating arrangements for young and old people, and market stalls for street traders, among others. Green infrastructure is an essential element of sustainable future development. Therefore, planting trees and using sustainable materials became the fifth urban design strategy. Local co-creation and maintenance was the sixth strategy; it ensures that each public space has some leeway for local adjustment, although the design is structured similarly for all locations. This strategy encouraged the design of elements that might foster a local identity for the area or could be developed and built by locals, thus strengthening their connection with the place. Last but not least, security aspects and the integration of basic infrastructure in the design should be the foundation of all designs, from the Active Mobility Network to public spaces.



Figure 9. Design of a public space rehabilitation in Maxaquene A within the participatory process (superwien, 2022).



Figure 10. Compilation of all 22 public space designs in the different neighbourhoods of Maputo (superwien, 2022).

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## Public Space and Everyday Culture. Photo-stories of Fractional Place-making in Urban South Africa

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### Abstract

To understand the concept of public space within the African context, we need to unpack the terms 'public' and 'space'. Public space can't be seen in isolation from the action that takes place within the urban space, the everyday culture that influences public life. The opportunity lies in reviewing the idea of public space from a conventional meaning into one of understanding the fractions of space as co-produced, negotiated, and occupied places in constant change, driven by a continual process and not a desired end-product. In some instances, the fractional space is connected and creates a mesh or network of social infrastructure; in others, the spaces remain individual and active. The short essay offers a series of photo stories to reveal the concept of *fractional urban space*. The images illustrate a switch in foreground concepts versus the background realities and actions in urban spaces experienced in fragile neighbourhoods in Cape Town, South Africa. Four spatial frames are interpreted. *Firstly*, fractional space is described. *Secondly*, a space of practice remarks on a strategic, and transformative project as a lesson for incremental area-based development. *Thirdly*, a space of exchange, reveals the social function and production of space within an extraordinary and overlapping micro-space of the city. *Fourthly*, a space of learning, reframes a critical pedagogy of engaged teaching and learning beyond the academy, co-designed and situated in a 'real' public space project. The images offer reflections of fractional urban space in context.

**Keywords:** transformative, practice, everyday culture, learning

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### **Foreground/background Public Space in an African city: An Introduction**

A community member from Gugulethu in Cape Town narrated her concept of everyday culture as ordinary, daily public life acted out in popular and personal neighbourhood places; such as the hairdresser, the spaza shop, informal and backend streets, front yards, the home-based shop, the jazz bar, the braai-stand on the corner selling chicken feet, the food-stand at the taxi rank, the yard next to the church, the entrance to the early childhood development centre, the forgotten walkway, the informal kick about and so on, as a never-ending list of complex and adaptive urban *public spaces*. These are places that are used by local residents, combined with emotions, politics and stories of relationships and experiences in and with urban space. Such public spaces are sometimes invisible, mostly audible. Timeframes are linked to the rhythm of the day, the night; patterns of the month, and the seasons, encouraging a social practice in urban space that is experiential and potentially transformative. Everyday culture extends to local knowledge co-production, opening the possibility where public space claims a visible platform for encouraging dialogue, and debate. The use and function of public space is guided by everyday cultural practice and determined through local agency. Yet, why is the physical place in which everyday culture occurs considered under the western canon of “public space”? Are the urban spaces maintained and operated by the local municipality? Do these spaces link to a regulated zoning scheme that is registered, recorded, and budgeted in integrated development plans? What is considered public and by whom? The answers to many of these questions are uncertain or sometimes distorted and unrecorded. Public space in the local context of urban South Africa is often misunderstood and presented in an official, narrow language and represented in conventional methods. The result on the ground is often a myriad of neglected official and zoned public open spaces and ignored vibrant ‘other’ spaces that are not quite public, nor private.

The short essay offers a series of photo stories to reveal everyday public space experienced in fragile neighbourhoods in Cape Town, South Africa. The images illustrate a switch in foreground concepts versus the background realities of public spaces. Four spatial frames are interpreted. *Firstly*, to understand public space in the Cape Town context, I describe the idea of an alternative terminology, one I refer to as *fractional urban space*. *Secondly*, I remark on a space of practice, where a strategic, and transformative public space project illustrates a lesson for incremental area-based development. Spaces of practice are interpreted at the neighbourhood scale to understand area-based development, including conditions of safety and improved quality of life. Such spaces take into consideration the sense of the whole (neighbourhood and community) and the individual parts (public space). *Thirdly*, a space of exchange reveals the social function and production of space (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 1991) within a micro-setting. Spaces of exchange include some of the smallest spaces in the city that have a social presence and economic potential such as spaza shops, *Lastly*, a co-produced and situated ‘real’ public space project is presented as a space of learning. The iThemba Walkway project helps to reframe a critical pedagogy of engaged learning in urban design teaching practice. The images offer reflections of fractional urban space in context and further add to the debate around spaces that are public in the African urban context.



### Revealing the multiple facets of fractional urban space and everyday culture

Cities are demanding, laden with questions of rights, desires, needs and aspirations. Change manifests itself most evidently through space (Ewing, 2021), amplified by current urban transformation, global crisis and environment impact of climate change. How are we adapting within urban space to cope with such extremes? Simone and Abouhani (2005) argue, “All cities are places of multiple intensities and layers. These layers and intensities pass through, settle, consolidate, and disperse across the diverse spaces to which their various intersections themselves give rise” (p. 9). The intersection of such places, activities, and people provides a new stage for social engagement, economy, and education.

To understand the concept of public space within the African context, we need to unpack the terms both ‘public’ and ‘space’. Publicness is often blurred in places that change according to the needs and demands of the community, the household, and the individual at different timeframes. Certain public spaces also function as many places at once, such as a street acting as an access way, but also a memory space for funerals, a place for initiation rituals, or a place for protest. Consequently, public space cannot be seen in isolation from the social and economic action that takes place within the urban space, the everyday culture that influences public life. This determines how we map, measure, evaluate, design and maintain what is commonly termed ‘public space’ in resource scarce neighbourhoods.



Figure 1. A small public space acting as a water point and gathering space in Lotus Park Informal Settlement in Gugulethu. Photo by Kathryn Ewing (2019).

The opportunity lies in reviewing the idea of public space from a conventional meaning to co-produced, negotiated, and occupied urban spaces in constant transformation. The essay offers an alternative concept to public space built on previous research on *fractional urban space* (Ewing, 2021, Ewing and Krause, 2021, Ewing, 2022). Fractional urban spaces are defined as “never quite complete and are involved in the making of micro-parts of the whole, crossing scales, spatial dimensions, and their presence amplified over time. They act independently or if connected, form a mesh of active space reliant on the level of interactions and relationships between the physical and social realm” (Ewing, 2021). Fractional urban spaces act as places for transformative practice, engaged learning and community exchange, encouraging everyday culture to flourish.

Figure 1 reveals a small public space acting as a water point and gathering space in Lotus Park Informal Settlement in Gugulethu. We can view such an urban space as an insurgent space that encourages a quiet encroachment (Bayat, 2013) through everyday culture, the social practice of washing. The image illustrates the smallest fractional space, a grey space (Yiftachel, 2009), or interstitial space, which is undefined, neglected and located outside of the formal public space concept and register. The size is difficult to measure as boundaries are constantly moving, but it is considered a micro-scale public space. The type of public space reveals a symbolic element of civic engagement and citizenship (UN-Habitat, 2015) being neither completely public nor partially private space. Nevertheless, it is an active community hub with a public washing line connected to the interface of private dwellings, signalling a level of local safety through a secret system of surveillance, trust and occupation. The water flows constantly, sometimes due to a broken tap, or sometimes a forgotten activity as a community member runs between numerous chores. The dirty, unsafe water pools and remains soaked with detergent, grease, and food leftovers. It is not zoned as a public space. Nobody consciously maintains the space as the ownership is understood at the broader community level of ‘ownership’ or rather the informal occupation of land. However, the water point possesses the potential to be transformed into an inclusive and safe space, worthy of public investment. There are many water points scattered across informal settlements throughout Cape Town. Such spaces could be urban landmarks and anchors in future upgrading interventions (UN-Habitat, 2015), but all too often they remain a fraction of left-over and informal, occupied space as seen in Frame 1.

### **A space of practice**

Strategic area-based development and informal settlement upgrading, including incremental public space intervention projects, are viewed as a process towards developing safe and resilient neighbourhoods. It is important to identify the nature and typology of design intervention and implementation; whilst not forgetting the need for flexible urban design frameworks and trade-offs for long term transformation, service delivery and land recognition.

Figure 2 shows an urban space upgrade project in Monwabisi Park Informal Settlement, in Lower A-Section. The project presents a precinct scale intervention within an informal context. The space has been incrementally upgraded over the past 12 years, facilitated by an implementing agent, Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) NPC (Ewing and Krause, 2021).





Figure 2. An urban space upgrade project in Monwabisi Park Informal Settlement.  
Photo by Kathryn Ewing (2021).

Public space in the informal setting in Khayelitsha is referred to as “emthonjeni”, a multi-functional, multi-layered gathering space. The image was taken on a Thursday afternoon showing how young people can freely inhabit the precinct through in a series of informal kick-about spaces and permanent public buildings. Goal posts are temporary and are moved depending on how many children join or the age of the children and the direction of play. Formal, time-allocated and facilitated social programmes are interspersed with everyday informal activities and games. The precinct consists of an activated neighbourhood centre with a toy library and live-in caretaker, a pre-school classroom, community gardens and a series of recreational public spaces of different sizes, textures and uses, complimented by solar lights to enable use of the space at night. The public space and buildings are connected to a ‘smart network’ providing

public Wi-Fi to the users and local residents (Ewing and Krause, 2021) creating a new form of fractional space or a mesh network.

The project acts as a positive case study illustrating an incremental, yet strategic intervention that serves as a safe and activated space within the Monwabisi Park neighbourhood. At a broader neighbourhood scale, this precinct forms one of the two precincts situated within the informal settlement. The precincts are connected by a series of walkways and a ranging scale of emthonjenis' as part of an informal settlement upgrading programme aligned to Sustainable Development Goal 11, to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

### **A space of exchange**

Fractional urban space is essential to the livelihoods and productivity of informal traders and entrepreneurs operating in their backyards, at the edge of streets and in-between left-over spaces in the city. The smallest of interventions, such as a small canopy over an opening to the spaza shop, whether formally provided or informally constructed, add value and complexity to urban life. Simone (2014) advocates for *people as infrastructure*, where "...this infrastructure is capable of facilitating the intersections of socialites so the expanded spaces of economic and cultural operation become available to residents of limited means" (p407). Social infrastructure allows for the spatial redistribution of resources through micro-economies in public spaces. Spaces of exchange occur within, between and around spaza shops, shebeens, hair salons/barber shops, community gardens and early childhood development centres.

Figure 3 shows the Wonke Wonke Spaza Shop illustrating an alternative form of social infrastructure and a space of exchange. It is located midway along the Harare Safe Walkway between the railway station and the Harare Urban Park and Library, further extending to Monwabisi Park Informal Settlement in Khayelitsha. Reimagining forgotten and underused urban spaces, such as spaza shops, offer potential for not only economic exchange, but social and cultural exchange. Spaza shops become collective gathering points not only to sell basic goods but to issue public voucher systems, act as soup kitchens, sell data and provide Wi-Fi hotspots, as well as becoming safety points for local neighbourhood watch patrols and spatial (often colourful) landmarks between public transport stops in low-income neighbourhoods. Small gestures, like the step ladder placed on a concrete platform at Wonke Wonke allow children to access the counter. Flexibility is key to the success of positive urban space, allowing for unexpected uses whilst anticipating events to occur. These are self-made, operated and maintained public spaces.

### **A space of learning**

At the University of Cape Town Master of Urban Design (MUD) Programme there is an intention to teach socially responsive urban design to students who can represent and design for spatial equity and the urban everyday using incremental and informal strategies rather than big master plan approaches, inherited from the apartheid and modernist era. Urban design frameworks, precinct plans, and design proposals are rooted in social and environmental justice, towards building affordable, inclusive, and safe cities.





Figure 3 (top). Wonke Wonke Spaza Shop illustrating an alternative form of social infrastructure and a space of exchange. Photo by Kathryn Ewing (2019).

The intention of the academic MUD Programme is to “engage outwards” (Myers, 2006) beyond academia. Change-orientated urban design-research studios are deeply grounded in the lived experience and everyday reality, giving an evidence-based understanding of how cities work and develop over time. Nevertheless, the concept largely remains in the background of teaching as co-design remains a complex pedagogy during and in the post covid-19 landscape. Administration is convoluted, and fieldwork is not promoted or facilitated by institutional and financial academic frameworks. In addition, entry into established communities is sometimes unrealistic and requires mutual respect and trust which takes time to develop and evolve. All of which pose critical challenges to creating deliberate spaces of learning for students and teachers, communities, and stakeholders.





Figure 4. Spatial occupation and activation of iThemba Walkway in Gugulethu.  
Photo by Kathryn Ewing (2022).

In 2020, through a series of participatory workshops (urban talks) and site walk-about (urban walks), urban studio – Gugulethu Hope (or Studio Hope) exposed informal networks in Gugulethu that inspired the redesign of public spaces into vibrant places as youth platforms (transformative space) for expression and care. The studio transitioned in 2021 into a virtual space with community representatives taking photographs from the ground and transferring these to the students. On-going whatsapp stories and zoom conversations facilitated a different form of virtual engaged scholarship (digital walks and talks). Further studio and urban design research in 2022 enabled a deep engagement with the context through a series of walkways and waterways as key public space elements in the context of Gugulethu. A learning outcome from the combination

of these three studios and on-going research is a 'real' public space upgrading project, known as iThemba Walkway (Walkway of Hope).

Figure 4 highlights the spatial occupation and activation of iThemba Walkway in Gugulethu as a space of deliberate and engaged learning triggered by a co-design workshop on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The community group focused on four SDGs (5, 11, 13 and 16). The intentional activation of the walkway not only contributed to the use of the space, but ignited a conversation around memories and belonging, gender-based violence and safe and inclusive space, partnerships and peace. Constant dialogues between multiple partners and citizens discuss a phased approach to the upgrading project, building on the concept of small change, in terms of financial inputs (minimal resources), ecological justice (waste recycling) and spatial transformation (public space/street upgrading). Community residents and partners maintain the existing space through quarterly clean-up campaigns aligned to public holidays. iThemba Walkway has emerged into an on-going implementation project, coordinated by a local citizen, Xolile Ndzoyi, who acts as a conduit between community voices, diverse stakeholders, and students. Combined with lessons from the walkway project, research and urban studios continue to review, rethink and reframe concepts of public space in the African context.

## Conclusion

The four frames offer an open dialogue on public space in an African context. Spaces of practice (Monwabisi Park), spaces of exchange (Harare) and spaces of learning (Gugulethu) all exhibit different variations and typologies of fractional urban space. Public space and place-making in the African context requires a detailed understanding of everyday culture active in urban space.

Although this is not reviewed in depth, the essay reveals the problems of mainstream perspectives related to public space in Africa, largely inherited from the colonial and post-colonial, modernist past, and western concepts. By reframing public space as fractional urban space encourages place-making to be a strategic, situated, incremental and negotiated design process. At the core of this urban design approach is an expanded socio-spatial practice interested in the co-production of places (visually, practically, theoretically) in relation to the changing scale of urban form and territory in the city.

Calderia (2017) speaks of the idea of urban space as spaces in the making, continuously expanding, operating with a sense of temporality and agency. How do we understand this ever changing and dynamic urban form and emerging fractional space in a semi-formal/informal context? Urban design and the making of public space demand an interdisciplinary and co-designed and co-produced approach to public space, guided by diverse inputs, stakeholders, and participants, allowing for urban transformation. Areas for further research are:

- Reframing the concept and language of public space through ongoing visual and verbal narratives focused on different typologies of fractional urban space in the South African context. This includes interdisciplinary mapping, interpretation, and representation of fractional spaces in the city.
- Compilation of appropriate and relevant African public space implementation projects or case studies in one digital and open-source library for students,

community, teachers, non-profit and civic organisations, municipalities, researchers, and academics.

- Critical reflection and documentation including the co-production of knowledge and sharing of learning outcomes aligned to engaged learning and teaching practice.

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## Transforming Life for Young People. Public Space Action in Informal Settlements in Sierra Leone

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### Abstract

The paper makes a *posteriori* contribution as part of the active place-making discourse in the African context within two dimensions: First, it substantiates how public spaces can be transformed when shifting the focus from place-based to a process-oriented approach framed around the empowerment of the human condition to improve subjective wellbeing. Second, it provides rich insights into a case study on several informal settlements in urban Sierra Leone, West Africa, based on our project aspiration to create safe and conducive spaces for one of the most under-prioritized population groups - the urban youth. Together, both dimensions provide an invitation to evaluate ways how the UN-Habitat Global Public Space Toolkit can be effectively implemented at a local level and upscaled to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.7.

Philosophically, the mixed method action-research project received inspiration from Henry Lefebvre's social production of space which informed the design of the dream-catching process and was translated into a unique social research methodology that bridges the disciplinary divide from public health, anthropology, and urban design. The role of process-oriented approaches to place-making, in this context called space-making, is the key element of this paper. However, the empirical baseline data on subjective wellbeing collected from 1091 young people function as the foundation method to identify and validate the possible impact factor of the public space interventions to improve their environmental conditions. The conclusion reflects on the emergence of new epistemologies associated with the idea of urban loveability as it embraces the public space as an open-ended process to place-making in the African context to transform not just a place but the human condition - in this case, marginalised urban youth.

**Keywords:** public space, space-making, youth wellbeing, Sierra Leone, informal settlements

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## **Introduction**

Around the world, people migrate to urban areas in the aspiration of a 'better' life that offers them possibilities for economic success, education, and better overall health and wellbeing. However, urban life often does not deliver on these hopes, and the dream remains out of reach for many and manifests in very little improvement to those classified as resource-poor. The severity of this issue should not be underestimated, as currently one billion people around the world live and actively engage in 'informal' urban practices which include public spaces within settlements (United Nations, 2019b). People that reside in those 'informal' settlements stand very little chance to break the cycle of poverty in pursuit of economic gain as there is a lack of nurturing conditions in a multiplicity of critical dimensions. For example, due to land tenure issues poverty struck residents are often urged to engage in transgressive activities such as unrest out of shire necessity for survival (Dovey, 2013). Admittingly, a shift towards a change in perception and framing of poverty has been proposed by several scholars (Huchzermeyer and Karam, 2006, Amin and Thrift, 2017). Hence, we conceive the argument of economic prosperity as only one of those strong pull factors for people to move to areas of urban practices and question the assumption that it is not the most effective way to create equitable spaces that achieve youth wellbeing. Once the dwellers inhabit areas with inferior infrastructure provision, so-called negative socioeconomic and spatial tension result in alienation, segregation, and marginalisation that mainly become evident in their state of health and wellbeing. On the United Nations level, this concept has been considered concerning the collective narrative of the city-making processes under the term of 'leaving no one behind' (United Nations, 2017). Unlike common 20th century practices to improve living conditions linked to top-down upgrading of informal settlements, we interrogate the nexus through a different window- subjective wellbeing. To be specific we examine criteria used to measure degrees of subjective wellbeing of one of the most vulnerable population groups: young people in the age range of 15-35 (UNFPA, 2017) as the starting point to improve living conditions through 'soft' post-structuralist approaches that localize sustainable development solutions to deliver improvement for everyday life in transformative ways. The established argument that young people participate less in formal politics as they have no well-defined place in their respected society (Abbink, 2005) does equally apply to young people in informal settlements as they the majority feels that they lack opportunities to take part in society and do not have places to even go to and meet (Schirmer et al., 2020). For the purpose of this paper, our place-making approach is inspired by Henri Lefebvre's potent conceptual triad of space which theorises ways how space is socially produced (Lefebvre, 1991b). The cognitive capacity of the human mind is addressed in Lefebvre's representations of space which is also commonly understood as conceived space. While the spatial products are contained within the representational or lived space and the collective meaning-making aspect is embedded in the perceived or spatial practice space. The usefulness of concept of space and time in the context of urbanization has been convincingly discussed by scholars such as Harvey (1990) or Dovey (2008) and successfully applied by scholar such as Mews (2022) and Stevens (2007). The idea of 'space-making' naturally evolved out of the theoretical framing of Lefebvre's (social) space for the very reason as it overcomes limitations of phenomenological theories by reconciling the lived space with every day (Dovey, 2008) while overcoming the conceptual division of the object and subject through a set of relations (Lefebvre, 1991a). As the more 'soft' process-oriented approaches (van Melik, 2020) focus on the space of ideas (dreams) and their ongoing potential for realisations in public space, we seek to celebrate the balance of cognitive capacity of human minds to positively transform space that is not just evident in spatial products, rather



something which is closely connected to collective meaning-making as a pathway to improve wellbeing. Hence, this type of 'place-making' activity shall be referred to as 'space-making' and applies to open-ended ways of modifying materiality including grassroots community engagement methods, co-production, self-empowered education, and micro-level incentive schemes such as public space challenges (Ottosen and Mews, 2019).

The question of whether urban 'poor' are allowed to take on a positive role full of agency as part of urban practice, will be empirically substantiated with this case study. We contest that only top-down architectural approaches related to functional 'aesthetics' can achieve the aim of creating 'better' cities through 'beautification' of public spaces. In these cases, certain user groups such as under-prioritized population groups (urban youth) are often design out and the full potential of public spaces not realized (Stevens, 2007, Mews, 2022, Shirtcliff, 2018). In the following, we will provide the context of our case study in Sierra Leone by outlining contemporary conditions of urban youth and the state of public space. Then we will interrogate the space-making process and further qualitative learnings from our case study to achieve improvements concerning i) Access to safe and inclusive spaces; ii) Access to green and pleasant places; iii) Safety and security; iv) Literacy, education, and skills, v) Opportunity and support; and vi) Governance and leadership.

## **Context**

### *Sierra Leone*

Sierra Leone has for decades been one of the most impoverished countries in the world with more than half of its 7,97 million population (Worldbank, 2021) living below the international poverty line of 1.90 US Dollars a day (United Nations, 2019a). The economy remains challenged by pervasive corruption and undeveloped human capital. The country has experienced its share of hardships over the past 30 years including a devastating civil war from 1991-2002, recurrent flooding, the outbreak of the Ebola virus in 2014, the 2017 mudslides in Freetown, and as of the pandemic of Covid-19 in 2020. Democracy is slowly being re-established after the civil war that resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 2 million people. Sierra Leone has a young and growing population and is experiencing rapid urbanisation which is putting enormous pressure on cities to accommodate an increasing number of young residents in particular. Thus, many of Sierra Leone's young city dwellers grow up or settle in slums and informal settlements. An estimated 60% of the population is below the age of 25, and the age group 15-35 makes up almost 40 % of the total population (UNDP, 2018). Sierra Leone is further labelled as 'Low human development' in UNDP's human development index (UNDP, 2020).

### *Urban youth*

Sierra Leone's population is dominated by youth. After the lengthy civil war from 1991 to 2002, rapid population growth and one of the world's lowest life expectancies mean that as of 2015, more than 40% of the population was aged under 15, and 80% were aged 35 or younger (UNFPA, 2017). The cities have a particularly high proportion of young residents. One of the reasons for this is the migration of youth to the cities from rural areas. Sierra Leone is a country in which the process of urbanisation is putting pressure on existing cities to accommodate a growing number of, especially young, residents. The Sierra Leone civil war between 1991 and 2002 fuelled urbanisation, as life in the city was perceived as safer than in many rural areas. The movement of young people from rural to urban today is motivated by the search for better livelihood opportunities, both economic and social. Life in the city carries promises (although often unfulfilled) of education, employment, a higher

living standard, less social control and expectations contrary to traditional lifestyles and pressure from older generations, etc. In this regard, cities are natural attractors to youth, however, the promised freedom of urban life can be far from the experience of an average young person in the cities of Sierra Leone, particularly those living in informal settlements. The large proportion of youth growing up in and migrating to cities challenges urban infrastructures and governance, and many youths experience challenges such as social exclusion from livelihood opportunities and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. This exclusion can lead to pathways where young people experience a lack of social control, have limited support systems, and urban youth can live in what are effectively parallel worlds to mainstream society.

#### *Public space*

Public space can be defined as “*all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive*” (Garau et al., 2015). Urbanization is increasing the importance of such spaces because they impact the individual and social wellbeing of urban citizens and act as places that reflect collective community life. In the context of urbanization, the provision of access to safe, inclusive, and accessible, green and public spaces (SDG target 11.7) is key to urban wellbeing. The UN-Habitat 2015 Global Public Space Toolkit highlights the benefits and potentials of public space development to several important aspects of urban life, including increased income and wealth generation, enhanced environmental sustainability, improved public health, enhanced urban safety, and social inclusion (UN-Habitat, 2015). The focus on public space emerged from the growing understanding of the critical influence of urban design for the wellbeing of those living in urban areas, and in particular the importance of shared public spaces that provide space for the formation and enactment of communities. For several decades, since seminal studies on public life and the role of public space, there has been growing recognition that space is (i) socially produced, and (ii) a critical influence on human experience in an urban context (Dovey, 2013, Dovey, 2011, Butler, 2012, Lefebvre, 1991a, Lefebvre, 1996, Merrifield, 1993, Watkins, 2005, Zieleniec, 2018). Following the argument provided by Jane Jacobs, “*Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody*” (Jacobs, 1961), we embarked on the initial process journey to co-create a shared understanding and culture-specific definition of public space as a concept. We found that ‘public space’ was either perceived as an abstract concept from the western world or remained a foreign concept to many residents of the informal settlements until the project team co-produced the meaning with the participants.

The youth in the pilot settlement Funkia in Freetown co-created the following definition: “*A public space is a space available to people of all ages where they can meet every day socially and comfortably. These spaces are safe, accessible, free of cost, inclusive, free of discrimination, enjoyable, and encourage idea-sharing. Such spaces will contribute to our collective wellbeing.*” Subsequently, this definition was peer-validated in the eight other communities across Sierra Leone as part of the overall creating space for young people project.

#### **‘Space-making’ process: an open-ended process focuses to place-making**

Whilst access to safe and inclusive public spaces in urban Sierra Leone remains very limited, and individual living conditions for young people in urban areas remain poor – the need for recreation and socialisation also remains often unfulfilled. The overall aim of the action research project is to ground proof a theory of change that is based on the laudable work of Henry Lefebvre’s social production of space (Lefebvre, 1991b) and the right to the city

(Lefebvre, 1996). However, the emphasis of this paper only focuses on the hypothesis that a process-oriented approach to place-making (van Melik, 2020) that prioritizes the collective right to co-produce space can enable tangible pathways to improve the subjective wellbeing of young people in informal settlements. The open-ended process started with a specific co-design process, which can be referred to as a dream-catching tool as part of the space-making. We developed a tailored co-design method to collect data, called the dream-catching tool. The following section will first outline the design of the method before delving into the wellbeing survey data and then the case study findings.



Figure 1: Blessing from Bonga Town engaged in a community mapping workshop.  
Source: Dreamtown.

### **Dream-catching tool**

Deployment of the tool takes approximately three days. On the first day, community participants will be introduced to the context and public space as a concept. Groups engaged in spatial community mapping (see figure 1).

On the second day, participants dream together and engage in a rigorous process that narrows the intervention down to something tangible – to ideas for public space interventions. On the third day, the top three ideas are being modelled and exposed to a vote that subsequently results in the top collective dream for a public space design. The aim is to identify the most feasible and impact-effective space-making project for the young people in each community (figure 2).

A process that starts with a joyful encounter within a flat hierarchy - a meeting of people at a mutual level. Trust building is an integral part of the process and introduced through a range of targeted activities that are culturally appropriate (such as playful activities and dance) (see figure 3).

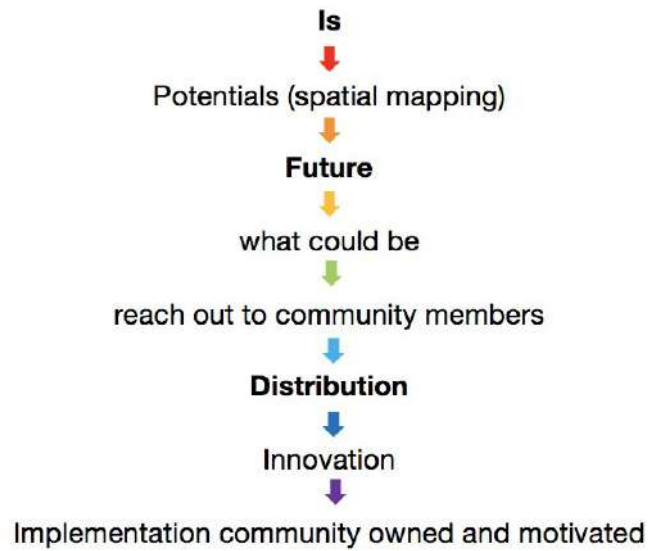


Figure 2: Dream-catching process (Source: Urban Synergies Group / Dreamtown)



Figure 3: Trust-building exercises with the community.  
Source: Urban Synergies Group / Dreamtown.

The “Is” phase asks questions about what kinds of spaces already exist in the community, and the potential to embed an intervention. The next step focuses on the future, asking questions of what could be (blue-sky thinking). We asked participants to rank all their ideas at a scale from the high level of fun to the low level of fun (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Ideas ranking. Source: Urban Synergies Group / Dreamtown.

As the next step, participants had to focus on the ideas that were situated at the higher fun spectrum and place them on the graph that allowed us to identify three ideas that fit within the high impact and low effort part of the graph (see figure 5). Ultimately, helping us identify those dreams that were expected to have the highest possible impact in the communities, at a cost and effort level possible within our project scope.

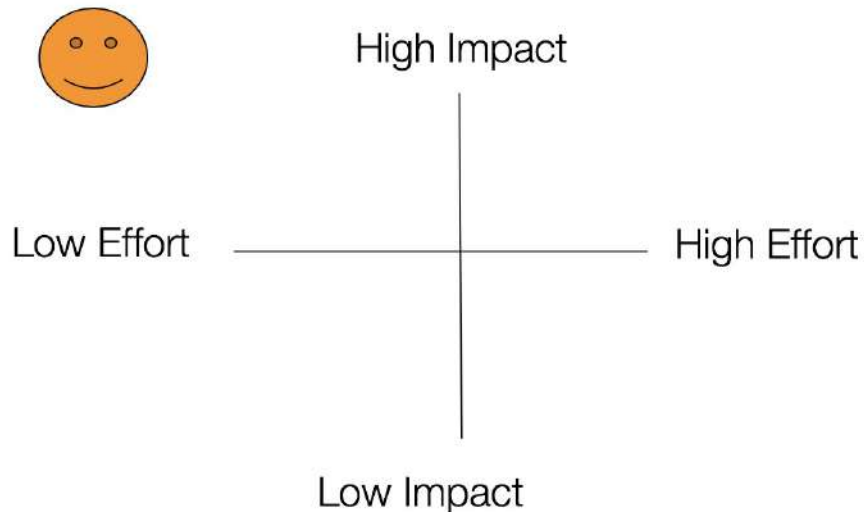


Figure 5: Ranking scale. Source: Urban Synergies Group / Dreamtown.

Once the top three ideas were identified and agreed upon at the end of the second day, we asked participants to reach out to other community members overnight that did not necessarily take part in the process to get feedback/ validation on their ideas for the community. The last step was all about the distribution of the agreed vision, that the



residents themselves with their collective knowledge, skills, and networks could implement. This ensures community ownership and motivation to realize innovation that can last sustainably.

### **Subjective Wellbeing: data to validate the impact and nature of the public space interventions**

To ensure that the idea can achieve the most impact with limited resources, the concept of 'subjective wellbeing' was introduced. The technical term 'subjective wellbeing' is defined as a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life (Diener et al., 2002).

Further, the empirical process around survey data collection was carried out by the project partners and led by the academic institutions. Noteworthy is that the collection has been carried out with locally trained students from the University of Makeni, all of which speak Creole and meet participants at an equal standing. All interviewers first explained the purpose of the survey, how long it would take (15-20 minutes), followed by an explanation of the rights to confidentiality and privacy. In addition, people's age and eligibility had to be confirmed before consent was given to take part in the survey. If a person was unable to read and write, informed consent was obtained before the commencement of interviews. If the person was able to read and write, participants signed the form. At the end of each survey, participants were asked to consent to provide their contact details for follow-up surveys. A range of different threats to subjective wellbeing for these youths was identified, including:

- lack of voice in the community,
- lack of access to education,
- lack of employment opportunities,
- social exclusion spatially as well as in decision-making processes,
- exposure to poor housing conditions,
- (sexual) violence,
- early pregnancy,
- no access to health services,
- drug and alcohol abuse,
- criminal activity.

In total respondents 47.8% were female and 52.2% were male; 30.8% of the survey participants were aged 15-19, 31.2% aged 20 to 24, and 38.0% aged 25 to 35 (Schirmer et al., 2020). The data from the youth wellbeing survey revealed that 68 percent of the 1091 surveyed youth believe that walking safely alone is a problem (Schirmer et al., 2020). Further 62 percent reported that they have no access to 'nature' or 'green space' and 75 percent of the young people do not have places where they can go and be creative (Schirmer et al., 2020). While 58 percent felt that young people are not being listened to 95 percent felt that they lack opportunities to take part in society (Schirmer et al., 2020). Both factors are highly relevant to determine the level and role of process-oriented approaches as part of place-making. Therefore, our space-making process included:

1. Youth wellbeing survey – identification of local context-specific data on subjective wellbeing
2. Dream-catching – identification of youth priorities for public space
3. Space development - implementation of community-driven public space action
4. Advocacy- continued momentum through the strategic application of youth parliaments to empower young people in those settlements.

At the end of the dream-catching process and the empirical baseline data collection on subjective wellbeing, we were in a comfortable position to determine the nature of the public space intervention to improve 1) Access to safe and inclusive spaces; 2) Access to green and pleasant places; 3) Safety and security; 4) Literacy, education, and skills, 5) Opportunity and support; and 6) Governance and leadership.

### **Case study: Creating Spaces for young people (Freetown, Makeni, and Koidu)**

The overall project takes place in eight communities situated in three urban areas in Sierra Leone: Freetown in the Western Urban Area, Makeni in Bombali district, and Koidu in Kono district, where the project's lead partner, Youth Dream Centre-Sierra Leone (YDC-SL) have their three office units. The following section provides a synopsis of the target communities where the project is undertaken.

The *Freetown communities (Funkia and Bonga Town)* are the most 'urban' in their construction, being characterized by very closely built small buildings. With limited available land, these informal settlements are typically located on land with poor drainage and a high frequency of flooding, frequently being reclaimed areas created through dumping waste and piling mud in areas of estuaries and drainage areas. Access to electricity varies, but an average of 79% of the Freetown communities have access to electricity at home (Schirmer et al., 2020). There is typically little to no vegetation growing within the densely populated communities, although some steep hillsides are draining into the community that has vegetation growing on them (and are also a source of flooding). *Funkia and Bonga Town* communities, respectively, border ocean and mangrove wetland. *Funkia* was built partly on solid ground and partly on areas where waste disposal has created new areas. The communities have a very high density of small residences, typically tin, wood, or brick shanty construction. Flooding is common in the wet season with poor to no drainage and drainage of water to the ocean during large rains affecting the communities.

The *Makeni communities (Renka, Mabanta, and New London)* are characterised by more widely spaced homes than is the case in Freetown, with greater space around homes for vegetation, and in many cases large numbers of trees and shrubs (although not in all parts of the communities). While homes are larger than is the case in Freetown, they typically house larger numbers of people, with very crowded housing common. *Renka, Mabanta, and New London* communities are characterised by homes made of brick and stone, often with large numbers of people living in them. For example, in *Renka*, 36% of youth live in a household with 15 to 19 people, and 21% in a household with 20 or more residents. In the *Makeni* communities, an average of 66 % of youth have access to home electricity (Schirmer et al., 2020).

The *Koidu communities (Kainsay, Koakoyima, and Koeyor)* are located in the Kono district, which is well known for its diamond mines. The communities are all characterised by small to moderately sized buildings, often with some space between them, and some vegetation often including trees, occasionally of reasonable size providing some shade in parts of the communities. Electricity access is not high in the three communities, with only, on average, 28% of youth having home electricity (Schirmer et al., 2020). In *Kainsay, Koakoyima, and Koeyor*, household sizes vary a lot but tend to be a little smaller compared to *Makeni*. Young people living in urban informal settlements experience inequality at several levels. At a societal level, they are marginalised under where they live. And in the informal settlement, they are marginalized under whom they are – young people. Significant change requires

action both at a societal and community level. At the end of the project, it is the ambition that young people are better organised, empowered to take lead on urban transformation, and participate in the decision-making processes in the eight communities. In the target communities, based on the dream and design process outlined above, the youth decided to build or rehabilitate community centres in the heart of their communities (figure 6 & 7).



Figure 6: Koevor community centre as a public space for youth.  
Source: Youth Dream Centre Sierra Leone.



Figure 7: The public space for youth in Kensay community.  
Source: Youth Dream Centre Sierra Leone.

### Participation, ownership, and impact

In support of this process, eight community-based organisations strengthened their capacity within project management and advocacy, and, together with YDC-SL, took part in presenting and discussing their Call to Action based on youth development priorities with the community and local (at district level) authorities. Community youth groups played a critical role during the project. In the establishment of the public spaces, by contributing to the labour and construction work, providing local procured building materials, safeguarding the materials and the spaces during the construction phase, fetching water, and cooking food. Youth were also mobilised to bridge gaps between youth and community stakeholders on issues that would affect the project, through frequent engagement during and after the establishment of the centres. The project has helped shift the mindset of youths (social production of space) and allowed them to identify with project-related roles and responsibilities. As a result, more young people started to play a proactive role as community stakeholders, lobbying on matters affecting their lives and wellbeing, and minimising community disputes through dialogue. In several communities, there has been an increase in the visible inclusion of youth (figure 8). For example, in Koidu, beneficiaries of the three youth spaces have established a coalition and registered with District Youth Council, and in Makeni, youth reported increased recognition by community stakeholders and are now invited to community decision meetings. Across eight communities the evaluation of the first parts of the project revealed that construction of the youth public spaces engulfed community support and participation also from non-direct project beneficiaries (men, women, other youth, and community stakeholders).



Figure 8: Renka community youth meeting.  
Source: Desert women.



To substantiate the level of impact of the space-making project as a process-oriented approach to place-making at the community level the following qualitative data includes the following statements from the youth and community stakeholders:

*“In regard of the existing peaceful co-existence in this community, my recognition of youth as a legitimate huge fraction of our community population has significantly increased.” (Community chief in Makeni)*

*“With the construction of the youth public space at Koeyor, we started having planned meetings at the center where we could express ourselves freely and constructively. Due to frequent meetings in the public space, my approach and mannerism to issues changed. Additionally, I have gained and developed skills in hosting and chairing meetings, resolving conflicts, lobbying with co-youth and community stakeholders to effect favourable decisions, and taking actions on matters that stand to benefit youth and the community; and my communication has improved too. With these attributes, I was moved to vie for the position of Town Chief of Koeyor, a position that has never been won by any youth in past decades.” (Town Chief in Koidu)*

*“During the implementation of the youth space project, I had witnessed demonstrable changes in my community. Key among others include youth male and female had regular fruitful project planning meetings with community stakeholders at all facets of implementation.” (Youth in Makeni)*

*"Community elders realised the need to work with us as responsible youth to make our dream (establishing youth public space) a success. I must confess that our youth public space project's key anticipated outcome is that it has bridged our relationship with our senior community stakeholders." (Youth in Kono)*

In Freetown, community stakeholders' responsiveness to the project has been lower compared to Makeni and Koidu, and there have been more challenges in the collaboration with community stakeholders and authorities. According to our evaluation, this has been due to low community stakeholder involvement and support, lack of capacity building for youth, low management capacity, and inadequate structure among partner community-based organizations (CBOs). These challenges are now followed upon in the second phase of the project, where the focus is increasingly on improving these collaborations in the two target communities in Freetown.

The developed community youth centres through the space-making project are now used for a wide variety of community activities including the following examples:

- Spaces are used to meet, deliberate, and decide on matters concerning community development. In essence, the public spaces are being used as common community grounds for consultation, engagements, planning, and decision-making.
- Across the target communities, youth informed that the public spaces are used for capacity building training, dispute resolution, and community meetings about their development plan. In Koidu, skills training is being conducted at the three centres.
- Local community administrators use the public spaces as local courts to resolve disputes. It has led to a substantial decrease in conflict and the manifestation of unity and peace among youth and community elders.
- Youth used the spaces to educate and disseminate information on preventing and eradicating COVID-19 and other public health best practices.
- In Makeni, community youth now offer free counselling services on drug abuse and



health best practices at the centres.

- Youth in Makeni conduct remedial classes for Junior and Senior Secondary School levels to contribute to their educational pursuits.
- In the Mabanta community, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation uses the youth spaces on a routine basis to administer vaccination and distribution of mosquito nets.
- In Bonga Town, a member of one of the youth groups conducts literacy classes.

### **Posteriori reflections on case study**

The space-making project is now moving in a direction of much more direct collaboration with local youth groups in each of the eight communities, to increase young people's ownership. 40 youth groups (five in each community) are now actively engaged in running the centres and will take part in a wide range of trainings and actions to positively transform, not only the centres and the space around them, but also other areas of their communities. In this process, they will be empowered through pieces of training and action projects that will be framed around making their communities safer, greener, and more creative. A key focus of the process-oriented place-making will be on strengthening capacities to engage in local fundraising and resource mobilization at the community and city level, in support of the continued sustainability of the youth centres.

While getting access to and maintaining the land rights to spaces in the communities, in itself, can be conceived as a success considering the scarcity of urban spaces and contestation over land use, there is an identified need to invest in perceivable ownership of the centres. Continuing the project, the youth community centres continue to act as hubs for the youth groups to engage in community transformation. At the same time, they strengthen the CBOs and organizational structures of the youth groups. To emphasize agency among the youth groups directly, they will each be in charge of implementing micro-projects, based on technical training that are facilitated as some shared responsibilities of all the project partners. These steps are taken based on the assumption that increasing local ownership over the process among the youth will amplify the impact of the project and strengthen sustainability. In addition, too many youths in the communities, having the opportunity to be part of a network, and be active in community work, keep them off the streets, and can build their skills.

The physical artifacts associated with the development of community spaces became a tangible and visible effect of the space-making process as part of the strategy to provide a platform for youth-led advocacy towards the improvement of their wellbeing. This reinforces the fact that young people in the communities need to continue to collaborate on finding solutions for, and advocating key duty bearers on, issues that affect them. An example of such a platform is the community youth parliaments (Dalton, 1996), which are facilitated at the community level regularly. Youth parliaments in the Sierra Leone context are an established forum for youth to engage in dialogue with key stakeholders and authority representatives, keep them accountable, and show them that young people are willing to – and capable of – joining the solutions. The project, therefore, continues to tackle community development from a spatial and urban design perspective, along with empowerment initiatives, and advocacy efforts for the improved wellbeing of youth across all the communities.

## Conclusion

The interrogation of our perhaps unconventional theory of change to implement a bottom-up vision to deliver not just liveable but loveable environments (Mews, 2020) for urban youth, we found that they can improve everyday life experiences of under-prioritized population groups. While place-making projects lend themselves to empower specific groups and deliver outcomes/ improvements with a sense of immediacy, the underlying process is key to enabling conditions for long-term prosperity as well as improvements to the collective wellbeing of community groups. In addition, we also found that the prevailing paradigm to improve informal settlements and their development patterns seems to be doomed and caught up in an endless circle of not being able to keep up with demand as part of conceptual dualism. While urban areas continue to rapidly grow, system responses remain stuck in a dualism around the production processes and products associated with top-down economics and large infrastructure projects, that continue to create divisions between those who have and those who have not. As Mumford eloquently put it "*The city should be an organ of love, and the best economy of cities in the care and culture of men*" (Mumford, 1961). With this posterior contribution, we were able to substantiate and contribute to an argument that calls for the transformative potential in under-prioritised population groups that upholds ethics, values, and care of the culture of mankind as equals coming together to socially produce spaces that deliver Lefebvre's vision of the right to the city. Deploying a process-oriented approach to place-making as part of this 'space-making' project can achieve impact among under-prioritized population groups. Small local Non-government-organisations (NGOs), strong CBO and collaborative multidisciplinary teams that focus on grass-roots action, building trust through joy and collective dreaming, while committed to pushing the paradigms in non-linear and innovative ways are in a position to effectively pilot novel approaches and upscale such as process-oriented approaches as part of implementation the New Urban Agenda (United Nations, 2017) and the Sustainable Development Goal 11.7.

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## Legislative Framework Influencing Public Space Development.

### The South African Experience of Racial Based Segregation Legislation and its impact on Public Space Development

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#### Abstract

People-Centred Public Spaces are attentive to the needs of communities, democratic, and responsive to the spatial environment of cities. Public space is a key component for cities in sustaining a viable people-centred public realm. This article provides an insight into the legislative framework that influenced the expression of public space on the spatial footprint of South African cities. Whilst Legislation does provide an enabling framework for spatial development including that of public spaces, in the South African Context there are contrasting examples of spatial development due to the impact of Apartheid-Related legislation. This article delves further into the impact of legislation that enforced physical separation of race groups on the development of people-centred public space as well the transition to developmental Local Government.

**Keywords:** public space development, legislation, South Africa

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## **Preamble**

During the period from 1948 to 1994 the South African Government implemented legislation that enforced a system of racial segregation and discrimination, which ensured white dominance over other race groups. The Population Registration Act of 1950 required all South Africans to be classified into racial categories of white, black, coloured and indian. The classification determined firstly the persons legal status, and secondly their rights to access in terms of employment, education, housing and other services. One of the most significant legislations that entrenched apartheid was The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 which established the segregation of public spaces. This act enforced the segregation of public facilities such as parks, beaches, and public transportation, ensuring that non-whites had access to inferior amenities which had profound effects on social, economic, and political life in South Africa.

Public space is an essential aspect of urban life. It provides people with access to open areas for recreation, socialisation, and interaction with others. However, during apartheid, public space was used as a tool for segregation, exclusion, and oppression. Under apartheid, public spaces were strictly segregated along racial lines, with white people having access to the best public spaces while non-whites were relegated to inferior and often overcrowded spaces.

One of the most significant examples of the segregation of public space under apartheid was the creation of "homelands" or "bantustans". These were designated areas of the country where black South Africans were forced to live. Homelands were often located in remote and economically underdeveloped areas and were designed to keep black South Africans away from white-dominated urban areas. As a result, public spaces in cities were reserved for white people, while black South Africans were excluded from them. The segregation of public space under apartheid had significant social and economic consequences. It created a sense of division and exclusion, which made it difficult for people from different racial groups to interact and develop a sense of community. It also led to economic disparities, as non-white communities were denied access to the resources and opportunities available in white-dominated public spaces.

In recent years, South Africa has made significant strides in transforming public spaces and making them more inclusive and accessible to all. The government has initiated policies and programs aimed at creating a more inclusive and equitable society, including the creation of public spaces that promote social integration and community development. However, the legacy of apartheid continues to impact public spaces in South Africa today. The country remains deeply divided along racial and economic lines, and many public spaces continue to be exclusive and inaccessible to marginalized communities. It is essential to acknowledge and address this legacy to create truly inclusive and equitable public spaces that promote social integration, economic development, and community building. This article delves further into the impact of legislation that enforced physical separation of race groups on the development of people-centred public space as well the transition to developmental Local Government.

## **Introduction**

Government across all spheres are charged with the responsibility of creating an enabling environment through – but not limited to - the allocation of resources for the production of goods and services, providing the legal and social framework within which

the country would be administered, ensuring the safety of citizens by maintaining law and order, promotion of economic growth thereby creating economic security. For the purposes of this paper, we look specifically at the roles of government using regulatory and legislative mechanisms for creating and enabling an environment (or lack thereof) for the development of public space. Figure 1 below identifies the roles and responsibilities of local government in creating an enabling environment for public space development. The key concept of this paper is to provide an understanding of how apartheid policy impacted public space development through the systematic erosion of powers and functions of Local Government.

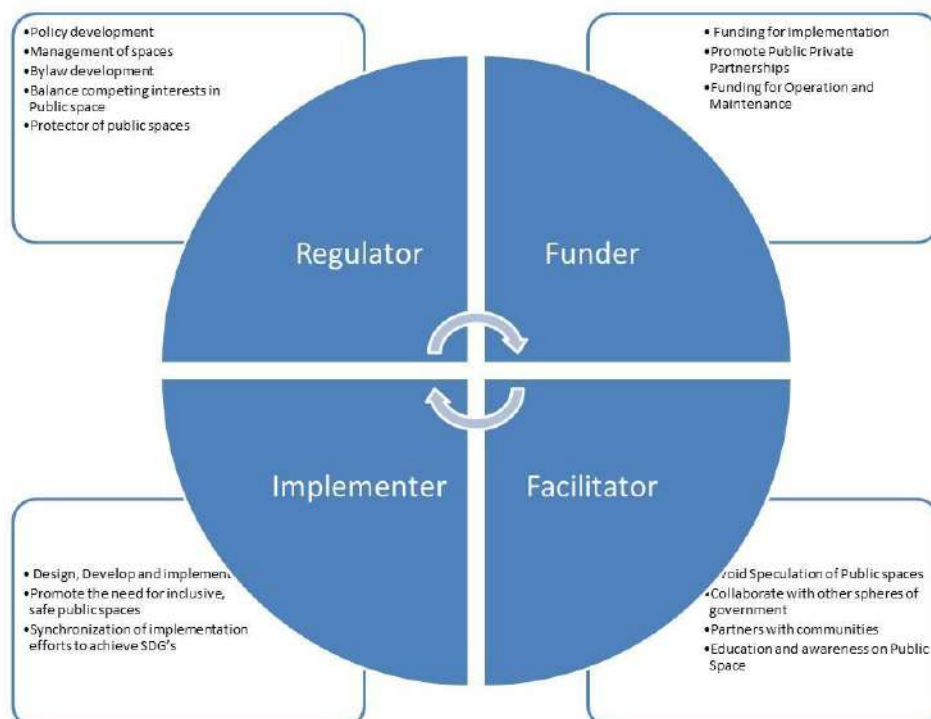


Fig. 1. Role of Government in Public Space Creation. Source: Author.

Before we engaging in the discussion, it is prudent that we contextualise the concept of public space. Relph (1976, p. 4-7) argued that place space occurs at various levels and scales of understanding, this view was further supported by (Smith and Low 2006) to reflect that all public space manifests itself in form ranging from streets, plazas, to the neighbourhood and extending to the city and national governments. Thomas (1991, p. 209-224) further interpreted that public space is only one component of the public realm, this view was supported by LofLand (1998, p.305) and further agreed that public space played a crucial role in sustaining the public realm. There are many ways of defining public space, either using distinguishing elements such as ownership, access, use, and control. Madanipour (1996, pp. 331-355) defined public space as that which is not controlled by individuals, and or organizations and by extension unrestricted to the public. For the purposes of this article, public spaces refer to aspects of ownership,

access, use and control, of which the means of access, use and ownership of the non-white racial groups was strictly controlled by the apartheid government.

### **Pre 1994 Apartheid Planning Legislation**

Pre 1994 the local government system in South Africa was largely based on a colonial and apartheid-based policy, resulting in a local government system that regulated the segregation of urban living spaces along the lines of race and ethnicity (Terreblanche 2002, pp. 441-442). At a spatial level, there were distinctively separated areas for different population and ethnic groups. The Government had adopted the British model of administration followed by different tiers of government from the National state, provincial authorities, and municipalities being the lowest level of government. Based on the powers and functions accorded to municipalities, each municipality enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy, with the white municipalities enjoying the highest levels. Black local authorities (Mather 2002, p. 345) also emerged and were under the “guardianship” of a white local authority, however later on the black local authorities were administered through the National state with the advent of Administration Boards. Full municipal status was granted to Black Local authorities in 1982. For the Indian and Coloured local authorities, Management Committees or Local Affairs Committees were instituted. These committees had limited powers and were largely advisory committees to the white municipality.

Between 1910 and 1983 local authority powers and functions were defined by the provincial ordinances. The provincial ordinance was developed by the provincial councils and defined the scope, nature, and jurisdiction of local government. This resulted in local governments having limited powers to make laws as they were confined to the parameters of the provincial ordinances. The provincial council exercised control over the powers and financial management of local authorities. The local governments were not protected in the 1909 or 1961 constitutions. In 1948 the National Party came to power as the ruling party of the Republic of South Africa and through the implementation of their policies, local authorities were considerably affected and seen as agents of the state. The promulgation of various Acts, which are referred to in the article, meant that policy decisions at a national state level took over control of certain functions of local government. Some of the Acts include The Group Areas Act of 1950 (Act 41 of 1950) which led to the National state determining the segregated spatial residential patterns in local authorities (Parnell 1993, p.473). The Separate Amenities Act of 1953 required local authorities to demarcate facilities based on race and the Bantu Administration Act of 1971 which created the Administration Boards for black local authorities. Local authorities during the apartheid era had limited powers and functions as these were largely dictated by National and provincial government.

The Bantu Self Government Act of 1959 established the administration of areas in the homelands, thereby ending any representation of the black community in the Parliament of South African parliament. However, the Bantu Self Administration Act confirmed the resolutions of the Stallard Commission in 1922 which directed that Africans should be permitted to live in urban areas in order to cater for the requirements of the white population, and they should depart once those needs were met. Whilst there were non-white race groups living in urban areas, enforcement by the state prevented use of

public spaces. Non-white race groups were required to use allocated spaces in spatially defined areas for each of the groups even if it meant travelling to the designated areas for use and enjoyment. This resulted in limited access to public spaces in urban areas for citizens who were non-white.

In 1983 the Constitution provided for the creation of a tricameral parliament with the state president having executive powers and three tiers of government were created based on racial lines excluding the majority black population group. The 1983 Constitution of South Africa did not define the roles, responsibilities and status of local government which then provided for an environment where all decisions related to the local government being managed at a National Level with a few delegated powers to the Provincial Level. In 1985 the Regional Services Council Act provided for the metropolitan service councils that would provide a basket of services such as water, electricity, sanitation, land use management and transport in mainly township areas. It is interesting to note that public space was not considered as part of the basket of services provided.

The Bantu Administration Act also gave birth to Transkei, Venda, Ciskei, and Bophuthatswana, the four designated independent homelands. The construct behind the act was for the black African population would lose South African citizenship and through the homeland structure, they would be able to exercise their limited political rights. Local government administration in the homeland context was very different compared to their white counterparts. Local government in the homeland was more centralized and was established in 1962 by the R293 Proclamation (which created the provision to establish councils in townships). Effectively, Homeland government assumed the development and administration of the R293 towns including that of public spaces. However, the homeland administrators could not exercise full administrative control over the designated areas as this role was carried out by The Department of Development Aid who oversaw the administration and was responsible for the delivery of service in the councils including the provision of public spaces. The Department also controlled the finances and determined the service delivery tariffs for the councils in the homelands. Yet again the black administrative councils had limited powers and jurisdictions of areas allocated to the homelands. These areas fell under the jurisdiction of the tribal authorities and recognised tribal traditions of government, compromising of tribal chiefs or elected council of elders. In most cases, tribal authorities had limited say over development and were largely seen as an extension of the homeland governments. In the 1960s the central government was forced to devise new ways to manage the influx of rural migrants to the urban areas. Urban Bantu Councils which were constituted by the white local authorities was introduced in 1961 by the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development. The council is comprised of councillors elected by the residents or largely through nomination from the white local authorities. This, however, did not prove satisfactory to the National government in that some liberal-minded white local authorities ignored instructions from their counterparts at the National government when nominating individuals as councillors. The development of the Urban Bantu Councils did not reduce the financial burden of immigrations of rural black to urban areas or control the influx of migrants. In 1971 the central government reviewed its policy with the introduction of the Administration Board, this allowed for the central government to take back full control of the township areas from the white authorities. The national government created 22 administration boards which were

later 1984 renamed to Development Boards. These boards were appointed by the Minister of Bantu Administration and consisted largely of white officials. The board was effectively the local authority which administered the development and provision of services including public spaces for black urban areas, these boards were not well received by the black urban populace as there were seen as organs of the apartheid state. The provision of public spaces under the administration boards were limited in the nature and quality of the spaces provided.

In 1982 with the promulgation of the Black Local Authorities Act, black local authorities were granted full local government status that was comparable to white local authorities. The black local authorities continued to be administered and controlled by Development Boards. Post the abolishment of Development Boards 1986, black local authorities were administered at a provincial level through the Community Services Division. Structurally the black local authorities had limited administrative, organizational, and developmental skills. The councillors that made up the committee had limited experience in the local government realm and many of them had only served on the Urban Bantu Council as indicated early these were purely in an advisory capacity. The black local authorities were further impeded by the lack of a viable revenue base, rental boycotts, and rising political instability, which impacted on the provision of viable public spaces

### **Local Government for Coloured and Indian Communities**

Racial integration of local authorities was in opposition to the National Party's politically-sanctioned racial segregation approach of having separate structures for distinctive racial groups. The Group Area Act of 1950 created the foundation for local authorities' structures which provided for racially divided residential areas and consequently provided for divided local authorities for Coloured and Indian areas. The 1962 the Group Areas Amendment Act promulgated three phases of Coloured and Indian local government. Phase One provided for a consultative forum consisting of nominated members that had advisory powers. Phase Two was a Management Committee that was somewhat nominated and partly elected. The management committee had wider roles and more extensive powers. The last phase would be completely independent authorities or city status. Progression to each of the phases was regulated by the Minister of Community Development and administered through the provincial administration. In Natal (now known as KwaZulu-Natal), only four Indian committees progressed to the independent authorities, whilst there were no Coloured committees that evolved to local authorities. There were two primary explanations behind this was, firstly the Coloured and Indian authorities had limited or no commercial and industrial areas that could generate rateable incomes, and residential areas were characterized by low rateable low-cost housing. Therefore, without a proper and effective revenue base, the Coloured and Indian local authorities had limited opportunities to become self-governing. Secondly, the committee participants dismissed the rule of racially differentiated municipalities and defended their participation at the committees as a means to attaining non-racial representation.

As indicated earlier in this article in The South African Constitution of 1983 established the tricameral system of government which had three defined chambers based on racial segregation policies. The House of Assembly managed the affairs of the white



populations whilst the House of Representatives and House of Delegates represented the needs of the Coloured and Indian populations respectively. The Department of Local Government was established for each of the three houses to manage and control local authorities. White local authorities engaged and consulted with the Indian and Coloured Management Committees however there was no obligation for the white authorities to accept their advice. This led to the Promotion of Local Government Affairs Act of 1984, which provided for better communication between the council and management committee and created greater opportunities for committees to manage their affairs. Decision-making powers were not conferred by the Act, and committee structures had to request authority from provincial administrations. The power that could be requested by the management committees was limited to the allocation of business licenses, housing allocations, eviction of tenants, planning, and approval of housing settlements (including the provision or lack thereof of public spaces), and leasing of property. Whilst the opportunity did exist for requesting these powers were not conferred to the management committees and the powers that were promised came under review. Here again, the responsibility for the provision of public spaces was limited.

### **Factors leading to Transitional Local Government**

#### *Fighting against Black Local Authorities*

Shubane, (1991, p.64-65) contended that the opposition of the apartheid regime was largely concentrated in formal urban areas so as to oppose the as a form of opposition to the establishment of black local authorities). The Minister of Development and Planning, Heunis in 1987 conceded that that country was being rendered ungovernable at the local government level and the war against ungovernability has to be fought at the local level. All campaigns against the local government systems were elevated to the central government via Heunis's office. From 1984 township were the centres of "ungovernability" and was characterized by violent protests against the government structures and those who collaborated with these structures. Township residents refused to accept a form of local government that forwarded the apartheid agenda and racial separation. Residents in the townships opposed the people and the very system that was implemented to "represent" them. During this period the emergence of rental boycotts campaigns spread throughout the country. The rental boycotts were against the increased levies from residents in black local authorities. Whilst the rental boycotts were aimed at reducing the levies imposed on residents in black local authorities, as the campaign grew momentum, additional demands were made. To counter the rental boycott campaign the government injected R1.1 billion into the townships to bolster the financial viability of local authorities and also foil attempts to disassemble a level of the apartheid government structure. Following the elections of 1982, the 1988 elections were a failure with the average at the national polls being 25% despite the attempts by the government to detain community leaders and restrict boycott campaigns and provide a "protected" voting environment for those that felt they were being intimidated. The failure in implementing the black local authority by the central government was also evident in the demise of the Indian and Coloured management committee. In 1990 the unbanning of political organisations ushered a new political dynamism in the country. Organisations in the black, coloured, and Indian local areas become more assertive and

continuously fuelled demands for dissolving the management committees and the formation of non-racial municipalities.

#### *Role of Civic Society*

Swillings (2010, pp. 194-201) argued that the creators of the apartheid system failed to consider the ability of civil society to mobilise, organize, think and associate. Swillings further argued that the means of repressing civil society assisted in consolidating its ability to mobilise. The example Swilling used is that of the migrant labour that commuted between the homelands of Ciskei to East London and how the civil society would use the time and protected space to organize and mobilise civic movements to take apart the apartheid system. Likewise in 1973 when Durban factory workers took to the street (public space) in protest which heralded the birth of trade unions. In 1979 unions had won the right to associate and began to win a firm support base from the factory workers and by 1982 brought an end to the time management practices controlled by white factory floor managers. So, whilst the working-class black population had effectively won industrial citizenship through the organized labour unions this began to stimulate the struggle over the control and nature of physical urban spaces in the cities. The unionised environment meant that the majority-black working population was brought into direct contact with managers and ultimately put the industrialised citizen in a better bargaining position for better working conditions and wages. It should be noted that public spaces also played a crucial role in forcing the transition from the apartheid system to one that was more democratic, a few examples of protests and show of solidarity for a just and democratic South Africa in the public realm were at The Union Buildings in Pretoria which has been the site of several significant protests in South Africa's history, including the Women's March of 1956, where over 20,000 women marched to protest against apartheid laws. The Parliament building in Cape Town has been the site of many protests, including student protests in the last decade against tuition fee increases and service delivery protests by communities. Johannesburg CBD: The central business district of Johannesburg has seen many protests over the years, with some of the most notable being the 1976 Soweto Uprising.

The 1986 Congress of the National Party resolved that was a need to argue urban and industrial citizenship on similar principles. This laid the foundations for the dismantling of the apartheid system at a central government level with the principle of a South Africa that is united and “universal suffrage” pursued. There were last-minute efforts to attempt to continue an apartheid-based system where the central government launched a “Winning Hearts and Minds Strategy” which was aimed at countering the boycott campaigns. The project assumed that the majority black population’s primary interest lay in urban services and not in a democracy. The state sadly assumed that the majority of the population would trade urban citizenship for political citizenship. Swillings, (2010, p.194-201) further argued that the disappointment of the “Winning Hearts and Minds Strategy”, increased international isolation, declining support for central government, international pressure from governments and social movements, provide President De Klerk an opportunity for a new approach to governing the country. In February 1990 liberations movements were unbanned and there was an acknowledgment that the liberations movement could not be excluded from reconstituting democratic citizenship.

## **Transitional Local Government**

Atkinson, (2003, pp. 1831-1832) contextualised the state of local government at the start of the transitional phase to democracy. Local government was largely characterised by local authorities that were defined racially, limited or no political legitimacy especially for Black, Coloured and Indian committees, unstable, inefficient, financially unsustainable, under-resourced, varying levels of standards and service delivery, lack of co-ordination and co-operation, to name but a few, all due to the separation of local authorities. Atkinson further argued that the role of local government would be to prioritise public participation and entrench democratic principles at the municipal level. As indicated earlier the experiences of the previous black administered local authorities failed due to proper meaningful participation and minimal legitimacy. For local government to meet the needs of the citizens there has to be a process that determines these needs. It is through addressing these needs that we ensure accountability as meaningful public participation shapes the delivery of services and decision-making processes.

The changes that were required at a local government level with specific reference to public administration were discussed in 1987 at the Winelands Conference hosted by the University of Stellenbosch, to create a public administration that was responsible and accountable. Suggestions that emanated from the conference were that the public administration should be people-centred and not technocratic. The 1987 conference set the foundations for the New Public Administration Initiative in 1991. The initiative was to develop a value system for public administration. The meeting held at Mount Grace resolved that the public administration promote the values of Democracy, inclusiveness, participatory local government, equitable and non-racial access to public services, whilst ensuring that these services are provided efficiently, effectively in a productive, accountable, responsible, and responsive manner.

The Interim Measures for Local Government Act 129 of 1991 co-created through a series of engagements with the African National Congress and the National government creating an opportunity for communities to participate and inform on options such as establishing joint service boards and amalgamations of entities. At the 1992 Kempton Park negotiations, the need for a separate body that negotiated on behalf of the local government was proposed. In 1993 the Local Government Negotiating Forum was constituted with all levels of government represented as well as the South African Civic Association. The purpose of the forum (which consisted of 60 members) was to seek agreement between the government departments represented and the civic association on the process and content of restructuring local government within the overall national negotiations process. The overall resolutions, agreements, and findings from the forum discussions were integrated into the Local Government Transition Act 209 of 1993 as well as the Interim Constitution Act 200 of 1993. The framework for local government transition was detailed in Chapter 10 of the Interim Constitution however the provisions of the constitution only came into being, post the first democratic elections in 1995/6 for local government. Chapter 10 of the Interim Constitution in Section 174 and the provisions therein, gave effect to differentiated local government structures for Metropolitan, District and local municipalities with defined powers, roles, and responsibilities. Further provisions accorded by the Interim Constitution included:

- National and provincial spheres of government cannot encroach on the local government realm which would undermine the local spheres fundamental status

- Gave the elected councillors regulatory powers including that of land use as well as public space,
- Allowed for the creation of municipal entities,
- Allowed for power to impose and collect levies and property taxes across the municipal area,
- Defined equitable share allocations from the national and provincial government,
- Defined the electoral arrangements for local government and the term of office (5 years) was defined,
- Section 245 for a 40% proportional party representation of the elected council, whilst the other 60% was for individual ward member election.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1997, the final Constitution took effect, however, the provisions of the Transition Act remained until December 2000. Which in effect meant that the sections that defined the status of the Municipalities, the establishment of the municipalities, powers, and functions, composition of the municipal councils, were suspended pending a municipal council being confirmed after the first general elections.

### **Defining Local Government Constitutionally**

The South African Constitution specifically Schedule 4 and Schedules 5 defines the role of local government and mandates them to provide services and as the driver of participatory democracy. The role of local government as intended by the Constitution is further entrenched in the Local Government Structures Act 33 of 2000 as well as the Local Government Systems Act 32 of 2000. Local government has three clearly defined categories Category A being the metropolitan municipalities, Category B defined as local municipalities and Category C being District municipal areas (made up of a combination of local municipalities). Category C municipalities were created to capacitate smaller municipalities and facilitate better development between well-resourced municipalities with smaller under-resourced municipalities. The District Municipality is responsible for integrated planning for the entire district, enhancing the capacity of the local municipalities where capacity is deficient, distributing resources between the local municipalities equitably, and ensuring equitable levels of services across all local municipalities in the district.

Legislative powers for the municipality lay in the hands of the elected municipal council. The Constitution clearly defines that local government is autonomous and other spheres namely national and provincial government should not impede or compromise a municipalities ability and rights to apply its powers and functions. These rights extended to the determination of land use and the provision of public space, so effectively local government had complete responsibility for the provision, protection and regulation of public spaces, which did not exist in the past under the apartheid regulations.

The Constitution defines the objectives of local government as follows:

- Provision of a democratically accountable government for local communities
- Sustainable provision of service to communities in the municipality
- Promotion of social and economic development initiatives
- Promotion of a safe and healthy environment
- Involving communities and organisations in local government matters

The Municipal Systems Act provides the statutory framework for the constitutional ideology of local government. The act provides for Local Government as an organ of

state to exercise its executive and legislative powers within a prescribed area as determined by the Local Municipal Demarcation Act. The Act also defines the duties and rights of all stakeholders in the municipality. The scope of the legal and executive authority is also outlined in the Act. The Act also directs municipalities to provide services in a sustainable, accessible and equitable manner. The Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 provides more provisions relating to sustainable financial management. The Systems Act also directs the implementation of a customer management system that would interface between the service provided and the payment for these services.

The Systems Act also deals widely with the issue of participation. The Act directs that “*a municipality must develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory governance.*” The Systems Act gives life to the development of the Integrated Development Plan.

### **Developmental Local Government**

Local government is defined by the Constitution as a sphere that is developmental. Municipalities are ultimately responsible for defining their administrative structures, preparing their budgets, developing planning processes, prioritizing the strategic needs of the municipality, and promoting socio-economic development, within the legislative framework provided by the System and Structures Act. The Constitution also requires that the Local Government participate in programs implemented by National and Provincial spheres.

Developmental local government was first outlined in 1998 in the White Paper on Local Government and defined as municipalities working with all stakeholders to improve their quality of life in a sustainable manner that addresses their social, economic, and service delivery needs. Development local government is based on the principle that all citizens of the country have equitable access to housing, health care, secure access to food, adequate portable water, quality basic education and social security. The White paper characterizes developmental Local Government as follows:

- Maximising socio-economic growth. The White Paper purports that municipalities have the greatest influence over local economic development opportunities especially related to tariffs, user fees, the number of people it employs, and the development and usage of land. Therefore, the local government is positioned to influence job creation and investment.
- The Ability to Integrate and Coordinate programs. The local government has the ability to provide directions and leadership that would enhance the prosperity of the municipalities. The White Paper argues that local government sphere that is the closest form of government to the citizens and coordinates efforts amongst various stakeholders in the municipality.
- Empowerment, Redistribution, and Democratic Development. The paper contends that whilst local governments promote community interests in council, the elected councillors should involve all stakeholders and civic organizations in the design and implementation of programs. Municipalities in the execution of their duties need to identify mechanisms that would promote the participation of excluded and marginalized groups.



- Learning. Global and national changes force local communities to re-envisage how they organize and lead. The local government is required to build political leadership that can facilitate dialogues and networks that work in the interest of the local community to achieve a joint shared vision.

Development Local Government gives direction to each municipality to prepare a strategic developmental oriented tool namely the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). The municipal IDP gives rise to the development concepts enshrined in the constitution. The IDP coordinates the plans of the municipality based on its capacity to deliver, budget availability, and ability to monitor goods and services delivered. The municipal IDP needs to take into consideration developmental programs at a national and provincial level and not sit in isolation from each other.

The IDP can be best described as a restructuring tool for growth and development for local municipalities, because the IDP is central to local government in that it guides all aspects of municipal business and provides all the necessary information about service delivery to the citizens. The IDP process involves all stakeholders and allows for cooperative governance between all spheres of government (as enshrined in the constitution). The process of developing the IDP allows the municipality to assess the current situation in the municipality, define the resources available to the municipality, determine existing skills and capacity, determine social needs of the various communities, and priorities all of the above aspects into a consolidated plan that sets a framework to deliver on the issues identified. These are achieved through the development of an implementation plan that identifies the goals and associated financial and human resources.

For Local government to be developmental it requires a public administration that is ethical, efficient, fair, equitable, and effective in responding to the needs of the citizens. Municipalities need to encourage participation in the policymaking realm to ensure transparency and accountability of the local government. The legislation directs local government to be more in tune with the needs of the citizens. The process of developing the IDP fosters a relationship between the municipality and its stakeholders by ensuring that the municipality engages in a public participation process that is meaningful and allows for all communities to input into the IDP.

The most significant change in legislation regarding public space is the the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) that governs the planning and management of land use and development. The act is designed to ensure that land is used and developed in a sustainable, efficient, and equitable manner, and that public spaces are protected and accessible to all.

SPLUMA has a significant impact on public space in South Africa. The act recognizes the importance of public space as a fundamental aspect of urban life and requires local authorities to consider public space in their planning and development decisions. It also provides for the protection of public spaces and requires local authorities to ensure that public spaces are accessible, safe, and well-maintained.

One of the key ways in which SPLUMA promotes public space is through the creation of public open spaces. Local authorities are required to identify and designate areas for public open spaces and ensure that they are accessible to all members of the community. This includes the provision of amenities such as playgrounds, parks, and other recreational facilities.

SPLUMA also requires local authorities to involve the community in the planning and development of public spaces. This includes consulting with community members on the design and development of public spaces, as well as ensuring that public spaces are responsive to the needs of the community.

However, the implementation of SPLUMA has not been without challenges. In some areas, local authorities have been slow to identify and designate public open spaces, and there have been instances of public spaces being sold off or privatized. There have also been concerns raised about the safety and accessibility of some public spaces, particularly in low-income areas where there may be a lack of resources for maintenance and security.

Despite these challenges, SPLUMA represents an important step towards creating more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable public spaces in South Africa. By recognizing the importance of public space and providing for its protection and management, the act has the potential to transform urban life and promote social integration, community building, and economic development.

## Conclusion

Racially based legislation severely impacted the provision of people-centred public spaces by constraining local governments' role in executing its mandates to provide safe places for citizens. All aspects of local government roles and functions as identified in Figure 1 were dictated by National Policy. However, as one transitioned from racially-based regulations to post-apartheid development local government we can see a strong paradigm shift to the allocation of powers and functions to local government to deliver effective and efficient services. The challenge for local government in the current context is to achieve equitable spatial transformation and one of the key components of spatial transformation in public space. The development of a public space strategy that is people-centred can assist in spatially transforming South African cities.

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## From the Diversity of Endogenous Spaces to the Specificity of Exogenous Space.

### The case of Bab Lamrissa Square in Sale Morocco

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#### Abstract

This article presents the social uses and practices of users through their manifestations, in order to evaluate the evolution of the relationship between the transformation of spatial structures and the production of landscapes representative of the image of the urban area.

In order to support the hypothesis, the field of investigation is focused on the public space of Bab Lamrissa, which now represents a natural extension, a kind of immediate "periphery" of Sale, which abolishes the physical boundaries. Deciphering the forms and methods of social allocation of the Bab Lamrissa square reveals a differentiation of uses and divisions, establishing the courtyard as an open-air urban laboratory.

**Keywords:** Salé, Medina, Bab Lamrissa, public space, appropriation, uses

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## **Introduction**

Questioning the notion of public spaces in the means of Moroccan cities using western vocabulary is akin to a risky adventure. The literature that has addressed this topic is fundamentally divided into two types, those that deny and those that confirm the existence of endogenous spaces that fulfil functions similar to public spaces in the western sense.

Moral: public spaces in ancient cities cannot be conceptually approached by them, regardless of its socio-spatial and perceptions of society.

In this context, we can retain that the organization of the Medina, the relations of neighbourhood, social control govern and circumscribe the limits of public spaces that remain viscous and elusive. This particular socio-spatial configuration forms the exit spaces of women who find themselves in the process of negotiating about the exit spaces and thus their freedom. A daily battle becomes thematic in the new public spaces of the contemporary city.

Knowing the theoretical hypotheses relating to the structure and formation of public spaces in a Moroccan city requires understanding this notion in the context of Medina.

As an evolving traditional tapestry, its cultural foundations and its social transformations, this knowledge is essential to understand the genesis of the public space in the case of the Moroccan city and particularly the case of Sale.

To support this concept, we based our field investigations on the public space of Bab Lamrissa, which now constitutes a natural extension, a kind of immediate “periphery” of Sale that abolishes the physical boundaries.

## **The Medina, an apparatus of endogenous public spaces and hierarchy:**

In the context of the Moroccan city, understanding the notion of the public space is intimately linked to the various changes of the Moroccan urban phenomenon, inseparable from the profound transformations experienced by the traditional Moroccan urban space, namely the Medina. Approaching and appropriating public space in the classical city (the Medina) requires a reading that takes into account the original fabric and its evolution, called “the cultural foundations and the social transformations” (Navez-Bouchanine, 1992) but also religious principles. “Certainly, the organization of the Medina has been on contextual and ideological grounds, but these alone cannot explain the practices of the public space. Local customs and cultures contribute to shape the relationships between people and their environment” (Karibi, 2015, p. 259). Despite the absence of geometric regularity, dear to western rationality (Fejjal, 2015, p.265): “although an uninitiated visitor might suffer from vertigo and experience some disorientation, the slawis found the streets of their city modest and neat” (Brown, 2001, p.71). The urban fabric of the city reveals its own rationality which characterized by a separation between the residential area and the business zone, by arranging its traffic pattern in hierarchical networks<sup>1</sup>.

From the morphological point of view, the great mosque (Al-Masjid Al-Jami) forms a prominent central element of the Medina in which everything converges and flows from

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<sup>1</sup> It presents itself as filtered spaces from the doors to the living quarters. The raw material is made step by step, to arrive and sold as a complete product at the centre. This gates logic is also valid for the taxation of goods that enter and leave the city, the passages, whether at Bab Sabta or Bab Fez, were strictly controlled to levy taxes on the goods entering and leaving the city.



it, as if it is a heart. As a community space, but also a public one, the agglomeration organized around this structuring equipment:" the most prestigious markets and workshops [are] located in the centre of the city near the main holy element, the mosque<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, we [find] the undesirable elements near the periphery". Thus, from the centre to the sides, the various elements of the city are organized according to its nobility and its symbolic value.

The central position of the Great Mosque<sup>3</sup> symbolizes the dominance of the urban, cultural and religious aspect of the Medina. It represents an essential spatial component that organizes and determines the movements of the believers who have the opportunity to meet at the prayer time (five times a day). These places were conducive to exchange, consult, pray, study or simply meet to talk (Brown, 2001, p. 81), leading to maximization of social interaction and fulfilment of community life.

All production and service activities were organized by a spatial hierarchy; as a nerve centre in the city. It is precisely around this community but also in the public space where we have easily seen the expression of the preferential evaluation of certain noble professions, which is somewhat closely related to worship: "Walking down this street<sup>4</sup>, one first passed by the tailors' shops and the craftsmen's workshops." (Brown, 2001, p.71). The services adjoining the mosque support its position as "structuring equipment", these supplements are compatible with a whole range of services essential to daily life; have societal and public<sup>5</sup> dimension. Thus, we consider the space inside the Medina to be public and communal when groups of people come together around a common reference at a specific time. Of course, it can be a national group ("the Moroccans"), a religious community ("the Muslims") and a neighbourhood community ("the population"). Thus, practices create daily life habits, which give certain legitimacy on the conquest of particular places; but these practices overlap with others, hence the frequent resort negotiation to occupy such space at such time. These were practical spaces whose boundaries were flexible.

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<sup>2</sup> The Masjid Djami is often translated as Great Mosque (Friday Mosque), by its functions and its aspect, becomes the most important public building of the city. From a functional point of view, the Great Mosque is associated with building of different functions (prayer place or school) and from this functional diversification results in great diversity and formal richness. Inside the Great Mosque, the courtyard usually contains basin and often a sundial. The prayer hall may have a maqsura (a separate place) for the prince and possibly another for women. Its main elements are the mihrab (a decorative niche in the qibla wall), the minbar, the dikka (a platform for the second call to Friday prayer), and the kursi (desk for the Quran); the prayer hall is also decorated with precious boxes containing other things such as Qurans, carpets, lamps, and incense burners. The obligation to perform the ritual ablutions has often led to the installation of bathrooms outside the mosque.

<sup>3</sup> Moroccan mosques do not build in the same architectural order, it presents over centuries and according to regional trends and various plans; these also differ according to the land area, its urban location and the topographical planning. However, the constituent elements of the plan remain almost the same in most large mosques, and its typical scheme consists of the following architectural blocks: a prayer room with naves and wings, a room for the minbar, a room for the imam, an open-air courtyard with or without corridors and a room for ablutions; these buildings may contain other annexes: a burial chamber and Bayt Al- Gnaz.

<sup>4</sup> This is the ramp of the *cadi*, *Aqbat Al Qadi* refer to the house of Abdellah Ben Khadra, a judge and president of the fez court at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>5</sup> Public bathrooms, ovens for public use, markets, Quran schools, shops, notary offices, hairdressers, pharmacies, bookstores, etc. In general, these services are for hygiene, mind, education, health, food, etc; which intensify social relations.

The large<sup>6</sup> dynamic and attractive arteries came to complete the device of the public space inside the Medina. They daily welcome abundant flows of users, visitors and especially commercial activities; the use of this space is regulated by secular rules that all the population knows and respects.

Even if it is described as massive, the smallness of these spaces does not seem to harm their attractiveness. The rush in these commercial arteries is tolerated, and individual personal space is reduced without any problem, as this place is invaded by the flow of pedestrian traffic from various populations of all socio-economic groups of different ages and genders. These spaces are noisy in the morning and afternoon, but it regains its original shape and calm in the evening while waiting for the next day.



Figure 1: Land use plan of the Bab Lamrissa public space. Source: INAU, 2017  
Bab Lamrissa, a tacit and consent coexistence of users.

The urban design of the Medina reflexes the reality of the population of the idyllic Islamic city and its distinctive places. Moreover, the appearance of new spaces cannot be understood without putting it in an urban context, characterized by the configuration of the city's centralization, its representation and its exploitation by public

<sup>6</sup> The term "large" is relative to the scale of the Medina and its urban components (except the Great Mosque) because when you change the scale-spaces of the Medina, even the largest ones enter into a small relatively sphere.

actors as well as the applicable urban governance system. The current goal of the public authorities is to create new public spaces that characterized by its continuity between commodity and urbanity. Consequently, the old centre is no longer necessarily the organizing element of the urban space; the new peripheral places are gaining important rules from a functional, social or symbolic point of view. Thus, we are witnessing a reconfiguration of territorial identities (Depending on work, housing, leisure, etc) and multiplication of socialites is sometimes ephemeral and fragile.

The Bab Lamrissa space located on the immediate peripheral of the medina of Sale corresponds to the formation of secondary centres and centralities, with a recreational specialization and homogenous attendance with powerful common appropriation (figure 1). Bab Lamrissa Square is defined by the buildings' elements and prestigious heritage, dominated by the great Bab Lamrissa from which it takes its name and the ancient walls of the city of Sale.

In January 2012, a significant enterprise was taken to improve the Bab Lamrissa courtyard as part of the development project of Bouregreg valley, aims to rethink this space, which previously crowded with vehicular traffic as a real living place, attractive and enjoyable for the locals (the population of the city).

The design of this square tends to seek a balance between green and mineral spaces, by combining lawns with more mineral spaces. The Bab Lamrissa square will allow daily relaxation at leisure (Walking, relaxation, games, etc.) while allowing the services of temporary event functions. (Exhibitions, festivals, concerts, etc) As for street furniture, the square is punctuated by 82 gray granite seats, apart from the benches and lamp posts; street furniture is rare.

*a. Bab Lamrissa cohabitation and coexistence according to a bipolar sharing scheme.*

In general, Bab Lamrissa is a set of concrete practices of proximity, hard to understand and sometimes change according to time and event. It also falls within the register of the centralization of places associated primarily with entertainment and the neighbourhood parallel to the fact that space is used freely (or at least without social restrictions). These practices concern phenomena ranging from production to simple occupation space, including transformation as an intermediate state.

Mixed and shared space between teenagers, young people, seniors, and especially women who accompanied by their children or grandchildren, mostly from the neighbourhoods of Sale. Bab Lamrissa square transformed from its base function into a kind of symbiosis of uses that everyone respects: "the rules of use underlie interactions between individuals and groups define the visible or latent limits of public space. You tacitly know how far you can go and what you must avoid" (Dris, 2005, p. 203). The walker hesitates to mingle with the crowd. Bab Lamrissa maintains a distanced, detached relationship with the square without becoming one with it. And the frequentation of this place by families is one of the main reasons given to justify good moral and ethical behaviour. Thus, the tacit physical participation that defines the boundaries of appropriate places (figure 2).

In the square, we find families accompanied by their children who have taken the northern part of the place, it is decorated with public benches in grey granite that permit its users to observe, discuss, and freely socialize while watching over their children playing. This location lets street vendors reside in this area, taking the available opportunities.



Figure 2: Diagram of sharing the Bab Lamrissa space between users.  
Source: photos and realization, A. Moussalih 2015.

Women always choose the same places to sit while their children meander in front of them in all directions. Strollers act as a bulwark against potential intrusions. Therefore, it allocates a portion of the public space, but leaves no chance for potential pushchairs or other competing users who would like to share it: “Not all people [go] to green places to engage with others. Sometimes they need a private space for themselves. This kind of people [like] only to observe others from afar” (Rasidi et al, 2012, p. 465). Thus, women constructed a place of “privacy” in a space open to all (Provansal, 2002).

The behaviour of sitting in public constitutes a form of expression, a language, and a territorial making of the appropriate space. Sitting in the city is a scene played out by at least three actors: “the one or those who sit in a group, the artistic or spontaneous device which is itself a geographical and institutional location [...] and finally the others, the passers-by, the dwellers most of the time unknown [...]. In fact, sitting on a bench means a sharing of the occupied space of co-existence rules, which supposes and favours a form of socialization” (Jole, 2003, p. 108).

On the other hand, we also find teenagers and young adults who exercise a counterweight between the users of Bab Lamrissa Square and who preferred to keep the occupied spaces in the South of it by turning them into actual land “mini-football”. Thus, the space directly participates in its structure, making it possible to share and limit or even exceed the extension of game activity (Gibout and Lebreton 2014? P. 73).

Searching for interactions through playing is an opportunity to learn the basics of the game, and then it becomes the prime motivator for the audience. Because, in the absence of pre-organized and specialized spaces, the crowd adapts to places not intended for them. Since then, it has become the game that organizes and polarizes the space.

The social learning integration and negotiation through the development of rules of the game within each game, made up of children and teenagers. The public space is also the place where a dominant sexist social practice is reproduced in our societies, built on sex separation (Benghabrit Remaoun 1997). Thus, girls and boys play in the same space, differentiated by the relative proximity of their mothers. This allows a permanent control of the mother who exercises her authority from a distance, through gaze and gesture (Figure 3).

This scheme fits perfectly with the sharing of Bab Lamrissa space. Thus, the ball game is played by children and teenagers in the southern part, while the girls play their favourite games alongside their mothers in the northern side. On the other hand, mixed games occupy the intermediate or transitional sides. Each type of public have drawn the limits of their own space has succeeded in preserving and protecting it from possible intrusions.

Boys games	Mixed games	Girls games
Soccer	Bicycles - scooters Rollerblades	Hopscotch - Jump rope
In the North	Intermediate parts	In the South

Figure 3: Diagram of the games practiced in the public space of Bab Lamrissa according to gender. Source: 2015.

*b. Bab Lamrissa, when the sacred invents new forms and new temporalities of use and appropriation.*

Although temporary and punctual, the installation in public space is a reflection of the ordinary, mundane, ritual, or leisure appropriations of a space traversed, consumed and shared by very different social patterns. In Bab Lamrissa courtyard, the highlights of the public events take place during the week, the weekend and the summer (spring and summer) or in the late afternoon and evening during the month of Ramadan, which imposes its rhythm and atmosphere; the day is framed by the call to prayer. In fact, everyday life is no longer punctuated by the muezzin except during the month of Ramadan. This data particularly influenced our schedule of observation and interviews with users. During Ramadan, the square knows a peak of animation only in two major periods of the day: either between the prayer of Al-Asr (in the afternoon) and the prayer of Al-Maghrib (from the sunset corresponding to the time of breaking the fast), or from the prayer of Al-Ichaa (from the night) until a late time at night.

In fact, these two peaks of animation lead to intensity in the place, with great differentiation in terms of types of uses, profiles, and forms of appropriation. The first period of attendance at the square begins with the prayer of Al-Asr and continues until sunset, the time of breaking the fast. The few green spaces are invested and transformed into a stopover offering freshness and rest during the summer and the



periods of heat waves, especially the benches are hardly shaded and do not encourage users to stay there (Figure 4). During this period, users tirelessly take turns in the square and each finds a suitable job for his age and physical abilities: “Everyone tries to pass the time in his way,” says one of our interviewees. Children, accompanied by their parents, run this time in all directions (bicycles, scooters, roller-skates, etc.). Adults and seniors try to make a minimal effort by taking shelter in the shaded areas of the yard to enjoy the coolness. During this time of the day, young people find in team games, particularly football, and a distinct pastime that occupies the entire place. Those who cannot find a vacant space to make their stadium or play space turn to under the new Hassan II Bridge. On the other hand, the absence of women during this period raises more than one question.



Figure 4: The occupation of green spaces in Bab Lamrissa Square during Ramadan.  
Source: A. Moussalih, 2014

During the second period, between the Al-Ichaa prayer (the night prayer) and until a late hour in the night, the square finds another atmosphere; it is completely transformed. Bab Lamrissa space acquires a new configuration and a new spirit. In short, the exceptional atmosphere of Ramadan sets in. This sacred month shifts all the urban activity from day to night. Night family outings are increasing; the municipality and cultural associations are organizing to decorate the public space with lively evenings (artistic and cultural events) in the open air. It attracts the crowd from all over the city and women end up reclaiming their rights to the scene, whether they are accompanied by a child, brother, and parent or alone. The Bab Lamrissa square becomes a place of traditional and local outings for them (Figure 5).



Figure 5: female attendance at the Lamrissa Ramadan festival 2017. Source: A. Moussalih, 2017

By evoking the question of the temporality and frequency of women in the public space, we are actually wondering about the constraints of access to public space. Thus, for more traditional populations, such as those living in the medina, the presence of women is not tolerated at night (Van de Bovenkamp and Vloeberghs 2015). Public space is socially forbidden to them as they can only access it with the company of a man, out of respect for customs and security reasons. Only the month of Ramadan makes it possible to derogate from this. During this month, the night outings of families and women multiply. The square takes on a ceremonial character, with free events attracting large crowds, especially men. Women also go there accompanied by their husbands or children: “The public space witnessed a frequent attendance by women during this period in a sort of truce [...]. But this triumph of celebration over the taboos and the habit mode of everyday life become ephemeral since the end of Ramadan once again re-established the monotony of daily life and the “curfew” on women” (Dris 2004, p. 261).

Despite the social, temporal, and cultural restrictions related to the use and the massive presence of women in public spaces, during this month, families are more tolerant of young girls going out after sunset, which shows the important role played by the month of Ramadan as a liberal time-space.

Regardless of the spirituality and the cruelty of this month of penance, the evening becomes the place where psychological and religious burdens seem to be lightened: “If the day is overloaded with taboos, the night observes its temporary lifting” (Bennani-Chraïbi, 2000).

If men and women wear modest clothes and most women abstain from makeup at least during the day, in the evening, after a long day of fasting, the instincts regain their hold. Many girls allow themselves to wear “daring outfits”. This behaviour becomes an actual social phenomenon during the nights of Ramadan. Thus, the public space becomes the stage where several forms of furtive flirting are discreetly deployed, with a polite appearance, but sometimes aggressive.

c. *Bab Lamrissa, a space of comfort and closeness.*

The public space of Bab Lamrissa is then more than just a place to go out. It becomes a space of comfort and proximity: “Urban spaces [...] could be inclusive spaces. They can be considered as potentially spaces to stimulate social interaction. However, modern

society nowadays does not have many intense social interactions with strangers. Most of them feel comfortable communicating only within their own social group and do not feel the need to interact with others. [...]. As long as the presence of others is enjoyed by one, the comfortable distance between them can be ignored” (Rasidi et al. 2012, p.465). This corresponds, according to the urban sociologist Chombart de Lauwe “gatherings of men who do not necessarily constitute a group, yet are linked with common representations, communication facilities and certain similar behaviors” (de Lauwe, 1979). In other words, the regulars develop a mutual knowledge within the local space they occupy.

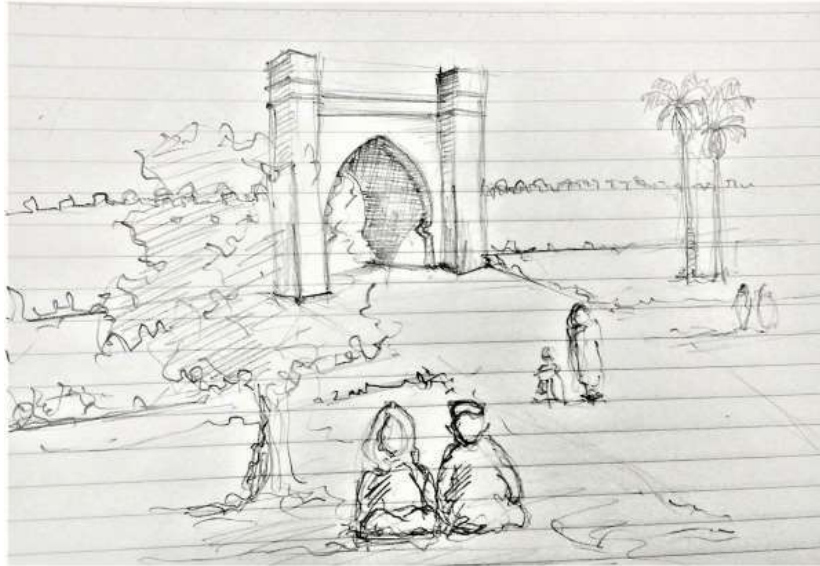


Figure 6: Bab Lamrissa a space of comfort and closeness.  
Source: Sketch drawn by Imane Brahimi, 2017

An inclusive and sociable space, Bab Lamrissa becomes the only refuge to get rid of boredom, discuss family problems and restrictions; it is materialized by the expression “نسى الهم” “forget the worries of everyday life”. This idea emerges directly from interviews conducted with the population who are accustomed to this place, and in particular with women. This sociability can be called “primary”, according to the definition of Caille (1949) it is the act of individuals and groups that are mostly composed of retired elderly people from underprivileged classes and often plagued by loneliness and boredom (figure 6).

In fact, the interviews that were the most difficult to translate in order to retain their semantic content were those who was given by the women of Bab lamrissa. Their expressions were short, colourful and full of meaning, such as: "forget about life worries", "breathe fresh air", "and stretch your legs". They draw their words and lines directly from the Moroccan cultural reference, which makes it difficult to transpose into another language.

These women's testimonies indicate another dimension that cannot directly be inferred from their comments, which is attachment to the neighbourhood: buying and consuming nearby, and enjoying leisure activities in the neighbourhood. This dimension is

traditionally associated with the emotional ties that bind the populations to their place of residence. Bab Lamrissa square as a public space embodies this function through its proximity and accessibility from the city of Sale. This form of appropriation of the square updates a reflection expressed by Kenneth L. Brown on Sale according to which the city has largely overflowed the walls of the city (Brown, 2001, p. 53).

## Conclusion

Deciphering the forms and methods of social allocation of the Bab Lamrissa Square reveals a differentiation of uses and division, establishing the courtyard as an open-air urban laboratory.

Bab Lamrissa Square, thanks to its location linked to the old city old Sale, has succeeded in providing the city with an opening to its external space and offering its populations a space for social warming. The users, through forms of use and appropriation of this square, have established a balance in the logic of implicit and consenting coexistence of uses. Moreover, the month of Ramadan transforms the scene and imposes its rhythm and atmosphere. Ramadan succeeds in transferring daytime activities to nighttime. Observing the way in which these frequent actions are implemented, these uses and forms of appropriation make it possible to make the observation that this public space must figure as a new emerging centrality confirming its position as an organizer and polarizer on the scale of the Medina and Sale.

The female presence in this public space reveals the evolution of the spaces in women's daily life within the Arab cities and turns it into a symbol of freedom and emancipation. The studied space represents "multi-use" places that have been invested by local populations, not only to imply leisure activities (programmed activities), but also for "informal" and "infringement" activities.

The uses and forms of appropriation invite us to question how the making of urban space tends to assign a particular identity to a place by mobilizing discourses and arrangements that aims to anchor it in reality. However, the remarkable contradictions concerning designers, producers' orientations, most often, hide a lack of knowledge of the place by the last, an impossibility of assimilating to its core and dispossessed it, little by little, of its substance.

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## Public Space in Cape Town. It's not about design

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### Abstract

Public space 'failure' is often attributed to 'poor' design. Perceptions such as these open the way for vanity projects at the expense of interrogations of the less glamorous issues that may lead towards practical solutions. Design over-emphasis and the notion that open space is a 'nice to have', further detracts from its many important roles, particularly for vulnerable communities living in Cape Town.

This article considers the challenges of delivering open spaces capable of playing multiple roles. Budget availability for maintenance and management, socio-economic issues, planning and institutional complexity and fragmentation, insufficient or incorrect community engagement, lack of inter-sectoral collaboration within professions, and single use design; are some of the challenges that underlie public space failure – in addition to design.

Resolving these challenges is important because of public space's critical role. Public space is the 'glue' that holds cities together. It is part of stormwater management, provides access to economic opportunities, improves safety, structures food access and agriculture and supplies ecological infrastructure for climate adaptation. Whilst design is not the biggest challenge, good design, appropriate norms and standards, integrated built environment practice, monitoring and evaluation metrics, can enable pathways for change necessary to affect a transition towards resilience.

**Keywords:** public space, parks, resilience, ecological infrastructure, urban health

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## Introduction

Is design the reason public spaces fail? Social media and growing public interest have made 'design' and 'urbanism' more accessible. This interest is exciting and important, but without critical insights, tends to over-emphasise glossy representations leading to the perception that the panacea for public space is re-imagining, re-design and private sector investment (City of Cape Town, 2019). Engagements through the City of Cape Town's Open Space Working Group suggest it is not.

'Public space' serves many purposes and has overlapping functions. They are productive landscapes that feed and replenish groundwater reserves. They are biodiversity areas that build climate adaptation and mitigation. They are streets, public squares and community gardens that foster community cohesion and give space for group and individual expression. They are parks and sports fields that create safe active and passive recreation for adults and children. They are river corridors and nature reserves where nature's web enables ecological functioning for eco-services. They are streets, pavements and markets where entrepreneurs make a living and food bought. It is where people gather to protest and exercise democratic rights. Public space is the 'glue' that holds the city and people together. Open space is the bones and life-blood of our cities. And if well-designed, constructed and maintained, it is potentially attractive and worthy of media interest and promotion.

But if design is not the problem, what is?

Cape Town is South Africa's oldest city. It is also the second largest metropolitan city, renowned for its natural landscapes and unusual, beautiful *vynbos* (flora). Located on the tip of the African continent, it straddles a peninsula flanked by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Developed by the Dutch settlers around a vegetable garden along the Dutch East Indian trade routes, it has played multiple roles throughout South Africa's history. Today, Cape Town faces escalating uncertainty emanating from climate change, foregrounded by the 2015-2018 drought. Even though the city emerged from this drought more water resilient, it is likely that the future holds other, equally destructive and disruptive shocks and stresses. Public space is an important part of managing these events because it offers adaptability and flexibility that embody resilience. City policy and strategy broadly recognises the important role of public space, but a number of challenges hinder ongoing work.

## Challenges for public space in Cape Town

Challenges to public space occur on many levels within and beyond the competence of local government. They are firstly, South Africa's historic apartheid legacy, secondly economic and social decay, thirdly institutional complexity, misalignment and fragmentation that is compounded finally, by a lack of systems thinking and professional recognition of inter-sectoral connectivity of outcomes and the need for flexibility. These establish the dominant co-existent 'wicked problems' - in *addition* to design.



Figure 1: District Six is an area located adjacent to the CBD. In terms of the Group Areas Act of 1950, it was declared a 'white' area. All black and coloured residents were forcibly removed in the early 1970s and relocated to settlements distributed across the Cape Flats. The area was razed to the ground and is still largely undeveloped. Source and copyright Paul Alberts.

### *Socio-economic issues*

Cape Town's city-makers (spatial planners, urban designers, landscape architects, transport planners and economists) battle the apartheid legacy that racially segregated South Africans and embedded structural inequality through spatial planning and under-investment in black and coloured areas (Matzopoulos, et al., 2019). Apartheid policy implementation included the forced removal of black and coloured Capetonians to the Cape Flats. This has caused inter-generational trauma that persists today, manifesting in a variety of ways, including mental health, one of the city's greatest resilience challenges (City of Cape Town, 2019).

Despite successive policy regimes across spheres of government, spatial and economic planning since 1994<sup>1</sup> has disappointingly effected little structural change. Instead, economically-derived racial segregation has replaced apartheid policy and continues to reinforce the divided city. The poorest still live on cheap land at a distance from amenities, jobs, schools and quality public space. This perpetuates historic economic inequality and limits the potential for social integration and economic mobility. Government-funded human settlements projects, intended to provide homes and spatial transformation, flounder under the load of demand and fall significantly short of expectations created by political campaigns – and good place-making. Ten years of national economic stagnation and the more recent mismanagement, 'state capture' corruption and COVID-19, have further exacerbated service delivery and

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<sup>1</sup> South Africa held its first democratic election in 1994 and those aged eighteen and older were able to vote, regardless of race.



social issues<sup>2</sup>. These encompass unemployment, mental illness, drug dependency, gender-based violence, gangsterism, crime, food insecurity, illegal land occupation, poverty-related communicable (HIV and AIDS) and non-communicable diseases typically experienced in vulnerable areas within communities located on the Cape Flats.



Figure 2: Wetland encroachment in Kommetjie. Source: Bruce Sutherland, City of Cape Town.

The built environments in these areas are characterised by overcrowding, rudimentary housing (formal and informal), insufficient basic services, inadequate public spaces, overcrowded public transport and degraded natural environments.

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<sup>2</sup> The city has a 'vulnerability' mapper that identifies areas of low resilience using GIS layers that include socio-economic data, population density, amongst others. The mapper was extensively used during the COVID-19 pandemic for both the humanitarian relief and the health responses.



Insufficient land for housing has resulted in the ongoing occupation of wetlands or floodplains that is visibly 'vacant' but required for flood management (Figure 3) that due to climate change is expected to increase in severity (Figure 4). Even though those living in these areas are aware of the risk, land occupations continue, reducing biodiversity areas and ecological capital needed for resilience and climate adaption, whilst also placing an additional burden on the City's disaster response resources. COVID-19 research further found that communities living in these areas were more vulnerable to infection than those living in other, better-serviced areas (Berkowitz, et al., 2021). This highlights the international phenomenon of interconnected urban environments and health that create a supporting virtuous cycle for urban environment and health, and the widening inequality gap represented by the uneven distribution of public space (Love & Kok, 2021).



Figure 3: Flooded areas towards the northwest of the city. Source: Bruce Sutherland, City of Cape Town.

#### *Planning for public open space*

For families living in dense, over-crowded conditions without outdoor space - public space becomes a necessary extension of living space in addition to providing livelihood opportunities. These spaces - parks, streets, utility reserves, detention ponds and spaces associated with social infrastructure (libraries, clinics etc.) - are not designed or planned for these uses (Figure 5).

Open spaces that are planned and designed – such as parks – are also in high demand in vulnerable areas where populations are large - and young. While use is positive,



degradation resulting from over-use, combined with vandalism and low levels of maintenance, can render spaces unusable and contribute towards the general appearance of neglect and decay.



Figure 4 (left): Children playing on a discarded mattress in a newly developed areas, Greenville, Fisantekraal, 2022. Source: Bruce Sutherland, City of Cape Town.



Figure 5 (left): Backyard community in Kensington, Cape Town; Source: Author  
Figure 6 (right): Children playing at a park degraded from over-use, Greenville, Fisantekraal, 2022. Source: Author.

*Several issues can cause 'over-use'*

Firstly, an under-supply of public space because of inadequate planning norms and standards. Secondly, in-situ densification by 'backyarders'<sup>3</sup> within a property (Figure 6) resulting in densification not considered in initial social services planning.

This kind of densification is different to the establishment of informal settlements that occur in the absence of spatial and infrastructure planning. High density and procedural complexity make the retrospective introduction of services such as fire response routes, water and sanitation or public space particularly difficult.

The phasing of dense housing development projects also affects public space success, particularly if development phasing and public space provision are not considered together. High levels of use of new public spaces, before the planting is established, can cause damage and exhaust maintenance budgets<sup>4</sup>, even before hand-over to the local authority (Figure 7). The combination of these two dynamics contributes towards the shortage of attractive, public parks in poorer communities, as per the park in Greenville, Fisantkekraal. Even though this park did not meet planners' or designers' expectations, it is popular and well-used in contrast to other, more recently developed open spaces in the area.

*Unused public open spaces may be 'unused' because they are vandalised, degraded or unsafe for children and therefore unusable, incorrectly creating the perception that they are surplus to need.*

The city has in some cases disposed of these types of spaces over time to reduce maintenance commitments and to focus on fewer, larger parks. This reduces the availability of public space and sets up a vicious cycle that potentially compromises other public spaces, because under-supply results in over-use causing degradation and so on. Over-use plays a role in public space deterioration, but - theft, vandalism and violent crime - possibly play an even greater role. Gang violence within communities makes public space unsafe for communities and City maintenance staff alike, restricting use and maintenance access that also inhibits investment.

Regular maintenance is key to the success of public space. Resources to maintain parks have sharply declined since the post-1994 local government restructuring in 2000. From 120, parks staff, the Constantia area, a wealthy neighbourhood, now has 24, that service the original area, in addition to two other areas (City of Cape Town, Resilience Department, 2022). This team works across their designated area, unlike the Green Point Urban Park that has embedded staff on site for daily oversight and management. A sharp deterioration of public realm quality is noticeable in areas where on-site resources are not available, highlighting their integral role in building open space sustainability. It follows that business plans should be prepared, in addition to plans and designs, that include these resources to protect the investment and ensure usability. Business plans could also include alternative income-streams from restaurant concessions or similar. These are difficult to implement because of asset ownership vagaries and complexity in public/private sector contracting, limiting their potential for activation and safety.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Backyarders' refers to the people (tenants) who live in informal structures within a property where there is a main house or formal structure.

<sup>4</sup> Landscape projects do not always include a minimum maintenance period of eighteen months and for this reason, plants may not survive.



*Public space is integral to many departments' work, creating institutional complexity.* Narrow definitional issues further affect management, resource and budget availability within the City that extend to issues around mandates, roles and responsibilities. At an operational level, maintenance mandates between departments render some areas, such as hard landscaped urban squares, outside 'normal' maintenance mandates because they are not viewed as 'parks'. Nor are they part of roads infrastructure. Consequently, these areas are not properly maintained<sup>5</sup> or programmed for active use, causing decay and reduced usability.



Figure 7: Jack Muller Park, Bellville. The Kuils River forms an important structuring element to the park, but has limited potential because of poor water quality. Source: Bruce Sutherland, City of Cape Town.

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<sup>5</sup> Designation would also determine the type of maintenance and as such, a road asset would be maintained differently to a park.

A variety of mandate issues also emerge in catchment management where engineers are typically concerned with flood management, rather than environmental management and maintain natural waterways as part of stormwater 'infrastructure'. Whilst this has been the practice historically, there is a growing awareness of the need for greater environmental sensitivity in water resource management (Official, 2022).

These issues are material to the development of resilient, ecological infrastructure assets that meet multiple objectives and therefore straddle more than one line department mandate. Projects that would be affected include those that look to use public space in a variety of ways such as for stormwater storage and treatment for non-potable use within the public space, or broader precinct. Project initiation phases must therefore first clarify asset ownership to determine departmental responsibility and future management and maintenance. Cautions for this process reside in the possibility that a line department, such as a water and sanitation department - have interest limited to water supply. This may affect the appetite for maintenance of elements that are considered 'non-water' but are integral to overall functioning. These considerations are important because urban water systems are becoming progressively more hybridised and integrated with urban systems including open space, blurring functional and institutional boundaries.

Understanding these complexities will be key for the conceptualisation and implementation of new open space projects, particularly if they are to deliver multiple resilience 'dividends'.

*Professional recognition of inter-sectoral connectivity of outcomes.*

The call for greater urban resilience permeates policy, strategy, planning and institutional arrangements. Identifying acupuncture points to effect implementation will require a deep understanding of the broader governance. Challenges however emerge in the built environment space because 'public space' is incorrectly pigeon-holed as 'parks'. Streets, nature reserves, agricultural areas, markets, plazas, biodiversity areas, flood management areas and groundwater protection zones, amongst others - are also public spaces. Single use application to these spaces undermines their latent potential to fulfil other functions. For example, stormwater detention<sup>6</sup> ponds are important parts of development layouts and perform a single function – stormwater management. These areas, if conceptualised, designed and managed as multi-functional public space, can fulfil this function and other such as a sport facility during the dry months. They are however typically fenced off and use discouraged.

Resilience dividends refers to a project's ability to deliver multiple outcomes. An example of resilience dividends are the ecological services supplied by wetlands that are defined in the legislation as 'water resources'. Services supplied encompass water treatment, flood management, biodiversity, groundwater recharge and amenity. Through a broader lens, wetlands offer biodiversity, recreation and social cohesion, health benefits, education, carbon sinks, climate change adaptation, economic opportunities and property value enhancement with related rates revenue for local government. Realising these latent opportunities requires built environment and planning professions to work in an integrated way, particularly in relation to management and maintenance.

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<sup>6</sup> A detention pond manages stormwater in the short term to prevent flooding. Stormwater is held on site and released gradually after the rain event. They are different to retention ponds that are permanent water bodies.

*Similarly, a road has value beyond its transport function.*

Mobility is limited for many Capetonians, due to unemployment and the ability to pay. It follows that many are confined to the areas where they live because of unemployment or low incomes. The emphasis on roads for *mobility* therefore shifts to *streets*<sup>7</sup> as urban ecosystems that support multiple systems such as economic infrastructure for sales both informally and formally; opportunities for social cohesion; street landscaping for liveability, climate adaptation and water management - amongst others.

For example, Cape Town's informal sector - traders operating from small shops, spazas, home shops – and street traders; supplies between 60 and 70% of food in townships and informal settlements. Most of the activity is informal, loosely governed and highly localised.

The importance of the informal sector in South Africa's food system emerged strongly through the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when the initial lockdown regulations prohibited markets and street trade, thereby limiting shopping to large retail outlets outside of communities – or humanitarian relief such as food parcels or community kitchens. Because roads are not designed as urban ecosystems inclusive of, but not limited to mobility, there are conflicts between different users.

Design and management across disciplines can improve this, but will require a different way of working across the built environment professions to achieve a transition to vibrant and liveable streets that in turn deliver resilience dividends.

Changes in design norms and standards and working practices will contribute to the transition, as will different monitoring and evaluation criteria that move away from narrow engineering measurements towards metrics that consider nutritional outcomes, climate change, liveability and resilience. However, professional recognition of the cross-sectoral nature of outcomes is key to achieving these changes.

Metrics and measurement are also important for determining how public space is valued. Public space may be seen as a 'grudge purchase' because it does not generate an income for developers or local government. It competes in budgeting processes against priorities such as water, sanitation and electricity and unlike the latter, the intangible nature of some of the services make it difficult to measure and compare objectively.

For example, in 1990, Nelson Mandela addressed thousands of South Africans on the Grand Parade. It was a seminal moment in South Africa's history - his first appearance since his imprisonment in 1964. Why the Grand Parade was chosen is unclear, but the thousands of South Africans who gathered - sent a powerful message of solidarity around the world. What value did that moment represent? What role did the 'place' play in generating value? Is there a measurement metric for moments such as this? Measuring the civic and democratic value of open space is more difficult than, for example stormwater detention and retention ponds, but even these elements play additional roles that are not typically considered in monitoring and evaluation. Public space value is often intangible and therefore difficult to measure and compare with other city-making investment, such as infrastructure, affecting budget prioritisation.

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<sup>7</sup> In this article a 'road' is defined as a hardened surface for vehicular mobility and a 'street' is defined as roadway within an urban context including pedestrian routes, cycles ways, public transport infrastructure and building edges.





Figure 8: Can a city be democratic without public space? The crowd on the Grand Parade in front of City Hall, Cape Town, awaiting Nelson Mandela after his release from prison, 11 February, 1990. Source and copyright Louise Gubb.

### **Importance of public space**

Public spaces in South Africa are not always pretty objects in space. They are not spaces for tip-toeing across lest the perfection of the ‘manicure’ be ruffled. They are robust and grimy. They are the places where everyone is equal - and vulnerable. Outside. Unprotected by a vehicle or building. It is in these spaces that we bump shoulders and lock eyes. They are statements of democracy, economic infrastructure, food environments, ecological infrastructure for climate adaption and urban health. Sometimes these spaces are safe. At other times they are not. The following section provides examples of these typologies.

#### *Public space for economic activity*

Public space importantly hosts economic activity. Crime however degrades public space and makes it unsafe to use. Khayelitsha’s Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrade Safe Node Area was developed to improve safety. It uses urban regeneration structured around public space to create economic, residential opportunities – and thereby safety. The process started by understanding crime (robbery, murder, rape and break-ins) through mapping and community engagements and thereby embedded safety as a structuring element of the design. Principles of crime prevention through environmental design were applied to emphasise surveillance and visibility, territoriality (‘owned’ spaces), access and movement, image and aesthetics (dignity), physical barriers, maintenance and management (pride and ownership) (VPUU, 2019).

The project components included the development of pedestrian routes edged by shops and trade opportunities connected to social facilities and public transport. Management via community partnerships and ‘lighthouse’ structures ensure that buildings orientate to public spaces and are occupied and operated, and that maintenance is undertaken promptly, ensuring that the area is cared-for and has ‘eyes on the street’.

Matzopoulos (2019) study of the project found that respondents who lived within 2km of the project experienced less violence, showed fewer signs of depression, and were more satisfied with the infrastructure in their neighbourhood, than those who lived beyond the study area. While these findings are indicative of success, social cohesion among residents in the project area was found to be lower than in surrounding areas. Similarly, the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, Africa’s premier tourist destination and one of the brightest jewels in Cape Town’s economy is structured around a high-quality public realm<sup>8</sup> within a mixed precinct comprising residential and commercial opportunities, in addition to a shopping mall. While serving more global, upmarket users and tourists, it is nevertheless an important publicly accessible destination. The value of shopping malls in building desirable cities remains controversial, but their public space contribution and the locational value for retailers should not be dismissed and requires research for a deeper understanding that could lay the foundations for greater private sector investment.

#### *Ecological infrastructure for climate adaptation and mitigation*

Nature reserves, river corridors, biodiversity areas, wetlands, sports fields, groundwater recharge areas and agricultural land amongst others, are ecological infrastructure and public spaces. These elements form an integrated network of spaces and places that have the potential for eco-systems services towards climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience.

Piece-meal planning however limits this potential, in addition to institutional fragmentation. The *Greening of the City* (1982) and the subsequent *Metropolitan Open Space Strategy* (MOSS) identified green and blue corridors across the city connecting mountain to sea and sea to sea<sup>9</sup>. Subsequent programmes, such as the *Source to Sea* and the *Green Infrastructure Programme* incorporate some of the key MOSS principles. Lack of resources to implement these programmes and severe pressures on land for housing, has depleted the green resources available for protection and development as usable public space. The separation of water resource management and environmental/park management has further limited the introduction of stormwater management assets into public open space, reducing their potential resilience dividends.

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<sup>8</sup> The precinct is privately owned and access to the public realm is therefore carefully controlled.

<sup>9</sup> Cape Town is located on a peninsula. The Cape Point Nature reserve represents the point at which the Atlantic Ocean and Indian Ocean meet.





Figure 9: Upper Liesbeek River Park; Source: Author

Even though City resources are constrained, some communities have recognised the need for ecological infrastructure and are actively upgrading their waterways. The upper Newlands/Bishopscourt community have developed the Upper Liesbeek River Garden. The community-funded the project and ongoing upgrading in partnership with the city. It emerged as a response to increasing crime, illegal dumping and the proliferation of alien invasive plants. Since 2004, incremental landscaping interventions, including a programme of alien invasive removal, bank stabilisation, picnic area, flood control and universal access elements have transformed an unusable area into a well-used and popular place where uniquely, children can safely play in an urban river. The Khayelitsha Canoe Club is another example of a civil society working together to improve their natural environment, illustrating similarities between the socio-economically divergent Khayelitsha and Bishopscourt. Whilst the Upper Liesbeek River Garden is community-initiated, the Khayelitsha Wetland Park is a legacy of the FIFA World Cup Football event in 2010. With limited City support, the Canoe Club operates education tours for local and international visitors that promote the park and wetland. They are unofficial custodians who maintain a part of the park that falls beyond the broader boundary. Litter and dumped material removal and notifying the City of other maintenance issues are some of the activities that they undertake that contribute towards the success of the park. Whilst different in many ways, these two parks illustrate the importance of partnerships and communities' on-site presence for ecological infrastructure management, in addition to the potential for income generation. A different approach to ecological infrastructure is evident in the FIFA Football for Hope Centre, part of the Khayelitsha Safe Node Area project. It is an example of water

sensitive design that integrates public space and water management in a more structured, urban way to transform unsafe stormwater detention ponds into children's sports fields. These fields are temporarily unusable after heavy rains, but during dry conditions, are an important asset, in addition to supplying ecological services such as groundwater recharge.

The importance of 'green' public space in climate adaptation and mitigation is widely recognised globally and significant strides have been taken to implement urban greening projects in cities in the global north. Even though South Africa's climate change-related projects lag behind global efforts, the Sea Point Promenade in Cape Town is indicative of an emerging practice. The project is located on the Atlantic Seaboard side of the city where storms have eroded the sea wall. Reconstruction and reinforcing work to protect the residential area against future storms has integrated significant public realm upgrades that further augment usability and attractiveness for a range of Capetonians. Hard landscaped berms reduce wave action; protect the land area and create vertical interest to the horizontal surface whilst also introducing playful elements for walkers, joggers, cyclists and skateboarders, thereby interweaving landscape elements and climate adaption elements seamlessly into open space.

Even though the value of ecological infrastructure is becoming more widely accepted and promoted, it is less accepted within engineering-dominated contexts, in part because there is little local comparative financial modelling of green versus grey infrastructure.

#### *Urban health*

'Urban health' considers ecological, biological, psychological, behavioural, and economic factors to be health determinants (Ompad, et al., 2007). It follows that a sustainable city is a city that supports good urban health (Faragher, et al., 2021) via urban planning and investment in open space.

Given the multi-dimensional approach to healthy cities, it is necessary to consider a broad range of factors such as the way that daily activities – living, working and playing - occur spatially across the city and affect individuals' and community health (Berkowitz, et al., 2021). These activities vary across South African cities and are determined by poverty, inequality and unemployment, often remnants of apartheid policy and planning. Obesity from over-nutrition and a non-active lifestyle increases the risk of developing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (Chopra, et al., 2007; Resilience Strategy, 2019) and vulnerability to illness, such as COVID-19. The Western Cape, where Cape Town is located has high levels of obesity with 44% of men and 73% of women suffering from (Faragher, et al., 2021).

The causality between obesity, NCDs and child stunting is self-reinforcing and creates a double burden of disease (City of Cape Town, 2019). Communicable diseases (HIV/AIDS and TB), mental health issues, crime, substance abuse, poverty (City of Cape Town, 2019) and depression caused by living in dense, urban environments, injury and trauma and maternal and child mortality – turns the double burden of disease into a quadruple burden of disease (Faragher, et al., 2021).

Open space interventions cannot resolve all these issues, but the availability of active and passive recreation facilities for a variety of physical and social activities can reduce dangerously high levels of obesity, improve socio-economic status and living environments, mitigate and adapt climate change - and build resilience.

Making the shift towards a healthy, resilient city therefore pivots in part, off improvements to the public realm.

## Conclusion

The problems with Cape Town's open spaces are multifaceted and underpinned by 'wicked problems' - in addition to design. Interest in public space must be harnessed and knowledge shared by those who understand the less glossy issues and complexity to improve design and guide investment in public space that guards against its commodification. Public space is more than a 'nice to have'. It is a critical part of our pathway to climate survival and resilience. Whilst design is not the biggest challenge, good design combined with an integrated collaborative, built environment practice with appropriate norms and standards, monitoring and evaluation metrics, can enable pathways for change necessary to affect a resilience transition. The sustainability of these pathways will however be determined by the socio-economic context including crime and safety, public space management, maintenance and activation.

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