



*Starting in 1995, Henri Vergon operated his art dealership out of Newtown between opening Afronova opposite the Market Theatre. "It was a hellhole then and my customers used to get mugged on their way home" he recalls. But he was determined to stay put in the city and given the Johannesburg Development Agency's investment in the suburb, was optimistic about its future. Since he was muscled out of the area – to make way for a shopping centre – he has become disillusioned with Newtown. He believes the City has sold out and renegeed on its promise to foster a cultural community.*

(The Sunday Independent, Life 'Living it up', 26 September 2010)

# **NEWTOWN: A CULTURAL PRECINCT – REAL OR IMAGINED?**

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 2010

## **ABSTRACT**

The Newtown Cultural Precinct came about as one of government's interventions to turn around Johannesburg's Inner City degeneration as a result of big business's migration to the North in the nineties when urban management and land use controls collapsed.

Government's approach to culture-led urban regeneration was by means of large public sector capital development. The research covers the history of the concept of Newtown as a cultural precinct and how it came into being. It explores the criteria for cultural precincts in terms of international best practice and whether Newtown meets these requirements. It determines whether what was planned for Newtown by government has been achieved, and is being implemented. A review of strategies, business plans, projects and activities related to the development of Newtown as a cultural precinct was undertaken, as were interviews with key stakeholders, in order to establish why the notion of a cultural precinct took root when it did, and whether it is a success or not.

## DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the MA Arts and Culture Management Degree in the School of the Arts, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

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Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ year \_\_\_\_\_

## FIGURES AND TABLES

### Figures

Figure 1: Geographic boundary of core Newtown Cultural Precinct.....	18
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### Tables

Table 1: Audience Statistic Summary Sheet as at 2009 .....	72
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Table 2: Audience year on year comparison from 2003 to 2009 .....	73
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Table 3: Does Newtown meet the criteria? .....	78
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## ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
ATASA	Aid to Artisans of South African
BRT	Bus Rapid Transport
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COJACHS	City of Johannesburg Arts, Culture and Heritage Services
DA	Democratic Alliance
DAC	Department of Arts and Council
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
FUBA	Federated Union of Black Artists
GAPP	Gapp Architects and Urban Designers
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
JAG	Johannesburg Art Gallery
JDA	Johannesburg Development Agency
JMPD	Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department
JPC	Johannesburg Property Company
MAPPP SETA	Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing, Packaging Sector Education Training Authority
MIDI	Music Industry Development Initiative
NAC	National Arts Council
Newtown Devco	Greater Newtown Development Company
NID	Newtown Improvement District
NLDTF	National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund
NP	National Party
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
SAB	South African Breweries
SACR	Gauteng Department of Sport, Art, Culture and Recreation
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resources Agency
SATI	Southern African Theatre Initiative
SDI	Spatial Development Initiative
VACA	Visual Arts and Craft Academy
VANSA	Visual Arts Network of South Africa

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Kate Shand has been employed by Urban Genesis since February 2002. She started working in Newtown, for the Newtown Improvement District, in May 2007. Her initial position was as city improvement district manager but this soon evolved into a marketing, fundraising and cultural programming position.

# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	4
DECLARATION.....	5
FIGURES AND TABLES .....	6
ABBREVIATIONS .....	7
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	8
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.....	9
CONTENTS .....	10
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	15
1.1    Background.....	15
1.2    Aim of the Research Report .....	17
1.3    Rationale.....	19
1.4    Theory and literature review .....	19
1.5    Research methodology .....	22
CHAPTER TWO: NEWTOWN EMERGES AS A CULTURAL SPACE.....	27
2.1    A brief history of Newtown.....	27
2.2    The seventies and the establishment of the Market Theatre.....	29
2.3    The eighties and the Market Theatre becomes a major world theatre .....	30
2.4    The nineties and enter Christopher Till (1991 to 1997).....	31
2.5    The late nineties and Gauteng Province.....	36
2.6    Enter JDA 2001 and Graeme Reid .....	40
2.7    Why Newtown? .....	45
2.8    The story of the international consultants (200 to 2006) .....	47
2.9    Enter JDA and Lael Bethlehem .....	51
2.10   And finally the Newtown Improvement District.....	57

CHAPTER THREE: IS NEWTOWN A CULTURAL PRECINCT?.....	62
3.1 Key performance indicators.....	62
3.2 Heritage and architecture .....	63
3.3 Infrastructure.....	66
3.4 Sufficient quantity of viable cultural organisations, training and production.....	67
3.5 Clustering.....	67
3.6 The day and night time offering .....	70
3.7 Visitors .....	71
3.8 Marketing .....	73
3.9 Public space.....	75
3.10 Funding and sustainability.....	76
3.11 Economic regeneration .....	77
3.12 Does Newtown meet the criteria?.....	77
 CHAPTER FOUR: IS NEWTOWN A SUCCESS? .....	 82
4.1 What do the key roleplayers think?.....	82
4.2 Where to from here? .....	87
 CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	 92
 REFERENCES.....	 100
 LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED.....	 104
 APPENDIX A: PROFILES OF KEY ROLEPLAYERS .....	 105
Bethlehem, Lael .....	105
Reid, Graeme.....	105
Sack, Steven.....	105
Spiropoulos, John.....	106
Till, Christopher .....	106
 APPENDIX B: PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEWTOWN – THEN AND NOW .....	 107
Image 1: The Market Precinct – showing the context.....	107
Image 2: The Electrical Precinct – showing the context.....	108
Image 3: The Transport Precinct – showing the context.....	109
Image 4: Interior of the Electric Workshop.....	109
Image 5: Interior of the Sci-Bono Discovery Centre.....	110

Image 6:	Newtown in the 1930s .....	110
Image 7:	The Bus Factory after the introduction of double-decker buses .....	110
Image 8:	The Bus Factory today .....	111
Image 9:	Turbine Hall in the 1930s .....	111
Image 10:	Turbine Hall today .....	111
Image 11:	Fresh produce market (1912) .....	112
Image 12:	The Market Theatre today .....	112
Image 13:	Interior of fresh produce market .....	112
Image 14:	Interior of Museum Africa today .....	112
Image 15:	Market Theatre Precinct in the 1980s .....	113
Image 16:	The flea market on Mary Fitzgerald Square in the 1980s .....	113
Image 17:	Mary Fitzgerald Square today .....	113
Image 18:	The refurbished Workers' Museum .....	114
Image 19:	The new Moving Into Dance building (2009) .....	114
Image 20:	Launch of refurbished Kippies (2009) .....	114
Image 21:	Interior of Kippies in the 1980s .....	114
Image 22:	A Newtown heritage marker .....	115
Image 23:	The paving on Mary Fitzgerald Square after the opening of the 2010 World Cup .....	115
Image 24:	Homeless living on Carr Street (2009) .....	115



*Space is not empty and nor does it allow rational infill. Places are, for example, associated with real events (which have taken place there), with myths, with history and memories. It is this very confrontation between thinking in terms of space and thinking in terms of place – often unobserved – that lies at the root of many conflicts about spatial development and the failure of projects for all their good intentions.*

(Hajer and Reinjndorp, In Search of New Public Domain, 2001)

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

I will start by providing a brief introduction to Newtown to set the scene and to alert the reader to different forms of urban regeneration which will be germane to an understanding of Newtown's successes and failures.

For over thirty years, Newtown has been at the heart of the three separate dynamics of change in the re-creation of the Inner City of Johannesburg: urban culture, commerce and the urban property cycle, and politics. Newtown as a cultural precinct exists as a direct consequence of the Market Theatre which was established in 1976. The history of Newtown from the establishment of the Market Theatre and Newtown as a location of cultural production and consumption until the flight of big business in the early nineties, was the result of both formal planning decisions as well as informal urban processes (Debnam, 2007).

In response to the movement of major businesses to the North from the Inner City, local and provincial government, mainly through the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) and Blue IQ, instituted a major programme of public sector infrastructure investments in the Inner City. The infrastructure upgrade included the physical environment upgrades in the Precinct and the Nelson Mandela Bridge; and the new N1 on and off ramps linking Newtown to the South and North. Part of the programme included stakeholder engagement and the development of strong venues and organisations, as well as cultural programmes (Debnam & Starke, 2002).

Culture-led urban regeneration strategies follow either a production or consumption model (Binns, 2005). Investment in production is focused on growing the cultural or creative organisations and industries. The initial vision for the development of Newtown was a bottom-up approach, with support being provided to the plethora of small cultural organisations and artists located there. The intention was to develop and strengthen these organisations ultimately transforming them into quality producers of arts and culture for public consumption (Spiropoulos, 2010). It is my view that this would have assured a strong foundation or base on which to develop Newtown into a thriving arts and culture precinct. Binns describes this model of regeneration via participation of community arts programmes and says "A third, alternative, culture-led regeneration strategy focuses on achieving renewal from the bottom up. This vision turns the old 'civilising' argument for cultural policy on its

head and enables social actors to be more than passive consumers of official art handed down to them by above” (2005:5). Instead the concept of Newtown as a cultural precinct was taken over by government, provincial and local, and the approach to regeneration that was adopted was one of a property-led strategy with a top down approach.

The development of Newtown took on a consumption based approach with the creation of large flagship projects, for example, Mary Fitzgerald Square, the Nelson Mandela Bridge and the Sci-Bono Discovery Centre. According to Binns “Through such a policy, city authorities attempt to develop a culturally vibrant image deemed attractive by mobile, middle class, high-tech or ‘knowledge’ industry workers” (2005:2). There is always the tension, a choice to be made between creating an audience, customers and visitors on the one hand, and creating cultural product on the other. There are arguments for and against both approaches. Invariably, and often unfortunately, the former wins because it is more visible and faster and therefore makes policy makers and politicians, as well as funders, happy, often at the expense of production. In the case of Newtown there is a definite perception that the producers of arts and culture, the artists themselves, were pushed out to make room for more impressive buildings and venues, and for commercial developments<sup>1</sup>.

At the end of the day Newtown was identified as a cultural precinct for investment by government because, according to informal conversations with Graeme Reid, former CEO of the JDA, and John Spiropoulos who worked on the Gauteng Spatial Development Initiative (SDI), planning during the early Spatial Development Initiative identified key sectors for investment. Tourism was one area and hence Constitution Hill, the Cradle of Humankind, Newtown and Dinokeng were selected. A ‘consumption’ driven approach, one could argue, was therefore implicit from the outset. Emphasis was placed on access into Newtown because the precinct was seen as a ‘black hole’ due to its inaccessibility. It also had the following attributes: political and cultural struggle (heritage and memory) that made it a prominent area; central and strategic location; sustained profile in the cultural sector (potential tourism growth); increasing profile in the creative industries (growing importance in economy); potential attractiveness for property development; existing infrastructure (often of great heritage interest) high proportion of land in public ownership (opportunities for public facilitation of private sector development) and finding a foundation from where the City could be re-developed (Debnam & Starke, 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s own notes taken at a Newtown Marketing Committee Meeting. February 2008.



Initially venues and institutions were developed (Dance Factory, Museum Africa, Sci-Bono Discovery Centre, Bassline) and land was made available for private sector development. According to Peter Starke, consultant on the project, in an informal conversation, only then was consideration given to programming and consumption. In my experience of managing Newtown's stakeholder liaison, most venues and organisations felt unstable and unprotected in an unreliable funding environment - exacerbated by changes to the Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing, Packaging Sector Education Training Authority (MAPPP SETA) and unreliability of the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF). Cultural organisations perceived themselves as unprotected from private sector development and threatened by escalating rents. The litany of concerns was long and included: empty dark performance venues with little or no support from the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) or the National Arts Council (NAC) to fund programmes; almost no artists (except for those being trained by the three strong training organisations who managed to remain in Newtown, the Artist Proof Studio, Market Lab and Market Photo Workshop); a collapsed craft hub blamed on the entry of the JDA into the Bus Factory; and poor management of certain venues<sup>2</sup>.

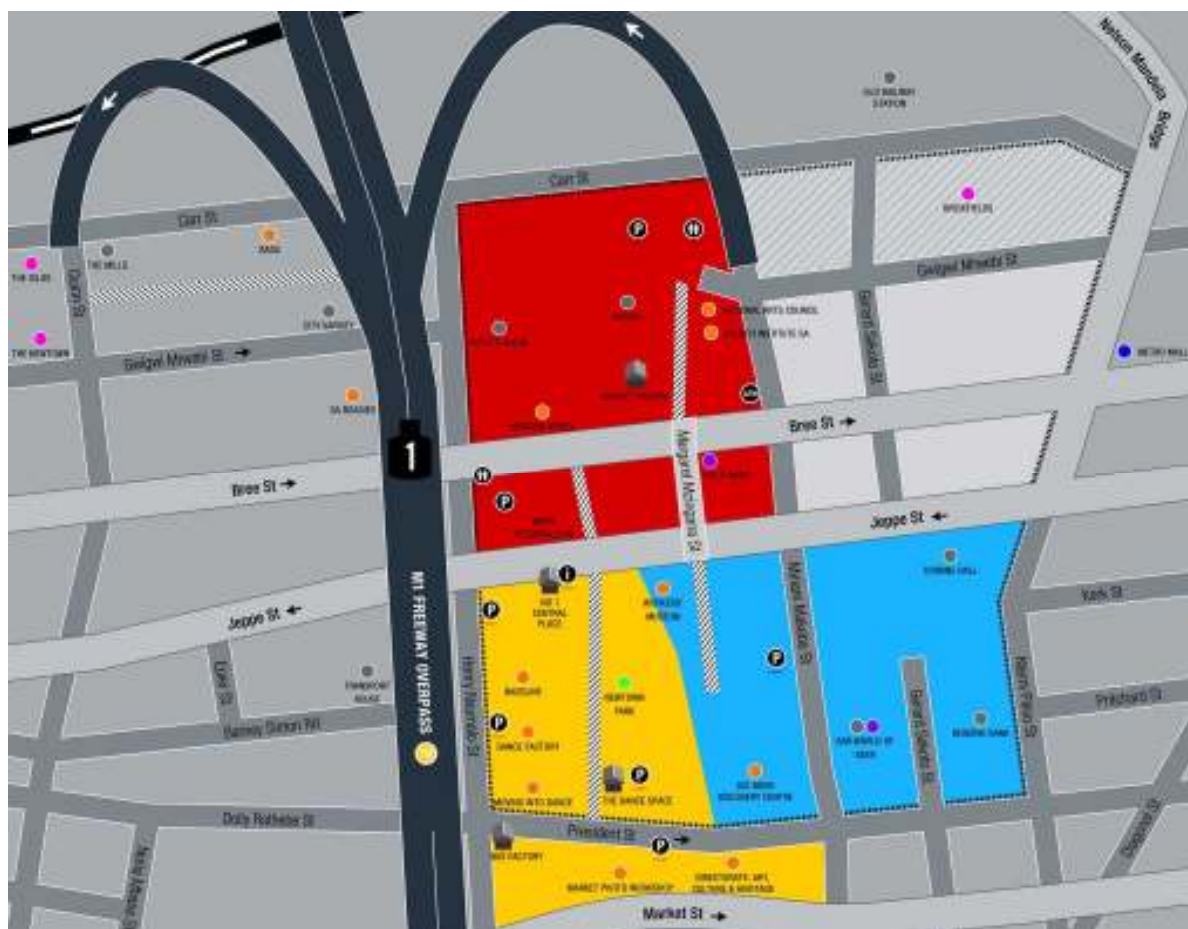
## **1.2 Aim of the Research Report**

The identification by government of Newtown being ideal for a cultural-led urban regeneration project was in response to Inner City urban decline and the search for a way to reverse this decline. I examined the establishment of the current Newtown iteration; 'The Newtown Cultural Precinct' and what led to its establishment from the mid seventies to 2010. I focused on the geographic boundary of the core Newtown Cultural Precinct as illustrated in figure 1 below. The boundaries are Henry Nxumalo in the West, Ntemi Piliso in the East, Carr in the North, and President in the South.

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<sup>2</sup> Author's own presentation for JDA June 2008 based on interviews with cultural organisations.

Figure 1: Geographic boundary of core Newtown Cultural Precinct



My research differs from other theses and research papers on Newtown in that I focused on the precinct's development trajectory and the key decision-makers along the way. Some of the theses and research papers I referred to include Lara Preston's *Johannesburg as world city: arts and culture policy in the urban African context*, Yasmeeen Dinath's *Re-generating the culture factory: deconstructing interpretations of culture in the hybrid city*, and Matlaba Setlhako's *Assessing economic empowerment in the Newtown Cultural Precinct*.

The aim of my research was to evaluate whether Newtown could in fact call itself a cultural precinct, and to look at what plans were put in place to get there, by whom and why. I assessed whether Newtown as a cultural precinct was successful, especially in terms of it being a culturally-led urban regeneration project. The 'hard' achievements were easier to evaluate as they are concrete structures that can be seen and touched, such as the Nelson Mandela Bridge, which created access into Newtown. The 'soft' objectives were more difficult to assess, such as an increase in 'quality' cultural productions and audience statistics. The Newtown Improvement District (NID), a section 21 company established to

provide urban management, marketing and event services to Newtown on behalf of the stakeholders and the JDA, has produced detailed reports since June 2006 based on performance monitoring indicators such as visitor numbers, new tenants, media exposure, and quality and quantity of training taking place in the precinct. These reports assisted with assessing the 'soft' objectives, as did interviews with venue and training organisations. I identified successes, failures and shortcomings and assessed. In order to do this I examined what Newtown was prior to government intervention and what it is today, as well as what is planned for Newtown in the immediate future. The research explored whether there was consensus between stakeholders about approach taken and the result, which is the Newtown Cultural Precinct as experienced today.

### **1.3 Rationale**

My position as marketing manager of the NID, a section 21 company set up by the JDA to manage the Newtown Cultural Precinct, is key to my rationale for undertaking this research. As the current 'caretakers' of the precinct it is valuable to establish a baseline upon which to measure Newtown's achievements in terms of the original thinking and planning that went into Newtown's current iteration. The most important question that this research attempted to answer was is Newtown successful? I will not shy away from examining failure precisely because it is in my professional as well as scholarly interest to understand the failure of the precinct, if that is going to be the final judgement.

I also intend to provide a historical record of Newtown's development trajectory and why certain interventions were made at various points in time. The purpose of this research report is to preserve this record and to make it accessible. It is also hoped that the research will serve to refresh the memory and remind decision makers of what has taken place before and why, and to inform the focus and direction of current and future planning for Newtown, as well as redirecting funding to gaps that still need to be addressed. According to Starke a description and evaluation of the Newtown development from 2000 to 2010 would be very valuable as no record exists of the history of the project.

### **1.4 Theory and literature review**

As mentioned in my aim, I am aware that there are various Masters research reports either completed or in process about Newtown. My approach to Newtown differs from the topics covered by the other research in that it deals specifically with the Newtown Cultural Precinct. It will evaluate the Newtown Cultural Precinct in terms of its success and failures. It will also look back on a full decade since the initial plans for Newtown started incubating. According to Reid and Spiropoulos, there was not a distinct theoretical approach that informed the

original planning by the Gauteng SDI. The only name that was mentioned is that of Charles Landry and his work on the Creative City concept.

In order to understand the context, drivers and motivations for the development of the cultural precinct in Newtown, as well as to evaluate its success within the context of current theory and literature, the research refers to culture-led regeneration theory and definitions of public space. According to Bradford (2004:2) "Equally for urban planners and policy makers, there is recognition that artistic works can enable dialogue between diverse people and groups; that cultural heritage can become a focal point for regenerating derelict neighbourhoods or, indeed, for reinventing a whole city's 'sense of place'; and that by valuing self-expression, the arts and culture contribute to active citizenship". Has the creation of the cultural precinct achieved this?

A sense of place becomes an important concept in understanding what makes successful public space, particularly within the context of cultural led urban regeneration strategies. That very sense of place that may have identified a particular place as being suitable and appropriate for a culture-led urban regeneration project is often lost in the implementation. Stedman (2003) describes a sense of place in terms of three variables: the physical environment, human behaviour and social and/or psychological processes. A sense of place has a dual nature, according to Hummon (1992) in that there is an interpretive perspective on the environment as well as an emotional reaction to the environment. These nuances are difficult to capture in government projects, such as Newtown, where it is easier to transform the built environment (which gives the effect of regeneration and transformation) than it is to work with the emotional and the symbolic and gently penetrate below the surface to uncover and work with a sense of place. The physical features of a place per se do not contribute to a sense of place but influence the symbolic meaning of the landscape and in so doing contribute to a sense of place for the users of the place (Stedman, 2003).

According to Reid (2010) the creation of a successful public space was one of the guiding objectives of the urban design framework. The key elements of successful public space as described in the literature will be explored and Newtown's public space will be assessed against the criteria. Hajer and Reijndorp (2001) explore the components that make successful public space. They look at the animation of public space and observe that people choose which space, festival or event to frequent based on what they identify with and avoid other places. In other words "public space turns out, in reality, to barely function as a public domain" (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001:85). In contrast to Landry (2004), Hajer and Reijndorp (2001) suggest that public space fulfils the function as a place of meeting less and less.

Hummon (1992) notes that a community or group of people form attachments to a certain place not due to that place's physical characteristics but through perceptions of the physical environment. Reid noted that transforming the negative perceptions of Newtown was also one of the important objectives of the upgrade of the public space (2010).

In Evans (2005) the term 'urban regeneration' is defined as "the transformation of a place – residential, commercial or open space – that has displayed the symptoms of physical, social and/or economic decline breathing new life and vitality into an ailing community, industry and area [bringing] sustainable, long-term improvements to local quality of life, including economic, social and environmental needs" (LGA in Evans, 2005: 9). This definition is appropriate to the regeneration and creation of the Newtown Cultural Precinct. The regenerative results of culture led regeneration in terms of transforming an area in decline is investigated in the research.

Landry (2004) explores how we can make our cities more liveable. He looks at how creative and innovative solutions to city problems can be feasible. He asks the question – how can we make where we live a better place? Landry believes in our city centres as the "neutral meeting place for all parts of the city – and the sense that publicly shared space enriches our experience by enhancing connections, interaction and atmosphere" (2004:120). This notion was explored in relation to Newtown with its accessible public space but which also struggles to realise the potential of a vibrant public space.

According to Evans (2005) urban regeneration is increasingly incorporating that sense of place outlined above and smaller public art projects and concern for the everyday environment is taking precedence over large building based flagship projects and inner city public realm urban upgrade projects. "Regeneration is not simply about bricks and mortar. It's about the physical, social and economic well being of an area; it's about the quality of life in our neighbourhoods" (Evans, 2005:8). He also mentions the potential of the arts in regeneration and "valuing identity amongst communities where historical industrial sites undergo culture-led regeneration" (2005:8).

I make extensive use of both the terms cultural and creative industries and Binns (2005) makes a clear distinction between the two which I will apply throughout my paper. "The 'creative industries' tag refers to a wider range of activities than simply cultural, and includes: 'advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer games, television and radio'" (Binns, 2005:2).

“Thus the creative industries, as defined and widely replicated, are now seen to comprise those industries that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCMS in Evans, 2009:1005). This universal, capitalistic measure also reflects the shift from culture, and cultural industries as instruments of the nation-state (such as broadcasting, arts and heritage), to the more global creative industries (Cunningham, 2002). In this sense, they are more open to trade and exchange, in contrast to protectionist and utilitarian national culture, thereby positioning the creative industries “at the crossroads between the arts, business and technology” (UNCTAD, 2004).

### **1.5 Research methodology**

There are many different approaches that could be taken to assess whether Newtown has met the requirements of a cultural precinct. The literature on public space, creative cities, culture-led urban regeneration, and the creation of a sense of place gave me a context and helped frame my theoretical orientation in which I positioned my research. The literature and theory also helped me to understand how and why arts precincts are used as a tool for inner city renewal and to transform public space, as well as what this transformed public space means and what the consequences are.

The instruments I used included unstructured, in-depth interviews with key government officials, consultants, senior venue management and other stakeholders, as well as extensive documentation.

In relation to implementation strategies, the research looked at the role played by the NID, the JDA, the City of Johannesburg’s Directorate of Arts, Culture and Heritage (COJACHS), Blue IQ, and Gauteng Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (SACR).

After I collected my evidence I established a baseline for evaluation of the project against which to measure performance. The baseline included a list of initial objectives and deliverables as outlined in the business plans and urban design framework. I also defined what is considered to be a standard cultural precinct based on international understanding and best practice and I measured my findings against this.

I interviewed key government officials including Steven Sack director of COJACHS, Christopher Till, former director culture for the City of Johannesburg, Lael Bethlehem current CEO of the JDA and Graeme Reid, former CEO of the JDA, and Leila McKenna, former

managing director of the Johannesburg Property Company (JPC) in order to understand strategic direction, motivation, challenges, successes, and future plans for the Newtown Cultural Precinct. Profiles of each of the key roleplayers can be found in Appendix A at the end of this report. Avril Joffe, as a key arts and culture expert, was interviewed for an alternative perspective to the one supplied by government above. The interviews helped me to understand how the project trajectory developed, when and why key decisions were made that strayed from the original objectives and plans, perceptions around whether Newtown is perceived to be a success, and whether the objectives as outlined in the baseline were met.

The venue managers and cultural organisations in Newtown were interviewed to gain insight into their views on Newtown's development, what they understand by a cultural precinct, and whether they think that positioning Newtown as a cultural precinct has benefitted their business and contributed to changing perceptions of the Inner City.

Interviews also determined various stakeholders' understanding of government's policy objectives and what informed action by government against which the implementation of the Newtown project was assessed. Although in many of the interviews I dealt with perceptions I endeavoured to bring back the interview to the core aim which was to understand where the idea for a cultural precinct in Newtown arose from, and whether Newtown as a cultural precinct has been successful. The different groupings interviewed, loosely being government, cultural organisations, venues, and consultants, each had a particular perspective which I also acknowledged.

I analysed the content of the interviews in relation to the criteria for a cultural precinct in order to evaluate whether Newtown stakeholders and key government officials perceive the objectives of the project to have been met and what are perceived as gaps.

Although there are disadvantages that the researcher needs to be cognisant of when using a qualitative approach, which my interviews were, there was no other way of gathering the necessary information to understand the Newtown project except via unstructured in-depth interviews. Minichiello et al (1991) states the disadvantages:

- The researcher's definition of the situation might be interpreted differently by the informant, and the subsequent information will be representative of the informant's reality;

- The researcher is not in the position to observe the informant in his or her everyday life, thus depriving the researcher of ethnographic context, which will give the researcher a richer understanding of the informant's perspective;
- The researcher could try to interpret what the informant means as opposed to what the informant is saying, thereby influencing the data.

The interviews were open-ended with a few prompting questions, such as: What are the failures of the Newtown project? Do you know what was originally intended by government when it ear-marked Newtown as a culture-led urban regeneration project? What do you consider to be the successes of the Newtown project? I have an existing relationship with most Newtown stakeholders and I acknowledge that they may respond to me differently than they would to an interviewer with whom they have no relationship. I listened attentively for agenda pushing, but reasoned that even if my informants were seeking to make me sympathetic to their agendas it would assist my interpretation of Newtown's origins and history and of its successes and failures.



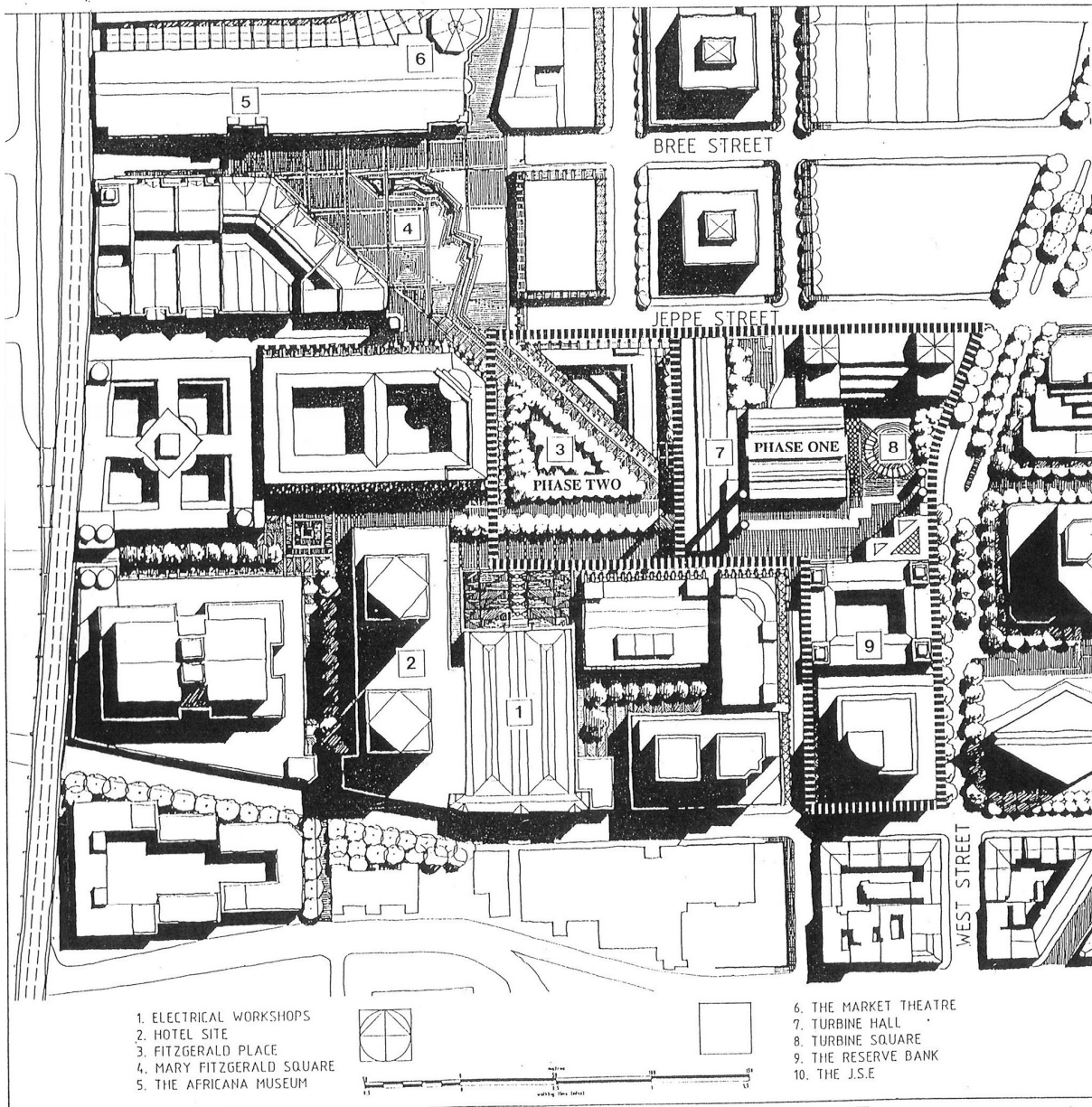


FIGURE 1 PHASE ONE AND TWO IN THE CONTEXT OF NEWTOWNS REDEVELOPMENT

*“Cultural heritage and contemporary expressions of it have provided a worldwide focus for urban renewal. In the midst of economic development we find inspiration in the buildings, artefacts, traditions, values and skills of the past. Culture helps us to adapt to change by anchoring our sense of being; it shows that we come from somewhere and have a story to tell; it can provide us with confidence and security to face the future. Cultural heritage is more than buildings – it is the panoply of cultural resources that demonstrate that a place is unique and distinctive. Culture lies at the core of creative invention. Culture is, thus, ironically, about a living way of life that is reinvented daily.”*

(Laudry, The Creative City, 2004)

## CHAPTER TWO: NEWTOWN EMERGES AS A CULTURAL SPACE

### 2.1 A brief history of Newtown

To understand why Newtown was identified as a place for cultural activity one must visit its origins albeit briefly. In the late 1800s when gold was discovered in Johannesburg there was an influx of people seeking their fortune. Among these were many Afrikaners dispossessed of their land during the South African War and they put their skills learnt from living off the land to practical use in activities such as transport riding and brick-making. The land to the east of Newtown was rich in clay deposits and a brickworks was established there where people of all races worked and lived together. Multiracial slums developed and the then City authorities used the excuse of the Bubonic Plague which had broken out to burn down the slums and clear a piece of land which they ear-marked for industrial use. They renamed it Newtown because it was quite literally a 'new town' and from 1906 the first power stations located there "served the growing city of Johannesburg" (Krige & Beswick, 2008:3).

In 1913 the fresh produce market located to its new building in Newtown adjacent to the railway sidings and Potato Sheds which included an open air abattoir (<http://www.newtown.co.za/heritage>). By 1936 Newtown had grown to also contain "three power stations, three different kinds of cooling towers, an incinerator, maintenance workshops and tramsheds, as well as canteens and residential quarters" (Krige & Beswick, 2008:3). Trams were manufactured in the tramsheds, now the site of the Reserve Bank, and the Bus Factory was used to repair trams and later as garaging for double-decker buses up to the early nineties (<http://www.newtown.co.za/heritage>).

In 1939 the square in front of the Market was renamed after trade unionist Mary Fitzgerald. Newtown was a hive of industrial activity and continued to be so well into the 1960s. In 1961 the Turbine Hall closed its doors and became a back-up facility for a new, large power station built in Orlando (<http://www.newtown.co.za/heritage>).

The Electric Workshop, Joburg's first power station built in 1906 and which operated for a mere two years due to technical problems, was no longer needed as a location for repairing faulty equipment. It also stood abandoned. The tramsheds were no longer needed from 1961 when buses took over as the preferred form of public transport. As the city grew the existing fresh produce market could no longer sustain the needs of the population and a new, larger facility was built in City Deep. In 1974 the grand, Victorian market closed its doors (<http://www.newtown.co.za/heritage>).

In the mid seventies Newtown stood abandoned as newer, modern more efficient spaces took over from the old industrial buildings. The abandonment of old industrial buildings in Newtown is not unique to Johannesburg. Steven Sack (2010) explains that the development in most major cities follows a similar trajectory in that the industrial services a city provides over time are relocated to the urban edge, providing opportunity for new uses for these abandoned buildings. The buildings providing these services, be they factories, markets, abattoirs or power stations, were built during the early formation of cities and at the time were close to the city centre. As cities expanded, new industrial centres were created for a variety of reasons including infrastructure becoming old, and issues of access and transportation. The spaces left behind are often subject to heritage regulations and protection, as well as zoning control and building regulations. It is not easy for city authorities to vacate such large infrastructure and or to knock these buildings down in order to make land available for development. Should a city wish to follow this route, says Sack (2010), it is often a lengthy process and there are all types of controls in place that can inhibit city plans to rejuvenate or regenerate those buildings. In the end it becomes easier for a city to imagine new uses for these buildings. Appendix B at the end of this report contains a list of photographs of Newtown buildings which have been adapted for new uses, as well as photographs showing the overall context in which the new uses of buildings have taken place.

According to Landry (2004:123) “Recycling older industrial buildings is now a cliché of urban regeneration, but does not make it less worthwhile.” There are many international examples of this type of regeneration activity, for example, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art which consists of 13 hectares of renovated 19<sup>th</sup> century factory buildings; the Tramway in Glasgow is a cultural centre situated in an old bus and tram depot; and in Bristol there is the Watershed Media Centre and Arnolfini Gallery in former warehouses (Landry, 2004:123). The phenomenon of the retreat from cities of the major service providers leaving vacant buildings owned by the city has been a driver for the development of cultural precincts in many cities across the globe. Johannesburg was and remains typical of an urban centre anywhere in the world going through transition.

In the case of Johannesburg there was huge public pressure around the demolition of the cooling towers in 1985 (<http://www.newtown.co.za/heritage>). As a result public debate ensued as to what to do with the remaining infrastructure and, according to Sack (2010), eventually the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) stepped in and put in

place the necessary steps to protect the original fresh produce market due to its unique roof structure.

The protection of the market building put in place a series of inhibitors on commercial development and opened up opportunities for social and not-for-profit activities.

The location of these industrial buildings is either a workable proposition for a city or not. For example, London has many industrial buildings, as has New York, but they were not necessarily immediately a target for refurbishment in the first wave of cultural regeneration. In London, the Tate Modern was built only once the bridge was built, and this was part of a huge millennium project. Each cultural precinct throughout the world has its own story and Newtown is no different. Newtown as a cultural space emerged at a time when the contradictions of apartheid were being highlighted by cultural activists and the conditions were ripe for the establishment by activists of a cultural space that would reflect and criticise the apartheid government.

## **2.2 The seventies and the establishment of the Market Theatre**

The Market Theatre was established in 1976 in a part of the city that was racially neutral and more accessible to different communities. The rebirth of Newtown in the seventies was from its very inception operating within the cracks of apartheid and asserting an oppositional culture. The very first cultural interventions in Newtown concerned democracy and an anti-apartheid approach. The establishment of the Market Theatre created interest and attracted other cultural activists and the federated union of black artists (FUBA), a black art school, was established across the road from the theatre. Kippies was built and became a popular jazz club. Smaller organisations who wanted to be near the action started moving nearby. Benjy Franci, after breaking away from FUBA, secured the Potato Sheds and this created further interest and more organisations moved in. Ricky Burnett established an art gallery at the Market Theatre. The French Institute, wanting to be near cultural activity, found offices and moved into the precinct. Restaurants opened, including the Yard of Ale and Couch and Coffee. Essentially all these organisations, venues and restaurants were, according to Sack (2010), cultural brands or cultural products or ideas that moved into the space, and a lot of them survived for only a limited period of time because they were associated with a particular set of circumstances, time and place.

For a second time in its history Newtown became a space where non-racial activity started to take place. The founding of the Market Theatre was the pivotal moment for the transformation of Newtown. As a direct consequence of the existence of The Market Theatre – and only because of that – when the Power Station cooling towers and other infrastructure

were scheduled for demolition in the early eighties “it was possible to mount a case for the area to be declared and developed as a cultural precinct” (Debnam, 2007).

### **2.3 The eighties and the Market becomes a major world theatre**

In the eighties the composition of the Market Theatre board became more corporate and so the corporate sector starting taking an interest. This interest, along with the anti-apartheid plays and the theatre giving a voice to black actors, helped position the Market Theatre as the most significant cultural space on the continent (Purkey, 2010). The Market Theatre became an extraordinary phenomenon. It took plays abroad and developed a huge international reputation. In fact it became one of the major theatres of the world, and it retains this status to this day. Kippies originally opened under the management of The Market Theatre as did the weekly flea market on Mary Fitzgerald Square. The pedestrianisation of the then Wolhuter Street outside the Market Theatre (Senior, 2010) was also undertaken by the Market Theatre and so a small cultural precinct started to take shape. Newtown became the place where people gathered, artists moved in and took over old buildings, and cultural projects development – all off the back of the Market Theatre.

When The Market Theatre opened in 1976 it was inaccessible, parking was on Mary Fitzgerald Square, there was a terrible smell of rotting meat from the outdoor abattoir, performances had to stop when trains shunted past, and it was a degraded area (Purkey, 2010). Despite all of this the Market Theatre took root in the imagination and grew. Its initial ambition was to establish itself a multi-arts venue.

The political context of the Market Theatre’s rise to prominence in the eighties was one of a growing militancy because of the cultural boycott. Artists became political activists and started unionising. The tenants in the buildings made available during Christopher Till’s tenure in the early nineties refused to pay rent and this, according to Sack (2010), was the seed of destruction for a lot of the organisations which were eventually displaced when the JDA started the Newtown regeneration project. Sack (2010) asks the question “Why didn’t they pay rent and why didn’t they make provision to pay rent?” Eventually as the city became democratised these organisations were sent accounts. Sack believes that they destroyed their own viability. He adds that there are, of course, other factors why arts organisations do not survive.

According to Reid (2010), Newtown was identified by the City of Johannesburg as a cultural precinct as early as 1987 when GAPP Architects and Urban Designers (GAPP) submitted a design for Newtown for a Council run competition. He believes they won because their

proposal included a cultural aspect. But Krige and Beswick (2008:3) claim that Newtown has only been referred to as a cultural precinct since the early nineties. In an interview with Barry Senior (2010), director at GAPP, he says that culture was relevant to their competition proposal but it played a background role. He believes the principles which informed their proposed 1987 framework are in fact in place in Newtown today.

Newtown as a place of culture had its first peak in the 1980s when it was the centre of cultural activism, creativity and energy. According to Sue Krige, the Market Theatre and Kippies had in fact “held the line” against the decay of Newtown for many, many years and that their action in doing so enabled people to envisage the area as a cultural precinct (Fraser, 2008). The flea market on Mary Fitzgerald Square during the eighties was an enormous success and also contributed to Newtown’s popularity at the time. It was a very exciting time in Newtown’s life, according to Purkey (2010) “It was an absolutely wild and fantastic place to go”. All Saturday it was open and full of traders and shoppers. The Yard of Ale was also a wonderful place at the time. The decline of the Market Theatre in the early nineties happened in parallel with the Newtown flea market closing when Bruma and Rosebank markets opened. Purkey (2010) pins this moment as the point when the crisis in Newtown happened and its downward spiral of urban decay set in.

Mannie Manim left the Market Theatre in 1990 because, according to Purkey (2010), “it seemed impossible to maintain the venue as a going concern”. It was operating on international and liberation money and suddenly liberation was here. It was the political environment and not the area that was in decline. Post 1994 for about ten years the theatre lost its way and mission. Obviously as the anchor cultural institution in Newtown a lot of activities in Newtown followed the decline.

#### **2.4 The nineties and enter Christopher Till (1991 to 1997)**

The thrust of cultural infrastructure development in Newtown took place under Till’s leadership (Sack, 2010). During the nineties, and driven by Till, the Africana Museum relocated to what is now Museum Africa; the South African Breweries (SAB) created the ‘World of Beer’; the infrastructure for a technology museum in the Electric Workshop was achieved; most of the programme for the Biennale took place in Newtown; and the Foundation for the Creative Arts (the predecessor to the NAC) and the French Institute converted offices opposite the Market Theatre.

Less formally the Market Theatre Foundation expanded to include The Laboratory, the Photo Workshop, small shops in its own precinct and a gallery. It also provided a base for

Gramadoelas, The Yard of Ale and then Kofifi. Cultural activist, Benjy Francis, launched the hugely ambitious Afrika Cultural Centre in the Potato Sheds. Till found space for Suzette le Seuer who moved her dance operation from the City Hall to what is now the Dance Factory, and Sylvia Glazer moved Moving into Dance Mopatong into a building next door, and Mega Music operated as a commercial music venue and equipment hire company out of the now Bassline venue. Nikki's Oasis opened, the pub and micro-brewery at SAB World of Beer became Horror Café and The Workers' Library converted part of the Power Workers compound for their use and as a small Museum of Workers' History. Small cultural businesses occupied space temporarily in 1 President Street, and Artist Proof Studios provided space and facilities for the fine arts. In fact some of the tenants moved in by Till are still in Newtown today, namely Artist Proof Studio, Moving into Dance, and the Dance Factory.

Christopher Till was the Director of Culture in the City of Johannesburg in the early nineties. The City had decided that it wanted to make Johannesburg a World Class City and it created three strategic director positions – economic, sport and culture – in the town clerk's office. These directors all had direct access to the town clerk at all times and by Till's (2010) admission they had a lot of power and were at the same level as the executive directors of the City. Although they had no staff, these positions were strategic in that they created the opportunity to develop the vision for a world class city.

At the time the buzz words were 'urban renewal' and Till saw the potential of Newtown to become a cultural precinct (Till, 2010). He intended to amplify what was already there, namely the Market Theatre precinct, and started the process of colonising City-owned land, which he saw was under threat. According to Till (2010) the City's vision at the time was to sell off the land for high rise office development. The first site sold was the old Turbine Hall, followed by the tram sheds and current SAB World of Beer nearby. He worked closely with Ron Finkelstein, a traffic engineer with the City who was responsible for submitting budgets for developments, in what he calls "guerrilla activity" (Till, 2010).

As with the Tate Modern, it took the potential of a large event to get the wheels turning. The City decided put a bid in for the Olympic Games and were looking for infrastructure development projects. Till grabbed the opportunity and submitted Newtown as a project using the example of the Waterfront Development in Cape Town to illustrate what was possible.



Till pushed the vision of Newtown as a cultural precinct because of the success of the Market Theatre, as well as the Museum Africa development which had been on the table forever but never developed. Finally he managed to secure a budget allocation to get Museum Africa off the ground by literally begging the Chair of the then Management Committee of the City. He convinced him that before he retired he should make this project happen, that it could be his legacy to develop Museum Africa. The funds were not enough to finish the museum and it still remains two thirds completed.

Till also focused his efforts on the Market Theatre precinct as there was existing cultural activity in the form of the Market Theatre and the Market Lab. He secured funds from the Foundation for the Creative Arts for the renovation of the now NAC building where FUBA was at the time. The French Institute moved into the top floor, the Foundation for the Creative Arts into the middle floor, and Till's office was located on the ground floor. Through his efforts he believes he was able to develop the original little precinct and make something more out of it (Till, 2010).

Other efforts included trying to convince Transnet to build the structure that now has the original Park Station on top of it. His vision was to bring steam trains back into the area and using the Potato Sheds and existing platforms as a station to go to Magaliesburg. Transnet did build the structure and moved the old station onto site but the City did not take forward his steam train idea. Unfortunately a squatter camp began to develop there, which Till did warn the City about, and soon it was massive. Transnet did not want to take their plans further because of this and the City did nothing about the squatters.

These setbacks did not deter Till and he continued with his efforts to build the cultural centre. He presented the idea of Newtown as a cultural precinct to the City as part of their Olympic bid. At the time he had already started culturally squatting some of Newtown's vacant buildings. His rationale was to get cultural people into Newtown on peppercorn rentals. For example, he moved FUBA and other smaller organisations into 1 President Street. Ron Finkelstein helped secure small budgets to start fixing up the Electric Workshop. Till started talks with the science community because he had heard they wanted a science museum. But nothing fell into place immediately and after a visit to the Sao Paulo biennale his ideas about how the space could be used changed.

Till explained (2010) that the model used by the City of Sao Paulo in Brazil was to make the Niemeyer building available to the Biennale organisers every second year for hosting the exhibition and in between to use it as a venue to host events. The revenue from the events

went towards the biennale. Till used this model for the Electric Workshop and started the biennale. In the building next door he started the Institute of Contemporary Art as the holding company of the biennale, and as a place where activities could take place all year round, a library, a place for artists to gather, and a white space called the generator where artists were invited to show their work in order to keep the energy going.

The Newtown presentation came forth out of all the projects presented because the City had seen the potential of creating Newtown as a centre for culture activity. Till describes the area as “a ruin, you can’t believe it, piles of rubbish everywhere” (2010). Again with the support of Ron Finkelstein he was able to secure some budget to develop and resuscitate the old Workers’ Library.

Till started his cultural squatting of buildings with the Dance Factory and Suzette le Seuer. He did the same with Megamusic whom he invited into the current Bassline building, and to Moving into Dance whom he moved into what he refers to as “the orange toilets back then” (Till, 2010). Kim Berman of the Artist Proof Studio met with Till because she was also looking for space in Newtown. He also helped her. “They were paying hardly any rental, really a peppercorn rental. I squatted them” said Till (2010).

Till realised that an organisation was needed to drive the further development of Newtown. He envisaged a section 21 company made up of cultural organisations and commercial property owners. He called many meetings with Newtown stakeholders, including Transnet, Old Mutual, Amaprop, the Reserve Bank, as well as the cultural organisations and venues. Till put it to the stakeholders that although the cultural organisations do not have money, they have “sweat and cultural equity” (2010) which they will be able to contribute to ongoing consolidation and development of the vision of Newtown as a cultural precinct. The cultural stakeholders, ironically as will be seen later, had Reid advising them in their efforts to establish the section 21 company but “those cultural organisations were fractious and they couldn’t get together” said Till (2010).

Although Till was never able to get the organising group together, he achieved a lot albeit in unconventional ways with at times a maverick approach. He had a vision, drive and access to the corridors of power. “It was great – we pulled it off – in that sense that it was an organic guerrilla type process working within the Council as a Council official with quite a lot of pull because I was in a strategic position, not running a department, and having the ear of the town clerk” (Till, 2010). He was able to walk into the office of City decision-makers and push them. “There was always a fight. It wasn’t simple. But in the end they supported me. That

was the process” (Till, 2010). He makes mention of the urban design framework put together by Barry Senior in 1987 but says that it did not influence him in anyway and that he hardly remembers it. Till believes that he saw the potential of an urban renewal project in Newtown, one that was culturally motivated, and because of his position in the Council he was able to drive it, starting with his culturally squatting of buildings, the Olympic bid which helped give his actions some structure and renovation of cultural spaces, and finally his efforts to bring it together into a management district which failed. In his words he tried to activate the buildings in a cultural way. “It wasn’t a formulated designed planned way – it was organic in the way of trying to get the energy there and save those old buildings and try then to regenerate it” (Till, 2010).

On a more critical note, if Till were to take the same approach to Newtown today as he did in the nineties there would be an outcry at the lack of transparency, procedure and accountability. It appears that he did not have to account for any of the decisions he made although, as a public official, he had a responsibility to the public at large. His haphazard, almost anarchic, approach to decision-making in Newtown meant that there was no institutional foundation for sustainability. In this sort of decision-making environment where no-one knows what they are doing and why they are doing it, there can be no continuity. Where there is no real planning there can be no vision, direction or build up of capacity. The result is a lack of depth, lack of direction, and little chance of continuous sustained effort. At the same time the context in which Till was operating also needs to be understood. He was caught in the political time span between 1990 and 2000 during the fundamental transition from one government to the next.

When the Council changed and the Democratic Alliance (DA) lost its majority, Till was sidelined and his job as Director of Culture was given a new name and a political appointment was made. He believes the changes in the Council started to affect what was happening in the City and this impacted on Newtown. Enter Graeme Reid. Till still feels irritated at what he believes was Reid’s co-opting of his vision of Newtown as a cultural precinct. He attended a meeting called by Reid in the late nineties where Reid announced the new vision of the City “it was like this was a new vision for the city, it wasn’t, I was irritated” (Till, 2010).

In fact what happened, in summary, was that Till was marginalised and left the City, and the person who took his place had very little effect (Sack, 2010). During this time the Gauteng SDI identified Newtown as a key node in their provincial strategy. The City and province recognised the importance of developing and extending Newtown as a cultural precinct. The

JDA was established and became the engine for driving Newtown as a cultural precinct. According to Sack (2010) there is only one reason why province and the City were keen on Newtown and that is because of the crisis of the City which arose from the flight of capital. And so, said Sack “it becomes the wedge into the proposition that Johannesburg can survive itself” (2010). Investing in Newtown was one of the ways in which the City could send out a positive message to its constituency, as well as potential investors. It also helped that the Market Theatre and Museum Africa, but in particular the Market Theatre, were located there. The Market Theatre was an important institution for the African National Congress (ANC) government because of the international role it played in the resistance to Apartheid.

What Till managed to achieve was extraordinary for an area that had no formal structures in place to drive it and no budgets specifically allocated it. It was Till’s drive, his unique and strategic position in local government, and his vision that brought Newtown to the point before province and local government starting taking notice. According to Debnam (2007) “There appears to have been a pervasive belief – possibly one based on necessity brought about by the absence of any alternatives – that cultural precincts ‘just happened’. They don’t and they didn’t, not least in the context of the collapse of Johannesburg’s Inner City.” Enter government and buy-in to vision, strategy, plans and budget.

## **2.5 The late nineties and Gauteng Province**

The restructuring of government and the introduction of provincial government is important to the Newtown story because suddenly there was a second tier of government that could push a political agenda, make strategic decisions, and had the budget to pay for projects. Spiropoulos (2010) describes the restructuring process. The Gauteng provincial government was formally constituted in 1994 after the first democratic elections. The provincialisation of the country was a result of the constitutional negotiations between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), DP and the National Party (NP), which favoured the regionalisation of government. The introduction of a second tier of government was a fundamental change in government structure away from the former provincial administrations of the former government. The economic policy of the new provincial government devised its own objectives and focused on building a strong services industry and supported the notion of clustering of sectors.

At the same time as provincial government was restructuring and formulating new directions for economic development of the province, so local government also went through a transition. From 1995 to 2000 the City of Johannesburg was run by the Transitional Johannesburg Metropolitan Council. The focus of the transitional government was to spend

budget on redevelopment and reconstruction and there was little focus on revenue. There were also many contradictions and much confusion emerging between the five local councils over policies and programmes because each was responsible for service delivery and urban management in their part of the city. In other words a cohesive and wholistic approach was lacking.

Reid (2010) explains that by 1997 Johannesburg was effectively bankrupt and Ketso Gordhan was brought into a newly created role of City Manager of Johannesburg in order to reorganise the five regional councils into one metro. The iGoli 2002 plan was conceived by him and included the introduction of a number of “highly specialised corporate entities” (Gotz, 2001:1). The Inner City Office was established in 1998 to provide a coordinated approach to regeneration and service delivery. According to Gotz (2001:1) “The Johannesburg Metropolitan Council’s Inner City Office was established in 1998 both to unlock the central city’s latent economic potential and to arrest the steady decay of this once attractive urban space”. It grew into a successful unit and by 2000 it was working on “30 discrete projects” (Gotz, 2001:5) and had become one of the “most dynamic units in the Johannesburg administration.” The City’s Inner City Office, under the management of Graeme Reid, was reconstituted as the JDA under iGoli 2002 in order to manage the Inner City renewal projects, some on behalf of Blue IQ.

The City’s response to the flight of capital and the urban decay that had settled across much of the Inner City was to institute a major programme of infrastructure development – with the support of national government departments and Gauteng Province through its agency Blue IQ – across the Inner City. Newtown was one of the projects identified by firstly the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and then Blue IQ. It was finally given to the JDA to manage as a major infrastructure upgrade project.

According to Spiropoulos (2010), province’s interest started in the late nineties when an economic strategy was drafted which advocated a departure from the traditional industry in Gauteng. The move was away from the mining and manufacturing sector to an economy that was more forward looking and included information communication technologies, business services and value add. Spiropoulos was contracted to manage the Gauteng SDI programme, a DTI programme which sought the transformation of industry and economy of Gauteng. The SDIs looked at comparative and competitive advantages of particular localities and tried to find ways to promote investment in these areas. Various projects were identified because of their concentration and convergence of energy and Newtown was one of the nodes chosen.

Spiropoulos (2010) believes Newtown was identified because at the time there was, firstly, a nominal clustering of arts and cultural enterprises and venues in Newtown, secondly, the Inner City was a priority urban renewal area for the City and, thirdly, the development of cultural precincts was very fashionable as an urban renewal strategy, globally. The SDI programme also focused on innovation, technology and industry. The Gauteng SDI looked at what would expedite improvement of the Newtown environment as an investment environment for creative industries. Research was undertaken motivating in favour of the Newtown area as an investment destination to DTI, Gauteng Province and the City of Johannesburg. The research was undertaken by Avril Joffe who had decades of experience working in the creative industry supply chain as a creative industries specialist consultant. She knew the individuals and could drive the research which was not property related, nor related to the physicality of the place or access. It was about the creative industries and how to develop a supply chain within Newtown and the surrounds.

But why was Newtown identified as the location for the promotion of the cultural industries and not the city as a whole? Was Newtown even a big enough space? Joffe undertook a mapping exercise to identify where clustering of the creative industries existed in Johannesburg and to try to ascertain whether Newtown was indeed the right location to promote the growth of the creative industries. Of course it was found that the creative industries were spread across Johannesburg, sometimes clustered in various nodes. According to Spiropoulos “In a way we were trapped in our own construction – under different circumstances if we were developing creative industries we would not be focusing on Newtown but focusing on the industry as a whole. It had to do with place of Newtown. We had to create an attraction so that property investors could come in, the City could build the necessary infrastructure, and it could be attractive place for people to work with each other” (2010). Spiropoulos also added that the idea at the time was very much around clustering and spatial clustering, in particular creating competitive advantage by means of such clustering.

The final report and recommendations were handed over to Gauteng in 1999. During the six month handover period Spiropoulos’s primary concern was to find a way to imbed the work and transfer the ideas and work to Gauteng Province, the City of Johannesburg and the JDA (Spiropoulos, 2010). There was buy-in to the Newtown project and Gauteng Province through Blue IQ invested in the JDA to make physical improvements. Other recommendations included the building of the Nelson Mandela Bridge in order to create access from North and South. Spiropoulos indicated that the decision to proceed with the

bridge was based on detailed traffic studies that assumed property development of the Newtown area over a ten and twenty year period. He also recalls a conversation with Ketso Gordhan, the then City Manager of Johannesburg, who pointed out the potential of the Mandela Bridge as an early win, a symbolic project to show the commitment of the City to the renewal programme, and so they went ahead with the bridge. Few of Joffe's research recommendations were implemented. Her recommendations which related to creative industries came out of an extensive workshop process. They related to supply chain development and how to enable one firm to supply products and services to the next one, and how to create commercial strengths for each organisation in the supply chain.

Once she had completed the research for Spiropoulos she ended up being appointed as the Newtown project manager at the Inner City office (Joffe, 2010). A proposal call was put out by the Inner City office offering seed money to the best ideas for projects for Newtown. Projects ideas for dance, film, music and craft were submitted and the City made the final selection. Seed money was given to develop business plans and architectural drawings with the intention that these plans could then be used to raise funds to realise the various projects. However, the project was never taken further says Joffe (2010).

During our interview, Avril Joffe read from a series of story boards, twelve in total, which refer to the 1999 vision for Newtown. I am struck by a description of Newtown "...senses delight of Africa made all the more vibrant by the rich diversity, fusion and cross-over vital energy... coursing through the veins of Newtown... culture is not going to be straight-jacketed into neatly ordered compartments planned but rather spawns its seed into the fertile soil of a precinct ready to receive it. Theatre of the street, theatre of life, is a glue that creeps into the crevices of Newtown... Forges industrial cultural jewels into the crown of culture through the alchemy of urbanism." (Joffe, 2010). How different to the final vision produced by the JDA in their business plans of a few years later with its focus on Newtown as a cultural capital and attracting economic investment.

Although Joffe (2010) feels that a lot of her work in Newtown was wasted effort, I would argue that her work was important in developing and driving a vision for the development of Newtown as a cultural precinct. Besides the urban development frameworks of GAPP architects (then referred to as GAPS) from the late eighties and early nineties, Joffe's work was the first planned and systematic approach for a vision for the Newtown Cultural Precinct. The link between the urban development framework and the content she produced and how this could be used to support the vision helped create real interest and excitement in Newtown. Another major contribution was convincing the Gauteng Economic Department

to fund a maintenance project in Newtown. Joffe and a quantity surveyor did a three week audit of maintenance issues in every building in Newtown. Province covered the costs of fixing the buildings. Joffe (2010) notes that in terms of maintaining its own buildings, the City did not follow through.

The JDA became the implementing agency and according to Spiropoulos (2010) their view on the creative industries was harsh “if they can’t pay the rent they must go. It was a strategic choice they made – it was a property-led initiative. On reflection that is what we were pointing to – an investment environment – tenancy and occupation.” Another recommendation made by the consultants was to create the right balance for Newtown between being a regional destination or a place to visit and being a neighbourhood. The report promoted residential development for Newtown to make sure that there was local night-time activity.

The JDA’s mandate was physical improvement and not industry development. Joffe raised funds independently to continue with her work with its focus on creative industry development in Newtown but then the funding dried up. Joffe’s recommendations were of a long-term nature and hence harder to implement than Peter Starke’s, the consultant who was appointed by the JDA to develop a business plan to create a functioning cultural precinct in Newtown. Starke’s vision was diametrically opposed to Joffe’s. His was driven by consumption and building iconic structures and Joffe’s was focused on production. The JDA believed that the property-driven approach – create the space and the physical environment and industry will follow – was easier and more cost effective to implement.

## **2.6 Enter JDA 2001 and Graeme Reid**

Although Till achieved much as described in the previous section, in January 2001 when the JDA entered the situation in Newtown was bleak. Reid (2010) describes the landscape. There was an informal settlement on the land to the North. In Turbine Hall, Transport House, the Bus Factory (with its roof removed), the sheds where Central Place now stands and parts of the Electric Workshop were all squatted in appalling conditions. The audience for evening performances had almost entirely deserted the precinct and daytime use was perceived to be increasingly unsafe. Mary Fitzgerald Square was potholed and covered in weeds and broken glass. The flea market had shrunk to Saturdays only in the core precinct and occasional raves happened at Electric Workshop.

It is within this context that the JDA’s business plan from 2000 to 2010 was developed. It defined a vision for Newtown in its 2002 business plan for the Cultural Precinct as “Newtown



will become the creative capital of Johannesburg and South Africa: dynamic, vibrant, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan, boasting the best cultural offerings in Africa” (Debnam & Starke). This was supported by a primary objective which was the “attraction of new private sector (and other) investment to complement and enhance the facilities and programme already available in the cultural quarter as a destination centre and desired location for the creative industries” (Debnam & Starke, 2002).

I will provide a brief overview of what was planned under Reid’s tenure and comment with hindsight after I have described each phase of the plan. The first phase of the JDA’s business plan for Newtown was a foundation phase that was planned to take place between 1999 and 2001 (Debnam & Starke, 2002). It included getting Blue IQ on board, the creation of the JDA, and the appointment of a development manager. GAPP’s spatial framework for the precinct was approved and a proposal call went out for dance, music, craft and media projects. An audit of Inner City cultural assets and development strategies was to be undertaken by the City of Johannesburg in order to give a context to projects in the Inner City including Newtown, in particular the notion of the cultural arc linking Constitution Hill to Newtown via Braamfontein, Wits University and the new bridge. Squatters were to be relocated.

This phase was successfully completed, except for the proposal call for development of cultural elements which was, according to Brian Debnam (2010), premature and unrealistic. He added that the proposals all needed ongoing public sector funding which was not available.

Phase two involved physical and planning infrastructure and took place between 2001 and 2003. It involved the major infrastructure projects such as the building of the Nelson Mandela Bridge, the construction of the on and off ramps, and the public realm upgrade with a focus on Mary Fitzgerald Square (Debnam & Starke, 2002). The spatial framework was to be revised and the adequacy of bulk services confirmed. There was to be commitment from the Johannesburg Housing Company to the Brickfields social housing development and the remaining squatters relocated. A detailed business plan from 2003 to 2006 set cultural targets (which included developing training and support for small businesses) in order to get buy-in for the commercial potential of the precinct. A cultural strategy was to be developed based on the strengthening of key organisations and the development of collaboration between them. A development framework for commercial investment was to be established, and a decision was made for the JDA to develop the first site, 1 Central Place, as a lead commercial project.

Again this phase was successfully completed. According to Debnam (2010) later in the phase it started becoming apparent that there would not be enough budget available for cultural programming and training growth on the scale initially envisaged.

Phases three and four between 2002 and 2004 involved the creation of cultural organisation infrastructure and the attraction of commercial development (Debnam & Starke, 2002). For the daytime programme and training this included the creation of the Bus Factory as a capex project with funding from the Japanese government and the installation of the Beautiful Things, a craft exhibition which was a provincial initiative. Also achieved was the securing of Sci-Bono Discovery Centre and the opening of the first phase. The long-term future of the Workers' Museum was to be secured as well as the opening of the west wing of Museum Africa. Both these projects were delayed and the opening of the west wing has yet to happen. The relocation of Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) to Turbine Hall, although agreed to by the City, did not take place. The evening programme and events achieved more success. The Market Theatre was rescued and restructured; Bassline became managers of the newly refurbished Newtown Music Hall; the Dance Factory was stabilised; and Mary Fitzgerald Square was launched as a major events space. On a structural level it was planned that a city improvement district be established to run the precinct; cooperative structures between cultural organisations and venues, commercial, and training be established; and most importantly that COJACHS become the JDA's eventual successor in Newtown.

Broadly speaking this phase achieved its targets in that new facilities and programmes were developed, management in key venues and organisations was consolidated, audiences increased, as did productivity in the training organisations. Issues identified at the end of this phase remain a challenge to Newtown's success and they include lack of funding for programming and still no confirmed private sector investment except for Turbine Hall. Reid (2010) notes that the JDA did secure investors for the identified sites but SAHRA put a moratorium on all developments in Newtown.

The attraction of commercial development in this phase focused on the development of 1 Central Place as a mixed-use commercial with retail on the ground floor; the development of the Majestic Development opposite the Market Theatre as a mixed use residential development with retail on the ground floor; C-Max development of sites including the Workers' Museum and a portion of the park behind the Jeppe Street houses a mixed use retail with cinemas, offices, residential, parking and a hotel. Anglo-Gold Ashanti and Turbine

Hall as A-grade offices shared with the new JAG and retail. The final proposal call was for Transport House, the site next to 1 Central Place and the site between Sci-Bono Discovery Centre and Moving into Dance, and the site of Sci-Bono's current parking.

Except for Turbine hall, none of these developments have taken place. The Majestic Development seems imminent, as does the development of the site next to 1 Central Place. But until the developers are on site, it is difficult to confirm that the developments will in fact proceed. The issues are not necessarily a lack of investor confidence but often relate to delays due to heritage, planning, infrastructure and other issues discovered late in the process. The development of Newtown linkages also formed part of this phase of the business plan. There has been investment in residential developments and offices in the Mills Precinct, to the west of Newtown, but real linkages with the Newtown Cultural Precinct have not been established. The potential of linkages with Fordsburg, Diagonal Street and Chinatown are vague and notional more than a reality. A Newtown North Development Framework was put in place (Senior, 2010).

Phase five takes Newtown up to the current year 2010 and focuses on maintaining cultural momentum in the commercial development phase while the JDA withdraws (Debnam & Starke, 2002). Not much has been achieved during the phase except the establishment of the NID, and the plan for the JDA to withdraw and handover to the city improvement district and COJACHS. The JDA offices were redeveloped, Moving into Dance rehoused, Kippies refurbished and the Market Photo Workshop relocated to more suitable premises. What was not achieved was the relocation of JAG to the Turbine Hall; re-launch of expanded and reconceived Museum Africa; Bus Factory confirmed as craft and design centre for exhibition, retail and training; the development of a brief for a 4,000 seat arena; the future of the Market Theatre secured through the Majestic Development and the Potato Sheds development; marketing and managing Newtown as a meetings venue; the Newtown box office; and training and education schools programmes.

Phase six refers to a Newtown that has achieved a sustainable critical mass in terms of both daytime and evening/night-time activity and that is a major contributor to increased tourism to the City (Debnam & Starke, 2002). It also refers to it as an attraction of international events. Audiences have increased (refer to Table 1 in Chapter Three) exponentially and Newtown does attract international events, and hopefully the newly launched Newtown Heritage Trail will contribute to increased tourism and visitors to the area.

But how did the JDA go about implementing this business plan? The JDA was instructed by the City of Johannesburg to make good use of its assets in Newtown because the City, as mentioned previously, owns a significant amount of land and buildings in Newtown, as part of its portfolio to make income out of its assets. At that stage Leila McKenna and Graeme Reid were the two key drivers of the whole strategy. The situation in Newtown as has been described earlier was dire and the 1994 transition did not help matters. The Market Theatre was probably going through its worst period at that time. Post-1994 artists lost their story for a period of time, and with that their direction and purpose. They had been in opposition to the government and had created what Sack (2010) refers to as an “exotic space where black and white people interacted and suddenly it was all legal”. Also at the time there were real management problems at the Market Theatre.

Post-1994 the ANC government did not have a cadre of cultural managers and people with little or no experience in managing cultural institutions were put in charge of cultural institutions, venues and organisations. During apartheid the funding agencies were supporting democracies and the anti-apartheid movement. They could not fund the ANC and trade unions but they could fund cultural organisations which were “perceived as the soft end into resistance”, according to Sack (2010). A large amount of funding from the Dutch, Norwegians and Swiss went into arts and culture but post-1994 this all dried up and many organisations collapsed because funding streams that they depended on all but dried up. Newtown was in a crisis.

In the nineties Newtown fizzled out for a number of reasons, some being lack of management, no programming, and organisations and institutions not talking to each other. Newtown’s decline is inextricably linked to Inner City flight of capital and the subsequent rapid decline of the Inner City. Reid believes that during this time the Council spent money on the wrong things. During Till’s time he says that although a lot of money was spent on Newtown mainly on renovating buildings, nothing was invested into attracting people into the area and “nothing was spent on the public environment, crime and grime” (Reid, 2010). The final nail in the proverbial coffin and major impediment to Newtown’s survival was the invasion of Turbine Hall by squatters.

In 1991 the Council sold Turbine Hall for R22 million (Reid, 2010). Just after all the tenants were signed up for the new Turbine Hall development, including Edgars and other major shops, the Council announced retail rights for the Metro Mall development. This destroyed the proposed Turbine Hall retail development and the developer went insolvent. Tiber and Nedbank stepped into the breach but before Tiber would take transfer they required the City

to fix up the building (which had undergone rapid decay due to the invasion by the squatters). The City had already spent the money received from the initial sale and so could not meet the developer's requirements. "You can't create a precinct in that kind of environment", said Reid (2010).

Neil Fraser (2008) tells a different story in his *Citichat* and describes how the City went out on a proposal call with a retail and entertainment complex as part of the brief. The tender was awarded in 1990 to the highest bidder who, "it transpired, did not have tenants in place and later evidently ran into major financial difficulties. Lower bidders were not considered even though they had secured major tenants and finance. The award was perceived to be a typical short-sighted Council decision 'looking for the biggest bang for the buck' and ending with no buck and no bang, nor even a whimper!" (Fraser, 2008). The City was quick to declare this project the start of the Inner City's regeneration and return of investment to the city. The site was invaded by squatters and it was described as "one of the harshest living spaces in Johannesburg where the filth alone could drive away the most incessant compassion" (Fraser, 2008).

The degrading physical and urban management issues were major contributors to Newtown's decline linked to economic and cultural issues. There was no reason to go to Newtown because the programming was non-existent or very poor. However, when there was something worth watching "When they did *Shopping and Fucking* you couldn't get parking," said Reid (2010). The closure of the *Vrye Weekblad* also contributed to the closure of the Yard of Ale, which was a hangout place for journalists and activists. When they stopped going it all contributed to the decline, Reid added (2010).

## **2.7 Why Newtown?**

Reid (2010) said that the big question facing government at the time was whether to pursue the notion of a cultural precinct in Newtown or not? A lot of money had already been invested and the question facing government was could they just walk away from this investment? Reid (2010) is of the opinion that the investment made by Till did not create a platform to address issues in culture or in private sector investment. "If you have nothing to put into a building why fix it up?" (Reid, 2010). No-one was looking at what was happening between the buildings and there was little funding for quality programming to bring people to Newtown. The situation was further exacerbated by a lack of communication and cooperation between some of the key institutions. At the time Reid (2010) started working in Newtown, the CEOs of the Market Theatre, Museum Africa and the Africa Cultural Centre had not spoken to each other for three years.

Reid said that the question the JDA asked was “is there any validity in continuing to pursue the notion of Newtown as a cultural precinct?” (2010). He said they found that there were a number of reasons to continue: Newtown was unique in terms of its heritage buildings and heritage assets; there was large public sector ownership of land (lots of land); an appearance of good infrastructure in place; as well as a nucleus of cultural institutions that had survived (Reid, 2010). Most importantly Newtown was the epicentre of metropolitan Johannesburg. “And where does integration happen?” Reid asks, “it happens in public spaces which are accessible” (2010). There was definitely the basis or foundation for the making of a branded cultural precinct, and of course it had for decades already been considered, informally, a cultural precinct.

The JDA also looked at the reasons why Newtown was not successful at the time. There were four key obstacles to Newtown’s development. These were, according to Reid (2010), the urban environment was unattractive; limited access – it may be the epicentre but no-one can get to it; it can only function as a destination place because no-one is living there; the state of Turbine Hall prevented developers from investing in the area.

The JDA’s strategy, informed by recommendations made by Spiropoulos, was to address access via the Nelson Mandela Bridge and the Carr Street off/on ramps. It was to make the urban environment attractive and the square and public space was upgraded following a national design competition. Iconic elements such as the carved African heads and lights were introduced. There was no-one living in Newtown and so the JDA introduced housing. Reid (2010) does not believe the housing developments necessarily contributed to the type of precinct he had in mind, “Brickfields didn’t create the kind of place that creative people may want to live in. We needed a critical mix of tenants – and this I think is where it went wrong. This place can’t survive purely on the consumption of culture.” Reid (2010) does make reference to Joffe’s research and recommendations around the importance of establishing the creative industries in the precinct. In his view the proposal calls that were sent out for business plans for establishment of various creative industries were awarded to people who could not deliver on the projects and that is why they did not work out. “There was a whole endeavour to create a place which was more about people living there and people working there and not just people coming there to consume culture” (Reid, 2010).

The maverick approach started by Till in his approach to developing Newtown was continued by Reid. Reid was unconventional with his budgets. Local government is about operational spending but Reid capitalised all sorts of activities. His rationale was that if one builds a

shopping centre in Newtown then marketing would be a capitalised expense – so why cannot marketing be a capitalised expense if you are developing Newtown – even if it takes ten years. “So we capitalised what we could”, said Reid (2010).

Theory can only take one so far in understanding Newtown and the development drivers. At the end of the day to understand Newtown and how it developed, it is just as important to know who was in charge. It was the big personalities like Till and Reid who decided how money was to be spent, and who motivated for these funds. Although it does have its downside, the maverick approach is sometimes the only one that, within the South African local government context, can get things done because it is not constrained by bureaucracy.

## **2.8 The story of the international consultants – Peter Starke and Brian Debnam (2000 to 2006)**

So how did Newtown go about positioning and developing itself into a cultural precinct as defined by international best practice? Peter Starke and Brian Debnam were the two consultants from Britain appointed by the JDA to drive the development of the cultural aspect of the Newtown project. Peter Starke was involved with Newtown from 2000 right at the start of the JDA intervention (Debnam, 2010). The JDA had already made decisions about the infrastructural improvements including access and the Nelson Mandela Bridge. Starke observed that the cultural precinct had an international vibe which could be compared with small provincial cities, but according to Debnam “the sort of place that was trying to sell sizzle but with no sausage” (2010). They saw the situation as being one where all the infrastructure had been planned but for a place that looked as though it was dying and due to the decline described previously there was not a trajectory that could be easily identified (Debnam, 2010).

The JDA’s business plan written by Debnam and Starke (2002) was explicit in saying unless investment is made in cultural organisations and infrastructure, including staff, and especially management and good management structures, you cannot claim to have a cultural precinct. In the end Reid accepted and found budget to manage the process of stabilising and improving the cultural organisations and venues within Newtown. It was at this point that Starke brought in Debnam and the two consultants supported by the JDA development manager, Xoliswa Ngema, in managing the JDA’s business plan (Reid, 2010). Together with Ngema, they developed a plan to strengthen the cultural organisations, to develop business plans for them, restructure their boards and put in a structure for those organisations that did not have one. According to Debnam (2010), for Newtown to be a cultural precinct there had to be, at the very least, a Friday and Saturday evening programme across music, dance and

theatre, and a daytime programme working across the visual arts, Sci-Bono Discovery Centre, and SAB World of Beer.

In Debnam's view at the end of 2003 Newtown organisations and venues were in poor shape (2010). The Market Theatre was on its knees with a R10 million deficit and twenty percent audience figures. The Bassline was doing one performance every three weeks usually when a promoter wanted to launch a record but there was no regular programme. At that stage it had evolved from Mega Music to the Music Industry Development Initiative (MIDI) with Rosie Katz trying to fund training programmes from MAPPP Seta funding in such a way as to bring in funds for concerts. The Bus Factory had acquired the Beautiful Things exhibition but there was no longer term funding. The Dance Factory was also on its knees with funding from the Belgians to run the dance school but nothing to run a venue. Moving into Dance was relatively well funded. The Market Laboratory was getting money from the Swedish to run their development and school programmes. The Market Photo Workshop, still in their old building, had very limited funds, resources, and no real exhibition space. Museum Africa was there put poorly managed. "The exhibitions had dust all over them and it looked like a museum that time had forgotten," said Debnam. The eviction of the tenants from 1 President Street was very controversial. The building was included in phase two of Sci-Bono's expansion and therefore the arts organisations, although they created a critical mass, had to be evicted. The SAB World of Beer and the Horror Cafe were both in place. The Workers' Museum was called the Workers' Library.

Debnam believes that from 1994 Newtown was used as a "dumping ground" for small arts organisations where they did not have to pay rent and so the idea arose in the minds of these people that Newtown as a cultural precinct was a place where artists gathered, sort of like an artistic enclave (Debnam, 2010). The JDA had other ideas and believed that if Newtown was to become a cultural precinct it had to be commercially viable and this included commercial developments, cafes, restaurants, shops and galleries. The vision of the JDA, according to Debnam (2010), excluded the arts organisations that had no funding and nowhere else to go because they were unable to pay rent. The strategy was to strengthen the daytime offering of Museum Africa, the Bus Factory, SAB World Beer and Sci-Bono Discovery Centre – the idea being that these venues needed to create a critical mass of daytime visitors and a series of attractions to give people a reason to visit. The second strategy, says Debnam (2010), was that a Friday and Saturday evening programme of music, dance, theatre and events on Mary Fitzgerald Square and the Newtown Park was needed with the idea of building festivals around this programme.



Debnam's first job was to do an audit of all the arts organisations listing conditions, problems, and challenges (Debnam, 2010). The building now called the Bassline was discovered to be so out of line with health and safety regulations that the venue could safely only hold 200 to 500 people and not the 1000 the venue was planned for. The JDA found money for exit doors and to refurbish the downstairs bar and flooring, and they fixed the upstairs venue. After this it was able to become a venue for 1000 people. This was an important step, says Debnam (2010). The Dance Factory did not have seating and audiences had to sit on old cushions infested with fleas to watch dance. The JDA paid for seats, a foyer, a sprung floor and refurbishment of the stage and rehearsal room, as well as installing an upstairs office. The Bus Factory was more problematic. A partnership with DAC, province and the City was required to carry the vision of a craft centre forward. This did not materialise and "thank goodness the JDA stepped in and saved the building" said Debnam (2010).

Once the capital recommendations were completed, Debnam and Starke had to investigate the internal structure of the organisations – how were they being managed and with what capacity? (Debnam, 2010). The Market Theatre as the *raison d'être* for Newtown, as an international cultural brand, and Newtown's anchor tenant, needed to be strengthened so it could once again be the exciting and innovative theatre bustling and busy with a strong South African programme. John Kani became the patron of the Market Theatre making way for new management but before he stepped down he negotiated with DAC that they would pay off the theatre's deficit and adopt the Market Theatre as a cultural institution. Starke and Debnam were appointed by the Market Theatre board to do a structural review of the organisation and to make recommendations as to a new structure and key posts. Their recommendations were accepted and implemented and a strong senior management team was put in place (Debnam, 2010).

Debnam went through a similar process with the Bassline and a business plan was developed and a lease negotiated. Similarly with the Dance Factory who had nine years of "non accounts" because all financial transactions had taken place through Suzette le Seuer's personal bank account (Debnam, 2010). Because of this she was unable to apply for funding. The JDA paid for this process and the arts organisations were able to recover somewhat due to the injection of funds from the JDA. The JDA also provided funds to venues as a guarantee against losses for evening programmes on Friday and Saturday nights.

It became problematic for the JDA to be funding programming as most of the funding from Blue IQ was assigned to capital projects (Reid, 2010). The JDA had cleverly phrased it as capital needed to attract partnerships and to get the precinct going. So although it was operational it was once-off funding for special projects and organisational development to make the precinct viable. The most important element of a cultural precinct is to have healthy organisations. “The rest is almost irrelevant because if venues cannot put on consistent, quality programmes then there is not a cultural precinct”, says Debnam (2010). So the investment made by the JDA ensured an increase in programme which resulted in increased footfall. This in turn gave confidence to some investors and Capello, Sophiatown and Kaldis were prepared to set up shop in the precinct due to the growing footfall.

Once all the above was in place, the JDA asked Debnam and Starke to develop an events strategy (Debnam, 2010). They worked with Brad Holmes of the Bassline on a tender for Arts Alive with the intention that not only the Bassline would be programmed but all venues in Newtown would benefit by being involved in the festival. With Ngema, they also started regular meetings with the arts organisations because they had discovered that many of these organisations had not spoken to each other for years. The idea was to get these people around a table so that they could complain about the JDA, parking, security, lighting, commercial developments etc. All the things they are still complaining about today at the stakeholder meetings that the NID now facilitates! It was a healthy process, in Debnam’s opinion (2010), and enabled the organisations to come together and start talking to each other about joint programming and festivals. “Newtown needed to be built on the organisations”, said Debnam (2010). This needed to come from the organisations and not be imposed upon from the top down.

The next challenge was ensuring that the events space and the nature of events were such that the cultural organisations could still work in Newtown. Mary Fitzgerald Square is essentially a mass event space and Debnam (2010) believes it is a good idea and in line with international best-practice. But contradictions remain and it seems that the JDA did not think through the potential conflict between hosting mass events and the implications for this on the programme offered by cultural venues and arts organisations, and indeed potential hotels and additional residential developments. On the other hand big spaces where people can gather are rare but they need to be carefully managed. There needs to be a balance in the way in which Newtown is used as a venue itself and the venues already in Newtown.

The idea was that the NID would coordinate and balance the programming and interests of the potentially opposing spaces – Mary Fitzgerald Square and the Newtown Park as spaces

for mass events with the interests of the venues and organisations – and where possible collaborate. In any cultural precinct this sort of approach is considered good practice. Of course Debnam (2010) is quick to point out that the difference in American and British cities is that they have highly subsidised organisations within their cultural precincts and this is rare in South Africa. To counter this, the JDA business plan was driven off trying to commercially develop Newtown to provide the funding to ensure ongoing sustainability of the cultural precinct in terms of safe and clean. In terms of best practice the fact that Newtown has never been at a point where it can say that its organisations have stabilised is Newtown's biggest problem in positioning itself as a cultural precinct. Debnam believes that Newtown is nearly there in that it now has daytime footfall and "it can only get better" (2010).

### **2.9 Enter JDA and Lael Bethlehem (2005 to 2010)**

Lael Bethlehem took over from Reid as CEO of the JDA in 2005 and arrived to a crisis of funding in Newtown. At this stage most of Newtown's public space upgrading and major infrastructure projects were complete. Newtown had a brand and had been launched as Johannesburg's cultural precinct but there was still a long way to go in terms of property developments and establishing and finding funding to manage the NID. Both these elements are necessary for Newtown's ongoing sustainability, and they feed into each other. Without commercial developments the NID will never be sustainable and ongoing urban management will not be possible. This of course threatens the very existence of Newtown as a place people will want to visit. Developments, it is proposed by Reid (2010) and Bethlehem (2010), underpin the City's investment and create a sustainable economic precinct.

The vision Bethlehem (2010) inherited was not explicit but rather implicit in that she had been in the City before her appointment as CEO of the JDA so was aware of the Newtown project and knew what the JDA had been trying to achieve there. She did have access to the business plan but said that it "guided her only up to a point" (Bethlehem, 2010). She also got input from Reid and Sack, as well as having conversations with Till. Just after Bethlehem started working at the JDA there was an all day workshop with Brian Debnam, Peter Starke, Xoliswa Ngema, Barry Senior and Steven Sack. The purpose of the workshop was to understand the issues and develop a plan going forward. Most of the thinking and input from the workshop was coalesced into a business plan for the NID written by Debnam (2006).

The JDA's website states that its primary objective is to bring about urban renewal and that means bringing investment to an area (<http://www.jda.org.za>). In the case of Newtown, says Bethlehem, there are the added elements of culture and heritage which are both resources in society and in urban renewal and regeneration (2010). Right up front Bethlehem (2010)

makes the position of the JDA clear in terms of its relationship to culture and cultural organisations within Newtown. According to Bethlehem “It wasn’t that we were here to serve cultural aims – it was that we were doing city renewal and city regeneration using culture as a big driver – and of course we need to serve the cultural community within that. But not in a sense that we do whatever it takes to satisfy cultural players” (2010).

Blue IQ and JDA were at loggerheads and there was no funding available other than the monthly income from rentals for running costs. Reid had told Bethlehem (2010) that R7 million had been set aside for the new Moving into Dance building but Blue IQ would not agree to this, nor would they agree to any further money from the Greater Newtown Development Company (Newtown Devco).<sup>3</sup> At this stage there was a serious disagreement between the JDA and Blue IQ about the future of the Newtown Devco. Disagreement aside, Bethlehem explained that Blue IQ always honours the monthly payment to the NID. Back to the Bus Factory and Bethlehem (2010) continues that a big issue was that the JDA was claiming the running costs for the Bus Factory from the Newtown Devco. The running costs were about R1 million per annum and there was no income to cover this. The craft exhibition took up most of the space. Artist Proof Studio was in on a very low rental. The coffee shop had failed. The cost of security for the building was also very high. Experience had shown that it was not going to work as a tourist destination, and that existing business and rentals certainly would not sustain the building (Bethlehem, 2010).

So when Bethlehem took over there was an immediate crisis. The JDA was unable to cover the costs of running the Bus Factory and they were unable to build a new home for Moving into Dance. The long-term sustainability of the NID was an issue. The JDA could not use any of the funds in the Newtown Devco account for further development of Newtown. Bethlehem had to immediately find ways to solve the crisis. The Bus Factory and the new building for Moving into Dance were priorities in order for cultural organisations to continue to have a home in Newtown. At this stage Bethlehem was still working under the assumption that the land Reid put out to tender would mean that the old Moving into Dance building would be demolished, and there was no money to build them a new building. She says of her handover period that she “inherited some big problems” (Bethlehem, 2010).

Out of this miasma two clear priorities emerged for Bethlehem, namely securing the Bus Factory and a new Moving into Dance building. Bethlehem (2010) tabled an idea at the initial

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<sup>3</sup> The Greater Newtown Development Company was set up with Blue IQ and JDA as shareholders to finance the Newtown Cultural Precinct Regeneration Project.

Newtown workshop that the Bus Factory could become the home of the JDA. A lot of people were against the idea because they thought it would displace cultural organisations.

“However, what they couldn’t see and I could was that the million rand wasn’t there and there was nobody to pay for it. So we had to do something. It’s all very well to say the whole space should be given to cultural organisations but no-one could pay for it” (Bethlehem, 2010). Bethlehem (2010) says that she could see the opportunity and that in retrospect she was proved right. The JDA was spending R1 million per annum to rent commercial offices at 90 Market Street and the Bus Factory needed R1 million per annum to cover operational costs “What if we paid our million rand rent not to a property owner but to the Bus Factory?” Bethlehem said (2010). She intended for the JDA’s rent to run the building thereby being able to keep the rents low for the cultural organisations occupying the rest of the building. She proposed to the City for R12 million to build offices for the JDA in the Bus Factory and not to pay this amount back because the space would become an asset of the City. She further proposed that the annual rental be used to cover the running costs of the Bus Factory. The City approved the proposal.

Bethlehem (2010) is aware that the cultural organisations at the Bus Factory felt threatened and perceived the JDA as moving in and taking over the space transforming it into an office block. “I suppose they just didn’t trust that actually I was really trying to save the Bus Factory” (Bethlehem, 2010). Bethlehem defends her decision by explaining that the craft exhibition had already moved out prior to the JDA moving into. In fact only one organisation was displaced by the move and that was a ceramics organisation. Although the JDA found alternative premises and paid for the move it did cause fallout. And she admits that the experience of the remaining tenants in the Bus Factory while the offices were being built must have been awful and damaging “but it was the only long-term answer” said Bethlehem (2010). In my experience and from what I observed, the biggest problem between the JDA and the cultural organisations was a lack of communication, and not necessarily the difficult conditions during building operations. In fact communication appeared to be non-existent.

The JDA does get income from the rentals at the Bus Factory but it is small and covers merely five percent of the building’s running costs (Bethlehem, 2010). The City cannot pay the other ninety-five percent and instead the JDA rental pays it. Bethlehem believes this has worked well, “We did build and we did move and I think everyone was pleasantly surprised because we were able to keep rents low. Everyone stayed except for the Swiss funded ceramic project (and we found other premises and we paid for the move) – they didn’t have to move an inch – which to me was a big thing because you do want to counter gentrification” (Bethlehem, 2010). She was also able to move the Market Lab into the Bus

Factory. She went to the City and asked for money to build a theatre in the space and they agreed. Artist Proof Studio and Imbali have expanded. The Visual Arts and Crafts Academy (VACA) moved out but not because the JDA moved in and they were relocated into one of the houses on Jeppe Street. "There were complaints by cultural organisations about Common Purpose moving into the Bus Factory but there was a good reason for them to move in because they are the JDA's social responsibility partner" (Bethlehem, 2010).

At the end of the day Bethlehem (2010) believes that the JDA's move into the Bus Factory has created a sustainable situation for the cultural organisations located in the space. Using the JDA's own rental stream she was able to keep nearly everyone in the building and the Bus Factory crisis was solved. Bethlehem's passion and commitment for the arts and culture is clear. "I really do believe that regeneration is a creative process and engaging with contemporary culture is not only inspiring but fertilises and nurtures regeneration and that you must get your staff to engage culturally otherwise they're going to be less good at their jobs" (Bethlehem, 2010).

Bethlehem's second priority was a new building for Moving into Dance. She had to go back to the City and "do some dancing" because Blue IQ said they would not pay for the building and that they were not willing to support it, although according to Bethlehem it was intended in the Newtown business plan (Debnam & Starke, 2002). There was a lot of indecision around whether the building would happen or not but eventually the City decided to support it. There was debate about why Moving into Dance was getting a new building and not another organisation but the fact remained "we were evicting them from another building and it was important to give them a home. And we did. But it was a struggle", said Bethlehem (2010). Bethlehem refers to Till's cultural squatting of Moving into Dance and she said that although they moved in on an informal basis and without permission "you can't just say to them move out because they are an important cultural actor" (Bethlehem, 2010). She is pleased that they were able to provide a new building and that the City was willing to provide the funding.

According to Bethlehem (2010) although the City has bought into the idea of Newtown as a cultural precinct (hence their investment in Moving into Dance and the Market Lab buildings), it also has to balance the development aspect of the area. This is about releasing land to the private sector for commercial development which is critical to Newtown's sustainability. Interestingly enough the R7 million Reid says was set aside in the Newtown Devco for the Moving into Dance building is now going to revert to the NID and will go a long way to ensuring ongoing management of the public space.

Bethlehem's next big issue was the Workers' Museum. As already mentioned, Reid had released the erf upon which the Workers' Museum is situated for development by Zenprop into a hotel. There had been a massive outcry and SAHRA had put a stop order on the development. Bethlehem eventually came to the conclusion that it was more of a "lose lose situation than a win win" and that pushing for the development of the site was not the right decision (Bethlehem, 2010). According to her "I didn't put this site up for development and although there is some obligation to Zenprop because the JDA did release the land – it's a mistake and we must walk away from it. It will ruin the place" (Bethlehem, 2010).

Unfortunately because of this Zenprop's proposals for the site in front of Sci-Bono also fell away. Newtown became too complicated for them. Bethlehem, once again, managed to secure funding from the City to renovate the Workers' Museum and put in a new exhibition. She concedes that Reid's intention was a good one – to use Zenprop's development to cover the operating costs of the museum. She believes the museum will be run sub-optimally but at least she was able to build a beautiful museum and "everyone can feel and touch that history" (Bethlehem, 2010). This is another achievement that Bethlehem is very happy about.

Bethlehem's cultural successes, in summary, are securing the Bus Factory as a space for cultural organisations, a new building for Moving into Dance, a new theatre and offices for the Market Lab, and a new museum for the Workers' Museum. The redevelopment of Kippies can also be added to her list of achievements and although it is a different space now it is under the Market Theatre's control and hopefully it will be used as a music venue. Sci-bono's expansion has been massive and although the JDA did not directly fund this, they did play a facilitation role. And finally the JDA managed to give the Market Theatre control over their land via a forty year lease.

Another success has been the establishment and funding of the NID which has been operating since June 2006 with Bethlehem as its main champion. The NID is vital to the day-to-day management of the precinct and the management of events on Mary Fitzgerald Square and the Newtown Park. Once the Newtown Devco has been dissolved, the R7 million will revert to the NID – according to Debnam's business plan (2006) this is the amount required to carry the NID to sustainability. There is an awareness that the NID cannot survive on its own and even with the R7 million it will need additional monthly revenue from events in the public space and from levies from the private sector. Bethlehem has managed to get Council approval for the R7 million, as well as for income from Mary

Fitzgerald Square and the Newtown Park. What is still not in place and critical to the sustainability of the precinct is the commercial developments.

Bethlehem's main objectives have been to try and secure and maintain the cultural elements of Newtown while at the same time trying to develop it including bringing in commercial development because that is the only way to sustain it long-term. The JDA therefore pursued the commercial developments. They have almost succeeded with the Potato Sheds development – a massive billion rand retail centre, offices and hotel behind Museum Africa and the Market Theatre incorporating the Potato Sheds. There have been some changes to the development agreement and the Johannesburg Council still has to approve but Bethlehem remains optimistic. The Majestic Development opposite the Market Theatre is also imminent and is linked to the Potato Sheds development in that the same developers are involved with both sites, namely Atterbury. An eight story office development is planned for this site. As part of this agreement, the Market Theatre will get new offices in the Majestic as well as R3.5 million from Atterbury. The NID will also be a beneficiary via levies.

Unfortunately an agreement was signed with the developers of Transport House that is open ended in that they do not have to develop within a specified time frame. The JPC and the JDA are seeking senior legal council to see how they can get out of the agreement (Bethlehem, 2010). Elangabi, the commercial developers, have residential, retail, a gym and cinemas planned for this site. They obviously want to hold onto the site, and have done so for two years now, perhaps until the market improves. The City does not want this as it is not good for Newtown or the Inner City in general.

Bethlehem (2010) believes the site next to 1 Central Place will eventually be developed and the JDA and JPC are already quite far with this process. The site in front of Sci-Bono is difficult because although it is a valuable piece of land there are complicated geo technicalities. If it does not get developed she “won't cry” because it is very useful for bus parking for Sci-Bono and parking in general for Newtown, which is limited (Bethlehem, 2010). The remaining site where the old Moving into Dance building is situated will most probably not be developed and in Bethlehem's view this is appropriate and it should be left (2010).

Smaller interventions include fixing the lighting. The JDA decided to remove much of the distinctive Newtown lighting especially along the streets and replace it with standard City Power street lights. The French lights as they are referred to have never worked properly and maintaining them is labour intensive and often just seems to make the situation worse.



According to Bethlehem (2010) they decided to keep the French lights on Mary Fitzgerald Square, the Newtown Park, the Nelson Mandela Bridge, and the walkways through the cultural precinct. However, I have observed that there are still French lights along President Street and Miriam Makeba Street. They remain temperamental and Newtown is often in darkness. The lighting situation remains problematic.

Looking back, Bethlehem feels satisfied with what she has achieved in Newtown (2010). She believes she has been true to what her predecessors put in place. She did try to protect the cultural sector and make it more secure and she believes they are now more secure. She had to end what Till started with his guerrilla tenancing and put proper leases in place.<sup>4</sup> I think it would be difficult to dispute that the cultural community are better served then they were ten years ago. As long as the NID can be sustained, "Newtown will be all right" (Bethlehem, 2010).

If there is one thing she hopes to achieve before she leaves her post in July 2010 then it is that she can get Old Mutual to pay attention to its buildings. She took the Managing Director on a walkabout recently and she says he was embarrassed about his buildings both in Newtown and in the rest of the Inner City (Bethlehem, 2010). However, without a person with Bethlehem's passion and vision driving things from the JDA it is doubtful that there will be follow through with Old Mutual and their buildings will remain a blight on Newtown's landscape until the market recovers.

## **2.10 And finally the Newtown Improvement District**

The NID is a voluntary city improvement district supported financially by the JDA and voluntary levies paid by various property owners and tenants within the district. A city improvement district is a geographic area in which property owners agree to pay a levy over and above existing rates and taxes to local government in order to secure additional services mainly in the areas of cleaning and safety (<http://www.urbangenesi.co.za>). Recently more and more city improvement district budgets are including marketing, events and programming, as well as other place making services such as town planning.

The NID has been in existence for four years since June 2006 (Debnam, 2006) and is responsible for the management of Newtown's public spaces in order to provide an exceptional experience for visitors to the precinct, as well as an enabling environment for commerce and cultural activities to flourish.

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<sup>4</sup> The cultural leases are still not in place at the time of writing this paper.

The NID is a section 21 not for profit company. The NID staff includes a marketing manager, events manager, operations and business manager, events and operations coordinator, and office administrator. Financial and HR services are provided by Urban Genesis, Johannesburg's only company which is in the business of establishing and managing city improvement districts.

The NID was established to take over the management of the Newtown Cultural Precinct from the JDA which had managed the area since 2000 providing safety and security, developing its public realm and providing an events programme in the improved facilities and supporting cultural organisations with the aim of developing the cultural precinct and attracting investment in commercial development in the area.

The NID maintains the JDA's vision for Newtown "Newtown will become the creative capital of Johannesburg and South Africa: dynamic, vibrant, sophisticated and cosmopolitan, boasting the best cultural offerings in Africa" (Debnam, 2006). According to the NID business plan (Debnam, 2006), as well as focusing on a clean and safe environment for Newtown's residents, cultural bodies and audiences - the NID has distinct aims and responsibilities in delivering the cultural agenda in Newtown. It states as the NID's responsibilities to maintain supportive relationships with cultural organisations; marketing and fundraising; event coordination; and education and programming (Debnam, 2006). To this end Newtown currently has a website, a monthly events-driven newsletter, a Facebook group, and a PR company on retainer. In terms of events and programming, the NID recently raised R3.1 million from NLDTF to run an extensive legacy project, marketing plan and full programme over the World Cup period. The NID can only support and conceive of projects once funding has been secured from sources other than the JDA and Blue IQ.

The NID attends the monthly JDA/JPC meetings so keeps in touch with planned developments and other issues facing the precinct from government's perspective. It holds a bi-monthly NID board meeting to report on operations, finances, events and marketing, and raises issues that need to be brought to the attention of the board. The board comprises representatives from the training, venue and commercial sectors, and a representative from COJACHS is also a member. The board besides ensuring corporate government best practice is upheld also drives the vision for the precinct. The NID also holds regular stakeholder meetings as information session and these are well attended.

The NID was generously supported by the JDA for four years. The monthly contribution by the JDA via Blue IQ has reduced and the JDA have committed to funding the NID on a month-to-month contract until the sale of 1 Central Place goes through when the NID will receive R7 million and become an independent company with no more monthly funding from either JDA or Blue IQ. The NID has to develop a business plan to try and legislate as a formal city improvement district in order to become sustainable and to increase levies. The business plan will also address how to best optimise and leverage the lump sum payment being made to it.

The NID's future is in the balance because the business plan originally developed by Debnam relied on the commercial developments being in place by 2010 and most of the NID's sustainability will come from levies received from commercial developments. These commercial developments have not taken place. Without support from the commercial sector levies will not be enough to sustain a fully capacitated office and the NID may become merely a safety initiative providing safe and clean services in the precinct. The NID does, however, need to operate as the management company Till initially envisaged all those years ago – to coordinate and communicate between the various stakeholders and stakeholder groups; to ensure that events in the public space follow due process; to continually market and promote the precinct; to fundraise for precinct events and festivals; and to ensure operationally that the precinct is safe, friendly and clean.

The NID's survival is also critical for driving the vision for the precinct forward and ensuring the cultural sector's interests are protected. With Bethlehem leaving the JDA, and although COJACHS is meant to be the custodian of the cultural precinct, it is going to be ultimately the responsibility of the NID and its board members to ensure that issues and concerns are raised and dealt with, and most importantly that Newtown continues to have a collective voice.



*Levy and others believe the city never followed through on its pledge to Newtown, forcing the artistic community to shift its commitment to Braamfontein.*

(The Sunday Independent, Life, 'Living it up', 26 September 2010)

## **CHAPTER THREE: CAN NEWTOWN CALL ITSELF A CULTURAL PRECINCT?**

### **3.1 Key performance indicators**

In chapter two I looked at the key drivers and decision-makers, and their strategies, focus and vision, involved in Newtown's development trajectory as a cultural precinct from 1976 to today. In other words how and why did Newtown end up as Johannesburg's official cultural precinct? From the opening of the Market Theatre in 1976 followed by Kippies, Yard of Ale, and the Flea Market in the eighties; Till's cultural squatting approach in the nineties; Newtown being designated an urban renewal project with massive investment in infrastructure in the early part of this century; to today.

In chapter three I will attempt to ascertain whether Newtown can in fact consider itself a cultural precinct. I will also look at the key indicators that can be used to measure Newtown's success as a cultural precinct. According to Bailey, Miles and Starke "the only credible way of understanding the impact of culture-led regeneration is through geographical and historically specific research that taps into the long-term social legacy of cultural policy, as opposed to its short-term outputs." (2004:3). Newtown, in its current iteration, is barely seven years old, so this sort of assessment will not be possible. Instead I will look at the measures listed below. I have derived these from the various interviews, as well as from a list of strengths and weaknesses listed by Bailey et al (2004). The strengths of Newcastle are listed as: exceptional projects; established, quality institutions; structurally sound buildings; artists and arts organisations deciding to locate there; and large, well staffed organisations (Bailey et al, 2004). Weaknesses are listed as: weak organisations and festivals; lack of market for arts sales; poor audience attendance; poor public transport and dispersed population; vulnerable 'middle-scale' venues in performing and visual arts (Bailey et al, 2004).

Based on the above list, I have compiled a list of the key performance indicators against which to measure Newtown's performance: 1) Heritage and architecture 2) Infrastructure 3) Sufficient quantity of viable cultural organisations, training and production 4) Clustering 5) Visitors 6) Day and night time offering 7) Marketing 8) Public space 9) Funding and sustainability, and 10) Economic regeneration. Due to the scale of this research report and lack of any reliable data, the assessment will be a qualitative one based on the author's own experience, as well as opinions derived from interviews.

### 3.2 Heritage and architecture

“There is a rich library of design in the precinct. It is almost like working with the site, working in a heritage context. It’s just that there are different elements. Instead of working with orientation and the sun, you are working with what’s there, instead of dealing with topography there are the other buildings... it’s how artists work” (Krige & Beswick, 2008:97).

Part of the identity of a cultural precinct, Sack suggests, is around heritage and historic buildings, and “internationally most cultural precincts have a heritage and historic aspect. New York is all about old buildings converted for cultural use” (2010). The preservation of Newtown’s heritage is not only in the restoration and reuse of its beautiful buildings. Sue Krige in a presentation at Wits refers to heritage as being “airbrushed history”<sup>5</sup>. She is referring to the nostalgic and sentimental approach to history that deals with the superficial appreciation and preservation of buildings and history, rather than telling the real and difficult stories. The Turbine Hall is a case in point where what is celebrated is the building and its architecture rather than the stories of the homeless who were moved out to make way for the restoration, or for that matter the story of the thousands of lives lost in the mines owned by AngloGold Ashanti. Although there has been an emphasis on preserving the old buildings that remain in Newtown there have also been very real efforts to tell the difficult stories, for example, the new Workers’ Museum pays tribute to the stories and lives of migrant workers in southern Africa. This is in line with the National Heritage Resources Act ([http://www.sahra.org.za/Sahra\\_Act25\\_1999.pdf](http://www.sahra.org.za/Sahra_Act25_1999.pdf)) which emphasises a shift away from historic buildings being the only reflections of heritage.

Newtown has some valuable historic buildings, including but not limited to the original Victorian Park Station sitting on a concrete plinth on Carr Street; the Edwardian toilet next to the Market Theatre parking; the Potato Sheds; the Market Theatre and Museum Africa building; the Turbine Hall; the Workers’ Compound; and Sci-Bono Discovery Centre building – mostly in a good state of repair. I will highlight and describe the most striking examples of restoration and reuse of heritage buildings that have made an impact on the architectural and / or cultural landscape of Newtown (refer to Appendix C at the end of this report for photographs).

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<sup>5</sup> From author’s own notes at a seminar presentation on 30 March 2010 by Sue Krige (Independent History and Heritage Consultant, and Senior Tutor in Wits School of Education) entitled *“The Power of Power”: The Electrical Precinct in Newtown, Industrial Heritage and the Conversion of the old Jeppe Street Power Station into the Headquarters of Anglo-Gold Ashanti, 1906 to 2008*, hosted by the Wits School of Architecture and Planning.

The first and most obvious building being the Market Theatre. Much of the success of the Market Theatre, according to Purkey, lies in the beauty of the building within which it is located, “a person entering The Market Theatre cannot help but be in awe of such a magnificent and remarkable building” (2010). Theatres which have been transformed from factories and warehouses have a huge advantage over ones built from scratch. He adds that there is something about how these theatres are forced into a space by the given structure of a pre-existing building that makes them very special (Purkey, 2020).

The Bus Factory was built to repair trams and then it became a garage for double-decker buses and operated as such until the early nineties (<http://www.newtown.co.za/heritage>). The building is now an important part of Newtown’s cultural landscape as it is the only space left where smaller cultural organisations can operate from at a cultural rental. The JDA’s visionary idea to renovate the Southern side of the building into offices made perfect sense to Bethlehem as “urban regeneration is ultimately about creativity and this is a creative space. We can feel the history of Newtown all around us and we use this as an inspiration” (Bethlehem, 2010). The JDA has used contemporary South Africa art on the walls and there is a beautiful craft exhibition in the public space as a reminder that you the visitor is in a reflective, creative and at the end of the day cultural precinct.

The very existence of Newtown as a valuable heritage site with so many historic buildings means that developers and architects have to and probably also want to work within the historic fabric of the precinct. Once such development, although not strictly for cultural use but within the boundaries of the precinct, is the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) development. According to Sue Krige, “The NUMSA development is fantastic and they have developed without interference with the fabric”<sup>6</sup>. NUMSA’s development was recently recognised at the annual JDA Halala awards where they won the Colosseum Award for conserving Johannesburg (Naidoo, 2010). The NUMSA development including their head office on corner Gerard Sekoto and Bree streets, the Moses Mayikso conference centre and hotel, as well as new buildings extending all the way around the corner to Gwi Gwi Mrwebi Street, have retained the detailed design from the facade of the original buildings and contributed to Newtown’s sense of rich heritage and aesthetic appeal.

The Turbine Hall development, a winner of the Colosseum Award in 2009, has had a very positive impact on Newtown. At the launch of the two heritage plaques that are located at the

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<sup>6</sup> From author’s own notes at a seminar presentation on 30 March 2010 by Sue Krige.



front door of the building Eric Itzkin, the City's Deputy Director of Immovable Heritage, described the development as the "flagship" project of Newtown that hopefully will attract other investors to pursue further development in Newtown. He emphasised how history can be celebrated through new structures whilst retaining what was once a "magnificent ruin" thus demonstrating the capacity of historic buildings to take on new lives and functions and for us to witness rebirth in the life of places and in the life of the City (Fraser, 2008). Neil Fraser sums up the development succinctly, "If ever there was a brilliant example of not just old and new being blended together but also the past, with all its many blemishes, being interwoven with a vision of the future, it is in this development" (Fraser, 2008).

Sci-Bono Discovery Centre is another example of a transformed building from power station to interactive science centre with two new wings on either side. The wing on the side of Miriam Makeba Street is striking and architecturally fascinating reminding the observer of a large ocean liner with multi-tiered decks, triple volume interiors and lots of glass opening into the public space. Another interesting architectural building is the new space for Moving into Dance. All angles and movement and bright colours and light, with large windows providing a glimpse into the dance studios. It is a very striking building, although ultra modern it speaks to the cultural vibrancy and cultural heritage of the precinct.

These buildings all now have a completely different feel to what they had before. Even the Turbine Hall building, although its main tenant is AngloGold Ashanti, is a cultural building. It contains visual arts displays, a gallery, and other tenants include design, event and branding companies.

More recently the NID raised over R1 million from the NLDTF and SACR for the implementation of a legacy project. The motivation behind the legacy project for the NID was the opportunity to present the wonderful potential of Newtown's heritage in order to provide an added benefit to the visitor experience in the Newtown Cultural precinct. The Newtown Legacy Project intends to be an ongoing and dynamic initiative to be further developed over time so that it is enabled to respond and express new information about its past, contemporary history and living heritage. The newly installed heritage signage and companion activities will serve to make the rich heritage and vibrant cultural life of the Newtown precinct more accessible to visitors.

The establishment of a site specific focused heritage trail in the district, is now complete. The production and installation of twenty-one signs took place during the months of April and May 2010, enabling visitors to take a self-guided tour around the area and to substantially

enliven existing guided tours, as well as the experience of pedestrians and other day-to-day users of the space. Also in place is the design and production of a heritage map, a twenty-minute documentary on the history of Newtown (which can be viewed on [www.newtown.co.za/heritage/documentary](http://www.newtown.co.za/heritage/documentary)), and the development of a heritage website (visit [www.newtown.co.za/heritage](http://www.newtown.co.za/heritage)). Six specialist Newtown site guides have been trained, as well as a two-day customer care and Newtown orientation course for twenty front-of-house Newtown venue staff.

The NID believes that this has been a very successful place-making project. Newtown's rich history is finally accessible to all – from tourists visiting the cultural precinct to pedestrians walking through the precinct. The photographs on the panels help bring the story of Newtown alive and the companion heritage trail pamphlet ensure that people wanting to do the trail can self-guide through the precinct. Alternatively tours are available and the site guides who underwent accredited site guide training were all unemployed youth. The intention of the training project is to up skill and empower these young people. Support is provided via the Workers' Museum which has taken responsibility for booking tours. The entire legacy project has been well-marketed and already the impact can be felt on the streets of Newtown. Its long-term impact is as yet an unknown.

### **3.3 Infrastructure**

For the most part infrastructure is in a reasonable state of repair. Museum Africa has recently spent millions sorting out sewerage, air-conditioning, water leaks and repainting the interior of the building (Sack, 2010). The Market Theatre is in excellent condition and recently the exterior was repainted. The Bassline is in reasonable condition, as is the Dance Factory although the seating is uncomfortable and the venue is cold in winter. The training organisations are all located in adequate buildings, and more recently Moving into Dance and the Market Lab both moved into brand new spaces. The SAB World of Beer, recently refurbished, is now a high quality visitor and conference centre. The Workers' Museum recently received a facelift and a new visitor reception centre provides a welcoming and professional flavour. Sci-Bono Discovery Centre is now flanked with two brand new buildings. The original structure still leaks during heavy downpours but otherwise it is in good condition.

In terms of public infrastructure, there is currently adequate parking except when there are large events on the square. However, if the developments proceed there will be a shortage of parking in Newtown. Lighting in Newtown, although much better, still does not function as it should and there are nights when the precinct is almost entirely in darkness. The roads

and pavements are in good condition and just prior to the 2010 World Cup, the JDA refurbished the iconic Newtown heads, fixed broken bollards, missing paving, and erected more directional signage on the roads as well as for pedestrians. There are public toilets on the square and in the Market Theatre parking lot, as well as in 1 Central Place. However, there are issues around the opening and closing times of these toilets. Mary Fitzgerald Square is about to receive a R10 million facelift. The JDA intends to make the space more user-friendly and softer for day to day use but it must still be able to host large scale events.

### **3.4 Sufficient quantity of viable cultural organisations, training and production**

Cultural organisations and creative activity is one of the most important criteria for a successful cultural precinct. Despite the displacement of cultural and training organisations by the JDA during the development of the precinct, there are still a surprising number of cultural and training organisations in Newtown, some of which have been in existence for decades, namely: the National Arts Council; the French Institute; Imbali; VACA; Artist Proof Studio; Southern Artists Theatre Initiative (SATI); Market Lab; Market Photo Workshop; Visual Artists Network of South Africa; Cultural Help Desk; Artist Aid; Craft Council; City Varsity; Moving into Dance; Moshito; SA Roadies Association; eCivicus; Craft Council; ATW Gladys Aghulus; Cultural Development Trust; and the Artbank. Drum Café and City Varsity are two for profit businesses but their presence contributes to the cultural training offering of Newtown. Production is, however, limited to the work produced by students at The Market Photo Workshop, The Market Lab, and Artist Proof Studio. Moving into Dance and the Dance Factory produce perhaps one production per annum, and similarly the Market Theatre produces about four shows per year serving more as a receiving house.

### **3.5 Clustering**

“International experience shows the enormous benefits and synergies creative industries derive from their close proximity to one another. In Dublin, for instance, an area called Temple Bar now contains eight innovative cultural centres and numerous private and public galleries which foster and showcase all major art forms – film, music, theatre and the visual arts. The area is now widely regarded as one of the most dynamic and vibrant cultural and entertainment areas in Europe” (Creative Strategy Consulting, 1999:8).

Most cultural precincts emerge out of places where initially there are low property prices and rentals which attract artists and arts organisations, a buzz develops, and then investors move in. The philosophy of economic clustering, which really is the theory behind cultural precincts, and what the Gauteng SDI and Joffe (2010) were promoting, is that when you put a critical mass of arts and creative organisations together they stimulate each other and

create partnerships, and ultimately create economically viable sustainable long-term industries. This is taking place all over the world with a focus on production, presentation, training, day and night-time visitors, and tourism. According to Debnam “That is the clustering required if you are to make a total cultural precinct” (Debnam, 2010). When Newtown is viewed in the context of international cultural precincts it is neither big on the presentational or consumption aspect nor on production – it is somehow caught in the middle.

The Market Theatre and the old Market Lab are situated in the Market Precinct. The NAC offices are also located in this precinct in a building which they own, and the French Institute also rent offices in the building, although not for much longer as they have not had their lease renewed and are in the process of finding new premises most probably in Braamfontein or Arts on Main. Moyo is no longer located in the Market Theatre and there is a new bar and restaurant called Market Bar and Bistro. Gramadoelas restaurant, an institution in and of itself, is next door. Where the old Couch and Coffee used to be is now premises for a small architectural practice. The old Kippies building has been renovated and is waiting for the Market Theatre to take over the management of what will most probably be a small events venue. The Majestic building is ear-marked for development which seems imminent. All the small tenants including Market Lab, SATI, flower shop, craft outlets, the seed shop, and Afronova have been given notice. Alternative premises have been found for the Market Lab and the flower shop. Across the road is Niki’s Oasis and around the corner is Museum Africa. Abutting Niki’s Oasis are old buildings owned by Old Mutual, the buildings overlooking the square are rented by the Market Theatre as rehearsal space and storage, the rest of their buildings are boarded up.

1 Central Place is a commercial development by Blue IQ and JDA. Key tenants are the Gauteng Tourism Authority and Kaya FM, a popular radio station. There is retail on the ground floor with three restaurants, there was a fourth, Cappello, but they were evicted on 30 June 2010 for not paying rent. Xarra Books, a dedicated African book shop, and a small craft shop are also there. There is a large underground parking lot. Small cultural organisations and the NID office have been given premises in the small Jeppe Street houses, namely the Workers’ Museum, VACA (who pay rent but are never there), Aid to Artisans of South African (ATASA), and the NID. The house nearest to 1 Central Place is being renovated by the JDA for the flower shop.

Behind the Jeppe Street houses is the newly renovated and opened Workers’ Museum, Sci-Bono Discovery Centre in the old Electric Workshop with two new wings, the Bassline, the

Dance Factory with a dance studio and a theatre, the new Moving into Dance building with three dance studios, and the old Moving into Dance building renamed the Dance Space with two dance studios and Gregory Manqoma's dance company are located there, as well as the Dance Forum who organise the annual Dance Umbrella festival. In the parking area of Bassline is the 'pink building' being used by the Market Theatre as storage. The old Blue IQ building next to Sci-Bono is currently being used as offices for the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) contractors.

On the other side of Miriam Makeba is the majestic Turbine Hall housing Anglo Gold Ashanti's headquarters, The Forum which is an events company, and Freedthinkers a cutting edge branding company. Next door is SAB World of Beer. The old Horror Cafe premises were for a short while transformed into an upmarket Doppio Zero restaurant but after six months this was closed down by the sheriff of the court. It has been standing empty for six months and SAB World of Beer is struggling to find suitable tenants.

On President Street there is the Bus Factory housing the JDA, Artist Proof Studio, the new Market Lab, the Unity Gallery, Imbali, the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) (although they are looking for larger premises but can only pay a cultural rental), the Drum Cafe (their lease has not been renewed), and various smaller cultural organisations. On the other side of the parking lot is the Market Photo Workshop and Market Photo Gallery and behind that are offices for COJACHS, as well as more cultural organisations, including the Culture and Development Trust.

In summary Newtown has three performance venues: Market Theatre (three theatres), Dance Factory (one theatre) and Bassline (two venues). There are four visitor attractions: Sci-Bono Discovery Centre; Museum Africa; SAB World of Beer; and Workers' Museum. There are five galleries in the greater Newtown area: Market Theatre Gallery; Market Photo Gallery; Afronova (relocated to Braamfontein); Rooke Gallery in the Mills Precinct; Bag Factory (Fordsburg) and the Unity Gallery. There are six eating venues: The Market Bar & Bistro; Gramadoelas; Niki's Oasis; Sophiatown; Kaldis Coffee; and Ko'Spotong. Retail is limited to Xarra Books, the Imbali shop in Museum Africa, the craft traders in the Market Precinct, a small craft shop at 1 Central Place, and there are various small outlets for traditional African clothing and some craft on South side of Sci-Bono opening onto President Street.

### **3.6 The day and night time offering**

Newtown presents an erratic programme in terms of quality, consistency and reliability. Quality programme is difficult to define because it raises many questions such as who determines what is quality? For the purposes of this report I will define quality as work that is professionally staged.

The Market Theatre, again, the anchor for the precinct, presents a quality programme with a focus on South African theatre, and for the most part all three theatres have a show on at any given time. The Bassline has recently improved and instead of being merely a receiving house now also produces. There is usually live music on most Friday and Saturday nights, with Thursdays providing a regular reggae evening. Although Newtown has an exciting cluster of dance organisations to the North of the precinct, The Dance Factory's theatre is often in the dark. Performances are usually linked to other festivals such as Arts Alive and Dance Umbrella.

The four main visitor attractions are open daily. SAB World of Beer has a state of the art history of beer tour and friendly, helpful staff. Sci-bono Discovery Centre has a permanent display of interactive games and activities, as well as new exhibitions. The Workers' Museum has a wonderful, new, and professional exhibition commemorating the lives of migrant workers. Museum Africa is slightly more problematic as the permanent exhibits are old and tired and sometimes not working. Temporary art exhibitions take up the remaining floor space. There is a new geology exhibition which is professional and was set up with input from geologists. It creates a sense of awe and wonder for the visitor.

Visual arts are catered for by the Market Photo Gallery but it is mainly student work that is on display. The Unity Gallery recently took up space in the Bus Factory but does not as yet have a reputation. The Artist Proof Studio gallery is also for showing student work. The Market Theatre gallery has a permanent exhibition of photographs of previous productions. Afronova, although still present, no longer has exhibitions and does not appear to be operating as a gallery and according to the owner Henri Vernon (in an informal conversation) they are moving their premises to Braamfontein. Rooke Gallery in the Mills Precinct to the west of the cultural precinct exhibits interesting artists and work but is only open by appointment.

The restaurants often offer live music. Sophiatown has recently started a Wednesday's live jazz session. Niki's Oasis provides an opportunity for emerging jazz musicians to perform

over most weekends. Xarra Books' book launches and cultural sessions have attracted a loyal following of young, black intellectuals.

Newtown's public spaces were designed with large scale events in mind. Most recently the square was used to host the City of Joburg's official public viewing area for the 2010 World Cup. Joy of Jazz, an international standard jazz festival, brings substantial investment and audiences to Newtown. Arts Alive supports programmes in venues and the public realm throughout Newtown. Newtown's festivals and special events include Diwali and Joburg Carnival, and until recently Gauteng Carnival, the Africa Day concert, and the New Year's Eve concert.

### **3.7 Visitors**

Holden's (2004) view is that cultural value cannot be measured by visitor statistics or door takings because there is no straightforward correlation between cause and effect of a cultural encounter of one form or another. Holden says that "cultural experience is the sum of the interaction between an individual and an artefact or an experience, and that interaction is unpredictable and must be open" (2004, p. 21).

Who comes to Newtown and why? The Newtown Business Plan (Debnam & Starke, 2002) indicates that people come to Newtown for its cultural richness, arts and culture offering at various venues, its originality and history, as well as the vibe provided by the numerous pavement restaurants. It is a diverse market and the Newtown offering is available to just about anyone living in Johannesburg or visiting the City.

The NID has been keeping visitor statistics since 2003 and the table below indicates that visitor numbers have increased, in some venues by over 300 percent when 2003 is compared with 2009. Total evening visitors have almost doubled from 79 626 in 2003 to 149 472 in 2009 and daytime visitors have tripled from 83 087 in 2003 to 243 382 in 2009. Total visitor numbers have increased from 224 713 in 2003 to 457 804 in 2009. An interesting anomaly are the events numbers which show a definite increase in 2005 and 2006 when the JDA was investing heavily in animating the public events spaces but the 2009 total of 64 950 is not much higher than the 2003 total of 62 000.

**Table 1: Audience Statistic Summary Sheet as at 2009**

<b>Evening</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Market Theatre	42 162	61 084	70 004	65 230	71 944	73 059	78 123
Market Theatre Lab	20 160	21 450	16 449	13 034	19 083	18 762	11 625
Bassline	14 000	42 000	54 560	86 407	51 520	46 976	51 706
Dance Factory	3 304	6 467	11 320	5 543	3 177	6 090	8 018
<b>Total Evening</b>	<b>79 626</b>	<b>131 001</b>	<b>152 333</b>	<b>170 214</b>	<b>145 724</b>	<b>144 887</b>	<b>149 472</b>
<b>Daytime</b>							
Museum Africa	47 880	63 012	79 551	70 156	68 808	54 375	58 783
Sci Bono	0	30 000	39 505	30 883	56 022	109 524	140 755
World of Beer	35 207	38 078	40 800	41 289	29 198	37 885	40 180
Market Photo W/shop	0	0	1 000	1 930	1 574	2 530	3 664
<b>Total Daytime</b>	<b>83 087</b>	<b>131 090</b>	<b>160 856</b>	<b>144 258</b>	<b>155 602</b>	<b>204 314</b>	<b>243 382</b>
<b>Events</b>	<b>62 000</b>	<b>92 000</b>	<b>177 651</b>	<b>174 731</b>	<b>153 050</b>	<b>107 520</b>	<b>64 950</b>
<b>Total Attendance</b>	<b>224 713</b>	<b>354 091</b>	<b>490 840</b>	<b>489 203</b>	<b>454 376</b>	<b>456 721</b>	<b>457 804</b>



**Table 2: Audience year on year comparison from 2003 to 2009**

<b>Evening</b>	<b>2006 on 2005</b>	<b>2006 on 2003</b>	<b>2007 on 2006</b>	<b>2007 on 2003</b>	<b>2008 on 2007</b>	<b>2008 on 2003</b>	<b>2009 on 2008</b>	<b>2009 on 2003</b>
Market Theatre	-6.82%	54.71%	10.29%	70.64%	1.55%	73.28%	6.93%	85.29%
Market Theatre Lab	-20.76%	-35.35%	46.41%	-5.34%	-1.68%	-6.93%	-38.04%	-42.34%
Bassline	58.37%	517.19%	40.38%	268.00%	-8.82%	235.54%	10.07%	269.33%
Dance Factory	51.03%	67.77%	42.68%	-3.84%	91.69%	84.32%	31.66%	142.68%
<b>Total Evening</b>	<b>11.74%</b>	<b>113.77%</b>	<b>14.39%</b>	<b>83.01%</b>	<b>-0.57%</b>	<b>81.96%</b>	<b>3.16%</b>	<b>87.72%</b>
<b>Daytime</b>								
Museum Africa	11.81%	46.52%	-1.92%	43.71%	-20.98%	13.57%	8.11%	22.77%
Sci Bono	21.83%	2.94%	81.40%	86.74%	95.50%	265.08%	28.52%	369.18%
World of Beer	1.20%	17.27%	29.28%	-17.07%	29.75%	7.61%	6.06%	14.13%
Market Photo W/shop	93.00%	Not available	18.45%	Not available	60.74%	Not available	44.82%	Not available
<b>Total Daytime</b>	<b>10.32%</b>	<b>73.62%</b>	<b>7.86%</b>	<b>87.28%</b>	<b>31.31%</b>	<b>145.90%</b>	<b>19.12%</b>	<b>192.92%</b>
<b>Events</b>	<b>-1.64%</b>	<b>181.82%</b>	<b>12.41%</b>	<b>146.85%</b>	<b>-29.75%</b>	<b>73.42%</b>	<b>-39.59%</b>	<b>4.76%</b>
<b>Total Attendance</b>	<b>-0.33%</b>	<b>117.70%</b>	<b>-7.12%</b>	<b>102.20%</b>	<b>0.52%</b>	<b>103.25%</b>	<b>0.24%</b>	<b>103.73%</b>

The biggest lesson shown by the 2010 World Cup has been Newtown’s inability to transcend class and race barriers in relation to its history. It remains unable to attract a broad middle class for entertainment spend except for specific programmes in specific venues. The World Cup has demonstrated this starkly. In the end it seems that international tourists preferred Melville, Sandton, Rosebank and Melrose Arch. The question remains – if Newtown wishes to reposition itself and become an economical sustainable precinct it will, I would argue, have to overcome barriers of class and race.

### **3.8 Marketing**

According to Murray in *Making Sense of Place* “within place marketing there is the potential for a sophisticated practice that could: give places a competitive edge in the global market place; transform the local economy; increase inward investment and tourism; and develop new and innovative approaches to community development and social inclusion.” (2001:11). In this context Newtown’s marketing still has a long way to go.

One of the problems with marketing a precinct such as Newtown is that it is difficult to know who the target market is because really it is for everyone – whether a homeless person wanting to rest her or his head and take a nap in the Park or an Inner City resident wanting to watch a free concert, or a black diamond hanging out at Sophiatown, or a theatre lover, or dance lover, or family visiting Sci-Bono, or school children coming to the museums, or local workers from surrounding office blocks looking for somewhere to have lunch, or young people looking for some spoken word or just a buzzy place to hang out, or tourists wanting to do the heritage trail and shop.

Newtown's current market position is relatively favourable on the generic front. It receives consistent publicity in terms of artistic and cultural achievement, commercial developments, in particular the award-winning Turbine Hall development with AngloGold Ashanti as key tenants, and its venues and events. Newtown derives large amounts of publicity from key events such as Joy of Jazz, Arts Alive, Africa Day, Diwali, the City of Johannesburg's New Year's Eve Party, and Gauteng and Joburg carnivals. Sophiatown, and until recently when they were evicted Cappello, have found their own niche audiences and are filled to capacity most of the time.

Where Newtown and its venues are still weak is in enticing new audiences and visitors into the precinct because once they have crossed the Bridge or come out of their offices it is with surprise and delight that the precinct and its offerings are discovered. A lot more effort and work is needed to get to the tourist market and those 'culture vultures' with spare cash in their pockets – both the emerging middle class and the middle class who stopped visiting the City a long time ago and have decided to live in their safe cocoons. Marketing efforts are needed to convince them that a visit to Newtown is well worth their while. In Newtown they can have an authentic and distinctive experience.

Newtown's location is both a strong opportunity and potential threat due to prevailing negative perceptions of the Inner City. Ultimately it is its very location that differentiates Newtown from other entertainment spaces and makes it unique in that it is part of the 'old city'. Its marketing points are old spaces that have been transformed into museums, galleries, dance venues, theatres, museums and offices.

In terms of positioning Newtown, the NID needs to emphasise what makes Newtown distinctive in relation to other places in the city. If potential visitors are offered a superior and unique experience they are less likely to visit Montecasino for entertainment or stay at home

watching television. Unfortunately due to severe budget constraints (a monthly marketing budget of R15 000) the NID is only able to do the very basics in terms of marketing, namely to update its website, produce and distribute a monthly electronic newsletter and do some publicity. An annual generic Newtown brochure is produced with funds secured via advertising and this is distributed extensively.

Global events provide an opportunity to position and showcase that best that a country and its cities have to offer. Newtown with its unique cultural brand and rich heritage took full advantage of the opportunity presented by the 2010 World Cup. Through funds raised via the NLDTF, the NID ran an extensive marketing campaign with some legacy aspects, including well packaged film footage of Newtown in general, as well as of Newtown attractions and organisations. Newtown also received over R20 million of publicity both national and international.

### **3.9 Public space**

Landry (2004) explores how we can make our cities more liveable. He looks at how creative and innovative solutions to city problems can be feasible. He asks the question - how can we make where we live a better place? Landry believes that the public spaces in our city centres provide the solution in the “neutral meeting place for all parts of the city – and the sense that publicly shared space enriches our experience by enhancing connections, interaction and atmosphere” (2004:120). Does Newtown provide this opportunity? It most certainly provides the opportunity with its many public spaces, including the park and the square, and museums, but I would argue that the positive impact of shared public space is yet to be realised.

The square is large, imposing and ultimately quite hostile except for major events of 10 000 or more. It is definitely not a space designed for people to relax on a bench under the shade of a tree. Its sheer scale prevents intimate moments, lunchtime concerts, or other impromptu performances. The park is more a place for people to walk through rather than inviting a picnic, or a place to sit and pause (there are no benches). The contours all but prevent a game of soccer or cricket and there are no play areas for children.

The decline of Newtown’s successful flea market on Mary Fitzgerald Square in the nineties left a gaping hole in the life and soul of Newtown and I would argue that without a market or similar activity, the public space in Newtown will remain alienating. In *Public Markets and Community Revitalisation* it is suggested that “public markets are needed today because they can effectively address some of the vexing problems of our cities: the need to

reinvigorate urban shopping districts and make inviting and safe public spaces; the need to support small-scale economic activity and confront the problems of street vending; the need to provide fresh, high-quality produce to inner-city residents; and the need to protect open space” (Spitzer & Baum, 1995:16). Public markets provide the opportunity to create “an inviting, safe, and lively space that attracts a wide range of people... an effective place where people mix... (it) can become the heart and soul of a community, its common ground, a place where people interact easily, and a setting in which other community activities take place” (Spitzer & Baum, 1995:2). Newtown needs a regular, large, inviting and inclusive market to help breathe life into its public space.

Newtown’s public space is managed and maintained by the NID. There is 24-hour security throughout the precinct, as well as cleaners who work day shifts. The security officers are referred to public safety ambassadors and it is their responsibility to secure the public space but also report service breakdowns and to provide assistance to the public.

### **3.10 Funding and sustainability**

In Bailey et al “...funding increases followed marked changes in cultural activity. This funding was entirely necessary if the impact of such activity was to be maintained” (2004:53).

The fundamental problem with the Newtown Cultural Precinct is the lack of funding. How can government decide and invest in the infrastructure for a cultural precinct if it is not going to fund culture? What is the point of creating a platform for culture if you are not going to fund the organisations and institutions, and the programme? According to Purkey (2010), within a year, although the Market Theatre has operational funding, it is going to have dark venues because funding for programming is not forthcoming and when it is it is unreliable.

What is critical to Newtown’s success is the funding needed to carry the cultural programme and without this the NID fears that key organisations could be lost to the City, province and even the country; the cultural programme will decline and there will be less employment and fewer production opportunities for artists, and following from this audiences will decline, with the potential of commercial and retail also declining; and most importantly Newtown’s reputation will decline.

The NID’s sustainability is also under threat and government funding is soon to come to an end. The NID needs to establish itself as a legislated entity in order to ensure a steady revenue stream in terms of levies. This process takes approximately two years and until that

time the NID is vulnerable to the vagaries of government, erratic payments, and the constant threat that the funds to carry the NID forward may not be forthcoming.

### **3.11 Economic regeneration**

NUMSA owns a lot of buildings on Gwi Gwi Mrwebi Street, including the Moses Mayikoso conference centre and hotel, as well as offices and ground floor retail which is newly built but sensitive to heritage and the new space is now to let. Brickfields adds the residential component to the precinct.

There are various specialist retail outlets: Xarra Books; Imbali shop; Craft Rural; five shops at 1 President Street; and three shops at Market Theatre Precinct (been serviced notice).

Economic investment has not yet taken place on a scale anticipated in the previous decade of planning for the precinct. It was intended that the investment made by government along with a land release strategy would attract commercial investment into Newtown and increase rates and taxes for the City. This development has not yet happened.

### **3.12 Does Newtown meet the criteria?**

According to the table I put together below – Newtown meets most of the requirements for a cultural precinct. There is still a lack of clustering of creative industries, an unreliable and poor funding environment, and little sign of economic regeneration on the one hand but a strong sense of location and heritage with adequate infrastructure and a marked increase in visitor numbers on the other. It should be noted, however, that visitor numbers are not quite at the levels some venues need to become viable, and there is still not high energy footfall in the public space to create atmosphere and a buzz. Consistent and reliable programming is not what it could be in some venues, most notably the Dance Factory. A decent budget is required if a strong marketing plan is to be rolled out for the precinct to overcome these shortfalls.

**Table 3: Does Newtown meet the criteria?**

Criteria	Strong	Adequate to strong	Adequate	Weak to adequate	Weak
Agglomeration of heritage buildings, iconic structures and interesting architecture	Yes				
Public infrastructure and cultural buildings in good working order			Yes		
Healthy cultural and training organisations and creative activity and production				Yes	
Clustering of creative industries, cultural sector, restaurants, and other retail					Yes
Increase in visitor numbers with street level activity			Yes		
Regular, quality cultural offering both day and night, and public space events				Yes	
Strong marketing programme highlighting distinctiveness, the programme and other offerings			Yes		
Well managed public space, and positive experience of public space			Yes		
Funding for organisations and programme and sustainability of NID					Yes
Economic activity in terms of commercial developments, increased specialist retail and restaurants					Yes

Precincts contain an agglomeration and clustering of infrastructure and buildings that perform a particular kind of function. A cultural precinct, according to Landry (2004:75) “would have a critical mass of cultural activity from one-off festivals to organisations that regularly create work. Architecture would mix the old and the new in an urban environment visually at ease with its contrasts.” Does the Newtown cultural landscape of 2010 present us with this picture? On the one level it is relatively easy to tick the boxes and say yes Newtown has met the following criteria and it therefore can call itself a cultural precinct. It has dance studios, theatres, museums, open public space for events, it has public art, graffiti, restaurants, and clubs. On the level of infrastructure, agglomeration and clustering of buildings that perform a cultural function, it is simple, Newtown has a greater concentration on balance of big publicly-funded institutions than commercial buildings than any other place in Johannesburg.

According to Debnam a cultural precinct is a cluster of organisations, “basically an economic and cultural cluster”, with arts organisations collaborating around production (2010). The result of this clustering is that artists gather around this and there is an audience who can benefit from the production. There is also a tourist market visiting museums, galleries and

specialist retail. "That's how cultural precincts work in the world" he added (2010). Most of these components were not in place in Newtown ten years ago. People were trying to run venues and organisations but it was clear that there was no funding for product. The limited clustering of cultural organisations in Newtown is mainly due to limited space because the available land has been set aside for commercial developments, and this includes the Potato Sheds which was the only alternative space available in Newtown for cultural organisations at a subsidised rental. This lack of clustering is definitely one of the greatest threats facing Newtown, this and an unstable funding environment. With more production, development, training, public performances, events, festivals and a commercial link, Newtown could start calling itself a cultural precinct.





*“Newtown has failed as a cultural hub. So much of what goes on in Joburg is about hype: you can brand anything. With Newtown the City identified the most low density place it could turn with least amount of investment and got interesting tenants but then left it to its own devices,” says Levy.*

(The Sunday Independent, Life, “Living it up”, 26 September 2010)

## CHAPTER FOUR: IS NEWTOWN A SUCCESS?

### 4.1 What do the key roleplayers think?

There are two approaches to assessing whether the Newtown Cultural Precinct is successful or not. The one approach is to view it as a project. If Blue IQ's goals, and they were the major investor at R295 million into the area, were to build infrastructure thereby attracting private investment and increased rental and property values, as well as attracting a clustering of culture industries (Preston, 2006:58), then has the project been successful? And more importantly has the investment had the desired affect? The other approach is to look at the place, Newtown, and assess whether as it stands now, it is a successful cultural precinct?

Newtown's success has to do with the massive investment made by government in the urban upgrade of the public space, investment made in the buildings themselves, as well as in business plans for the various venues, and of course programming for the precinct. The JDA's basic strategy was to create access; create safe, secure and attractive places that people want to be in; create critical mass and critical mix which was about getting people to live in Newtown; make the economic driver be the creative industries and culture; ensure consistent programming both day and night to avoid peaks and troughs; and secure the right kind of retail. The JDA has yet to succeed with the retail aspect.

The reason for choosing Newtown, according to Reid (2010), was to boost the creative industries as one of the City's growth strategies. He believes this part of the strategy failed because no attention was paid to it and the clustering of creative industries in Newtown of course did not happen. Peter Starke, the international consultant appointed by the JDA, emphasised the cultural aspect of Newtown. The question was not asked – how does Newtown attract the creative industries especially when they are so disbursed throughout Johannesburg? Reid (2010) concedes that it may have been an illogical action to take so perhaps it did in the end make sense to focus on Newtown as the cultural heart.

What Reid (2010) finds difficult to understand is if the policy-makers decided on Newtown as a culture centre why did they plan at a later stage to build a 1000-seater theatre in Soweto. Fundamental to City policy was to create a cultural centre within Johannesburg where people come together and where integration happens with easy access for all, which is why the investment was made in the first place. "To build regional cultural spaces reinforces separation," Reid added (2010).

Spiropoulos (2010) thinks a large part of what the Gauteng SDI recommended was implemented – not necessarily as it was initially intended but access did improve, there was investment in residential development, property interest, and Turbine Hall and the Electric Workshop were redeveloped - in ways that were in line with what was considered in the Gauteng SDI and very much in line with the province's industrial strategy of the time. "It is exactly what it could have been – it's not more – it's not what we envisaged in the period but it is what it could have been in that" (Spiropoulos, 2010). The market and the weakness in the supply chain is still there because there is not enough audience or buying power, nor enough quality product that is supported or researched. Government has done what it can do to improve the physical space, and to create an enabling environment for the property industry to take up the opportunity. Spiropoulos (2010) believes that when the commercial sector does finally move in, the right tenants are going to be key to Newtown's future success as a cultural precinct. "Tenancy must be a creative industries cultural industries tenancy otherwise you're not promoting a cultural node with culture as primary activity" (Spiropoulos, 2010). He adds that although much has been implemented, what is still missing is a strong creative industry sector. He concludes that the entire project was one of compromise and that the only intervention that could have made a difference was developing housing for middle and higher income people.

According to Reid (2010), Newtown would be fundamentally different if SAHRA had not intervened and put a moratorium on developments which included high rise developments, movie houses, quality retail, and loft apartments. SAHRA gave Newtown a higher heritage rating than Robben Island and stated that no building in Newtown could be higher than the highway! Reid and his team at the JDA worked very hard to secure the right developers who were pioneers and prepared to buy into the vision, to take risks, to introduce a different kind of residential, and to activate the ground floor retail in way that was complementary to the cultural aspect of the precinct. "SAHRA destroyed this", Reid said (2010). Reid believes he should have brought an urgent application against SAHRA to have their objection to the Zenprop developments overturned in order for those developments could have gone ahead, "my biggest failure around Newtown was not having stopped SAHRA", he said (2010). He believes that the JDA would have had the application overturned. The reason he did not was because SAHRA promised the JDA that it would be resolved within 90 days. It in fact took three years. "Those apartments would have sold. The retail would be flourishing. It would be a completely different and sought after place. That was the one fundamental mistake" (Reid, 2010).

In Debnam's view if there is a failure in Newtown it is the failure to address heritage. Newtown's key failure was "Reid's failure to address heritage" when the JDA went out on proposal calls for commercial developments (Debnam, 2010). If Reid and Leila McKenna, the then CEO of the JPC, had been slower and more patient Newtown would be finished by now. Debnam continues, "Because all the developers that jumped at the proposal calls did not have a heritage impact statement to respond to, they developed proposals based on the wrong assumptions about what they could do with the space. They responded with commercial ideas when in fact they needed to respond to heritage, cultural organisations and the potential future of the cultural organisations" (2010). Another of Newtown's failures is the tourism aspect – it still is not a place where visitors to Johannesburg to because it does not have consistency of product and enough buzz. It has less of a buzz than Rosebank which is more interesting in terms of restaurants, film programme and markets.

On the issue of funding, Debnam (2010) believes that had government been prepared to work together there would have been enough money to do what Arts on Main<sup>7</sup> has done. Blue IQ was operating from an economic platform; the JDA was responsible for area upgrade; DAC was only interested in a few projects; and province was more interested in outlying regions than in creating something in the Inner City. According to Debnam "if they'd come together and put small amounts of budget into a pot or on project by project basis it would have been very, very different" (Debnam, 2010).

Cultural organisations and creative activity is obviously one of the most important criteria for a successful cultural precinct. In order to access the space that is available in Newtown according to Reid (2010) you need a more interventionist state. Part of the reason cultural organisations cannot access space in Newtown and why marginal organisations are threatened is because of the nature of regeneration projects. Property owners do not want to release their land because it may have value further down the line and so government can no longer afford to buy or expropriate land. In Reid's view (2010), if as government you are going to embark on a regeneration strategy you should expropriate all the land before starting to invest in the area – in that way government can obtain land at a low value and then release it back to the private sector. He believes it was a major flaw in the Newtown's development process but he adds that they just did not have the tools to do it that way. He added that the reason the Bus Factory was renovated and offices created inside the space was because the JDA knew that the rentals would increase and the cultural organisations would suffer or worse disappear. The JDA also recommended that government should take

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<sup>7</sup> Arts on Main is a new private sector led cultural precinct to the east of Johannesburg's CBD

over the Potato Sheds and create space there for cultural organisations. It was part of the vision that the Bus Factory and Potato Sheds would be set aside as space for cultural organisations where they would have to pay rentals to only cover operating costs of the buildings.

If one looks at the production and consumption model. Newtown ended up being more about consumption than production. It is obvious that consumption happens as a result of production. Now there is no longer space for production in Newtown. When the proposal calls for commercial developments went out during Reid's tenure there was resistance to including requirements for cultural space. Bethlehem tried to right this situation and if the Atterbury Potato Sheds development goes ahead, the Market Theatre will benefit greatly. However, there are no explicit requirements in any of the proposal calls stating that a certain amount of space should be made available for cultural organisations at a nominal rental.

Despite initial plans and recommendations Newtown has not become a place where the creative industries cluster. What it became was a cultural precinct and in order to work it needs more people living nearby who will come into the precinct and participate in the consumption of culture. It cannot survive on just being a destination. The Newtown North precinct framework along with the market precinct framework attempts to engage but not really rigorously with the issue of the smaller property owners to the North of the core cultural precinct. Only once there is a critical mass and the right mix in Newtown will the energy move further up the road. People will take up space towards Ntemi Piliso Street because they will want to be near the action and all the space in the core cultural precinct will be taken up.

Interestingly Bethlehem describes the process of developing a cultural precinct as "organic" and adds that you "can't command a cultural precinct" (2010). The City has to provide the infrastructure which they have done and now in a sense it has to be allowed to happen.

Bethlehem has only one regret in terms of her involvement in Newtown over the past five years and that is Transport House. She feels sad that this development has not yet happened. "The JDA thought they had a credible bidder but they did not", she says. She regrets having awarded the development rights to Elangabi and in retrospect they should have imagined an alternative use for the space but they were under the impression that the bidder was credible (Bethlehem, 2010).

It is not so much of a regret but Bethlehem (2010) wished she had spotted sooner that the Square was not properly conceived or constructed and that it needs to be rebuilt. She has secured R10 million and although not quite enough it will go a long way to soften and green the space. Cars and trucks will be limited as to where they can drive because there are no layering works. The intention is to create a space which can accommodate events as well as being a comfortable, welcoming space when there are not events taking place. Mary Fitzgerald Square was never meant to be so big. It was supposed to be framed by a building at the Eastern end. (Reid, 2010)

Mary Fitzgerald Square remains a barrier in linking the various spaces. The Square needs to be surrounded by friendly venues so that walking across it becomes less alienating. In terms of arriving at a space that is intimate and cosy, Newtown has failed in comparison to other suburban spaces where South Africans feel safe. There are cosy spaces within the overall space but without friendly linkages the Square remains a barrier. There seems to have been little planning as to how people would navigate the square and what needed to surround the big, open spaces.

Bethlehem (2010) is not sure that Reid's decision to release all the land for development at the same time was the right approach, and certainly to do it without SAHRA's permission was problematic. "So there were mistakes" she says and includes the poor design of Mary Fitzgerald Square as another of them (Bethlehem, 2010). But she adds that there was some really excellent vision. "Setting up the NID early was a very good idea and the only way to really ensure ongoing urban management. Creating a forum of cultural organisations and trying to keep an alliance with these organisations is also very positive. Bringing in big events was also a good idea" (Bethlehem, 2010).

She acknowledges her predecessors in first Till who with his very informal and to City officials must have been maddening approach got things done. Without him Bethlehem (2010) believes Newtown would not have happened. Reid's approach was more commercial – perhaps too commercial – but he also got things going. And Bethlehem's job has been to do the "boring things – like how do we sort out this mess?" (2010). Her focus was to protect the cultural element while at the same time trying to get the area developed. She has a few last things to settle before she leaves but basically she is happy that the bones are in place.

The question that begs to be asked is was it government's intention to create a cultural precinct or was Newtown just another project to stem urban decay? The JDA's approach was definitely to identify precincts where they could cluster, create style and build a

regeneration programme around public realm upgrades. That is their mandate. They appeared not to be interested in what was necessary for the long-term sustainability of the cultural sector in Newtown. Again it comes down to the simple matter of budgets – it was just too expensive for the JDA to maintain a sustained investment in the Newtown cultural sector and programme.

Was there an alternative approach? The story of the revitalisation of Quebec City's Quartier St Roch is in stark contrast to Newtown's (Bradford, 2004). Two initial interventions in the 1980s, a library and an urban park, improved the quality of life of the community residing in the area. This was followed by the development of strategies around housing and zoning laws to encouraging creative clustering. Studio space for artists was protected to avoid gentrification. The private sector decided to move into "what had become a neighbourhood with a distinctive identity and sense of community" (Bradford, 2004). This was not the case in Newtown where the identity and community were almost completely eradicated to make room for the production and property driven approach.

#### **4.2 Where to from here?**

There is a lot of hope being placed on the imminent development of the Potato Sheds by Atterbury as being Newtown's hope to springboard it to the precinct it could be in the imaginations of the stakeholders, planners and politicians. But will it in fact help Newtown? Its effect on Newtown could be one of three things: it could be detrimental but it is hard to work out how; it could be neutral with a client base with nothing to do with arts and culture; or it could bring a whole generation of new vibey people into the precinct. If the development attracts a lot of the new generation, the News Cafe types who want to be out having fun then there will be an opportunity to attract them into Newtown and the cultural offering and programme.

Spiropoulos (2010) is of the opinion that in ten years time there will be more housing, greater density and a better mix of income groups in Newtown. This will bring an increase in street activity which will transform Newtown from merely being a destination that people visit and then leave. When asked if he thinks the Atterbury development will contribute to Newtown's future success he thinks it is a big risk (Spiropoulos, 2010). If it is perceived to be an interesting enough place as an African destination it will attract increased buying power and footfall and then it may succeed. He says that "If it ends up as a shopping centre like Cresta then Newtown is in trouble" (Spiropoulos, 2010).

The job of the JDA in Newtown is to promote economic growth and development, and to position Newtown sustainably in the future. In order to achieve this, Reid (2010) believes that they need to get new development and more residents with disposable income into the area, as well as a proper mix of retail. Reid is certain that Newtown will fail if this is not achieved. “It’s now on a similar trajectory as the late eighties and it will collapse again,” he added (2010).

It may sound contradictory but at the same time as promoting commercial development, space for the cultural organisations must also be protected. The issue of displacement is the other threat to Newtown’s success. Cultural organisations are moving to the east, towards Arts on Main. The JDA’s idea, during Reid’s tenure, to preserve the Potato Sheds and the Bus Factory as spaces where the margins can continue to exist was a good one. Part of Newtown’s attraction is that it is still a bit edgy and you need to protect the margins if this appeal is to be retained. It is the role of local government to create the cultural spaces and to protect them. Newtown needs these spaces. If government allows Newtown to develop just commercially then those organisations that are the very embodiment of what Newtown stands for are at risk and will get chased out.

Reid (2010) believes that the empty sites have to be developed because the big public spaces in Newtown will not work until they are framed and there is activity taking place in them. On the question of the Atterbury Potato Sheds development, Reid (2010) is uncertain whether the development will in fact benefit Newtown or not. The Newtown development framework shows the connection of Mary Fitzgerald Square to the Potato Sheds through Museum Africa. If this access and connection is created it has the potential to shift the energy but it does depend on how it is designed. “If it is done in a creative way it could work – and whether it contributes to Newtown will depend on the design”, he concludes (Reid, 2010).

Bethlehem (2010) believes that the Atterbury development will be the final piece of the missing puzzle to Newtown’s success. She shares the opinion of Reid and Spiropoulos – Newtown needs feet and that means developing more residential, office and retail. Bethlehem (2010) hopes that the Potato Sheds and Majestic developments are going to provide the much needed impetus for increased footfall and commercial and retail activity. She is cautious about these developments because of course what Newtown does not need is another Eastgate at the Market Theatre. So far the design is sensitive and the developers are in discussion with both the Market Theatre and Sack to ensure that an Eastgate does not get built on the site. Bethlehem says “I think it will bring a push to the NID, sustainability and



funding, and bring a lot of people in. It will breathe new life in the area” (2010). Bethlehem describes the Potato Sheds as “becoming the neighbourhood” (2010). Newtown has to have its own charm over and above the big event, museum and theatre. What is imagined by Bethlehem is that people will say “I’m going shopping in Newtown and I’m going to stay for the theatre” (2010). Bethlehem (2010) says she knows of no cultural precincts in the world that revolve only around culture – they are all integrated. But she does worry sometimes about what the final manifestation of the retail centre will be but remains hopeful that it will turn out to be a positive contribution to the cultural precinct.

And of course, without commercial developments it is not going to be possible to have a sustainable NID and ongoing quality urban management.

At the end of the day it can be argued that seven years after the initial vision was framed, almost all of the fundamentals for the achievement of the Newtown vision are in place. It is supported by the City and Provincial policy framework; it has potentially stable and well-led cultural organisations with a culture of collaboration between them; it is a desirable location with a growing local resident community; it has an international reputation and last year it hosted the World Summit on Arts and Culture and this year the City’s official public viewing area for the 2010 World Cup; it has substantially improved public transport infrastructure and a reputation for ‘safe and clean’; and potential private developers are committed to the NID structure.

On the other hand it can also be argued that it does not have a critical mass of arts organisations, mainly because there is not space for them in Newtown and they have found alternative, cheap spaces elsewhere in the City. The Potato Sheds could have been that space. There could be more film companies, theatres, more things to see and do. There is no longer a jazz scene in Newtown which is sad for an area with a reputation for jazz. Perhaps when Old Mutual finally pays attention to their abandoned buildings in Newtown there will be jazz bars spilling out onto a tree-lined Mary Fitzgerald Square, which is part of their plans. A critical mass of jazz bars around the square would certainly increase footfall and create the atmosphere and buzz that Newtown still seems to lack. Could this be a reality or is it once again a result of wishful thinking?



*Structure and change can be subsumed into space: among other things, space can isolate, offer resistance, exclude, secure, suppress, include, reject, petrify, absorb, digest and camouflage... Through control, anxiety situations are no longer awaited or predicted, but prevented, warded off and isolated. In the best situation this leads to stability in the building, the street, the square or even the community itself, in the worst to a regression in which defence (against the mythical unknown) becomes an end in itself and certain sections of the population and certain lifestyles are denied access. They roam the public space and are moving anxiety signals; they confirm public anxiety because they are denied entry into the anxiety-free space.*

(Fear and Space: The view of young designers in the Netherlands, 2004)

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Newtown's development trajectory followed some key interventions and decision brought about by mainly local government officials with vision and determination. From Newtown's early beginnings as the city's industrial heartland at the turn of the previous century, each launch or re-launch of the ambition left behind one more cultural building or institution on the Newtown landscape. From 1976 and the founding of the Market Theatre one thread has remained constant and that is its cultural focus.

I will summarise what I believe to be the key interventions along the trajectory that led to Newtown as we find it today and conclude with a description of activities that take place in Newtown between the cracks of the grand plans and massive investments. Developments during the eighties and much of the nineties were relatively informal. In the eighties Kippies opened and the very successful weekly flea market on Mary Fitzgerald Square started. Benjy Francis launched the ambitious Afrika Cultural Centre and the Africana Museum relocated to what is now Museum Africa. The cooling towers were imploded and Newtown's heritage status secured. The Market Theatre pedestrianised the then Wolhuter Street and established small shops. The first spatial plan for Newtown was drawn up by GAPP in 1987. Harridans followed by Gramadoelas also opened in the precinct, as did the Yard of Ale. The late eighties was Newtown's heyday.

Although Inner City decay started to set in during the early nineties, organisations and venues continued to multiply. The Market Theatre Foundation expanded to include The Laboratory and the Photo Workshop. Artist Proof Studio was given premises on Jeppe Street. The NAC and French Institute converted offices opposite the Market Theatre and moved in. Couch and Coffee also opened in the Market precinct. Suzette le Sueur moved the Dance Factory from City Hall to its current premises and Sylvia Glazer acquired premises next door for Moving into Dance Mopatong. Mega Music operated as a commercial music venue and equipment hire company. South African Breweries created the SAB World of Beer and the pub and micro-brewery at SAB World of Beer became Horror Cafe. The City located its base and much of the programme of its Biennale in Newtown. The Workers' Library converted part of the workers' compound for their use and as a small Museum of Workers' History. Cultural organisations occupied space at 2 President Street. A technology museum in the Electric Workshop achieved its floor-plates within the building but then failed. The weekly flea market closed, as did The Yard of Ale. The Market Theatre started floundering. Squatters moved into Turbine Hall, Transport House, and the open land behind the Potato Sheds and the original Park Station structure. Newtown became an

uncomfortable place to visit and work in. The Inner City landscape was definitely changing. At the end of the nineties the DTI had initiated the Gauteng SDI and Newtown was identified as a project for urban renewal.

The following decade was a period of more formal and planned interventions with government trying to reverse the downward spiral of Inner City decay. Between 2001 and 2003 major physical infrastructure was introduced including the building of the Nelson Mandela Bridge, the construction of the on and off ramps on Carr Street, and the public realm was upgraded with a focus on Mary Fitzgerald Square. Niki's Oasis opened in 2000 and Kippies closed in 2004. Between 2002 and 2004 there was investment in cultural organisation infrastructure with the creation of the Bus Factory and the installation of the Beautiful Things exhibition; the opening of the first phase of Sci-Bono; new management at the Market Theatre was key to rescuing the theatre and turning perceptions of Newtown around; and Bassline as new tenants at the Newtown Music Hall. The residential component was taken care of by the Johannesburg Housing Company with the building of Brickfields. Between 2003 and 2006, the JDA had as its focus commercial development but only 1 Central Place was built. All other proposed developments were delayed. Maintaining cultural momentum during the supposed commercial development phase was the objective of the 2005 to 2010 phase. The JDA moved in to their new offices in the Bus Factory rescuing the cultural tenants already in the space.

The NID was established in 2006 for the long-term development and management of the area which also helped to shift negative perceptions, and AngloGold Ashanti moved in as anchor tenants of the newly renovated Turbine Hall. Moving into Dance moved into their new building at the end of 2009 and their old building was tenanted with dance companies and organisations creating a dance hub. Doppio Zero moved into the Horror Cafe premises in mid 2009 and by the end of the year were bankrupt and closed down. In 2010 Sci-Bono opened both its new wings; Kippies was refurbished and handed over to the Market Theatre for management; and a new theatre and offices were built for the Market Lab. The Workers' Museum was also renovated and a new exhibition installed. Commercial developments remain on hold.

This gives some weight to the opposition of the JDA's project approach as outlined by Gotz "some have suggested that the 'project approach' to regeneration in areas like the inner city creates a development blindspot... It's all very well to focus on big investments such as Newtown... these projects certainly will catch the attention of business and wealthy residents with cash in hand... But will it draw development?" (2001:16). The author goes on to say that

this misses the fact that the real problem is not that big business and finance fled the inner city but rather why. The answer to this is given as inadequate urban management and inappropriate use of inner city space. “Chasing prestige projects in the inner city where enforcement has not been sorted out is like putting icing on a cake that has flopped in the hope that this will make it edible” (Gotz: 2001:16). Nearly ten years after this report was written I fear the critics may have been proven right.

This research paper does not present a critique of world city discourse. Nor does it explore the idea that the Newtown Cultural Precinct project arose from “policies based on Western ideals of regeneration and development” (Preston, 2006:1). The author has accepted that the City authorities operated within the world city framework. What was investigated, however, is whether the Newtown Cultural Precinct has been a successful project within the Western paradigm of cultural-led urban regeneration projects. Barbara Lipietz in her paper *‘Muddling-through’: urban regeneration in Johannesburg’s inner city* makes this observation “... current urban regeneration initiatives in Johannesburg’s inner city are not so much the result of a deliberate neo-liberal policy agenda being pushed forward in a purposive and effective manner but rather... they are the unfortunate effect of unimaginative responses to (desperate attempts at times) dealing with contingency – in a highly complex, fast-changing, and chaotic (let alone violent) inner city environment” (2004:1). Lipietz believes the City has limited resources and is “forced to partner with inner city constituents (commercial) in their quest to put a halt to urban decay” (2004:9). Lipietz states that “Courting the private sector, for these City officials then, has more to do with a desperate response to a highly intricate situation of spiralling decay, a pragmatic response to the disorderly city, to disorderly civil society. These claims, when lodged in the unstable and chaotic terrain of on-the ground (attempts at?) implementation cannot, it seems to me, be entirely dismissed.” (2004:7). She asks the question why does government implement the large flagship projects first? Yes, because they can drive province’s ambitions to be a ‘smart Province’ but perhaps also, she notes, “because such heavy investment projects, with their heavy weight of symbolism are simply the best way the Council can conceive of showing its control over the disorderly city” (2004:7). She goes on to say that re-imagining the city is part of Masondo’s (Johannesburg’s mayor) strategy to show his electorate that the Council cares about their city – the Inner City as their “point of access to the economy”.

What Lipietz is saying is that the City does not have the budget to counter the chaos and anarchy of an African city expanding exponentially as displaced people from all over the continent and the rest of South Africa move in daily creating as well as taking up the cracks faster than officials can respond. The only option that appears to be available is to try to

stabilise certain environments within the Inner City in the hope that the private sector will take up the invitation and invest. The City needs to partner and work hand in hand with the private sector to create an Inner City that works for the City, the private sector, and Johannesburg's citizens. And although the planners and the JDA are using Western models for their urban regeneration attempts, the City's inhabitants continue to display an array of innovative and creative responses to the city in which they live which are astonishing. All the planning in the world, as will be described later in this report, cannot create a Western environment in an African city. Newtown, as will be shown, has not become sanitised and Westernised.

In Preston's thesis she describes Newtown as "one of the most symbolic projects undertaken by the City of Johannesburg... This initiative, the most recent in a long history of such projects, is clearly in line with world city discourse in regards to the creation of a cultural quarter and the support of the cultural industries therein" (2006:56). Preston's notion of Newtown as a symbolic project represents an interesting perspective on the precinct. It implies that government did not necessarily believe the precinct or the cultural industries within it could drive the economic development agenda. The Newtown project was intended to increase commercial activity in the area, especially in cultural industries, and thus boost economic growth, employment and exports (Spiropoulos, 2010). However, in an interview Preston had with Sandy Lowitt, Chief strategic Officer of Blue IQ from 1999 to 2003, she claims that "Blue IQ was never convinced of the economic viability of the Newtown project as a major catalyst for growth in the city. Instead, she believes that the project was mainly undertaken for its symbolic value in terms of upgrading the city's image" (2006:58).

This begs the question what does Newtown symbolise and why would government invest nearly R300 million into a project without certainty of an economic knock-on effect. Theories of place attachment can help to unpack Newtown's symbolic importance and value. Although theories of place attachment are being used more and more by place-marketers to understand the "stickiness" (Markussen, 1996) of places and how best to position and market places, I will touch on the notion of place attachment and what this means in the Newtown context to better understand why government was prepared to invest in the area. For decades Newtown was one of the few places in South Africa where people of all races could socialise in the same space. The Market Theatre one of the few theatres where actors, black and white, could share the stage (due to a by-law stating that different races could mix because of the zoning of the original market) and mixed audiences could watch the plays. The Market Theatre was a world theatre producing plays with a strong anti-apartheid stance. Cultural organisations mushroomed all with a similar goal to use the arts to fight oppression.

From 1976 to 1994, Newtown was a site of multi-culturalism, activism, struggle, hope and creative activity. According to Stedman (2003) a sense of place is more than its physical features, it arises from the interaction of the individuals within a space to such an extent that eventually that place becomes imbued with symbolic meaning. In my experience there is tremendous emotion and feeling towards Newtown by politicians, city officials, artists, and Johannesburg's citizens. Rubinstein and Parmelee (1992:142) argue that: "Place attachment is a more energised, compelling or vivid affectual state born of one's linking significant life events, key developmental themes or identity processes with a particular environment." The emotional investment made by anti-apartheid cultural activists and others on the periphery for over nearly two decades, centred around the Yard of Ale, the flea market, Kippies and the Market Theatre, remains. Newtown is synonymous with South Africa's fight for freedom and hence its symbolic value is strong.

In my conclusion I would like to describe some of the activities, responses and actions taken by users of the Newtown space despite government's meticulous planning and imagining, and a R300 million investment in infrastructure and public space upgrades. Contrary to Preston's thesis, many aspects of Newtown remain unexpected and no amount of world city discourse can control that. On the corner of Gwi Gwi Mrwebi and Gerard Sekoto streets, near Brickfields, there is a makeshift tap that was installed by Joburg Water, or so the NID was led to believe. The tap was installed because Joburg Water was tired of repeatedly fixing the broken connection. Each time they would fix it, the following day water would be freely flowing again. Taxi drivers parking on Gerard Sekoto and Gwi Gwi Mrwebi use the water to wash their taxis. Unless Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD) is deployed there on a 24-hour basis to monitor and control the situation, the taxis will break the connection to get to the water they need to wash their taxis. Despite many attempts by the NID to get JMPD to respond, they were eventually told that without signage saying NO WASHING TAXIS, there is little that JMPD can do about the situation. The NID put up the signs and lo and behold a witty taxi driver carefully painted out the word 'NO' so now the signs read 'WASHING TAXIS'!

When AngloGold Ashanti moved into the beautiful, new refurbished building, as First World as any in New York or London, the staff and management looked out of their large, beautiful window in the reception area onto Gwi Gwi Mrwebi Street to purvey the Newtown landscape only to discover that many of the homeless who had been moved out of Turbine Hall to make way for the development had set up home on the pavements of Gwi Gwi Mrwebi between Bree and Jeppe streets – not a pretty sight when you have invested so much and spent months convincing your staff why it is a good idea to move to Newtown. They were



prepared to do anything to move the homeless but according to new city regulations you can only move squatters if you have somewhere to move them to. So the squatters remained and AngloGold Ashanti's staff felt very uncomfortable arriving and leaving work driving through the pavement squatter camp. Until one day when Joburg Roads Agency came to Newtown, unannounced I might add, to repave the pavements. The homeless had to move and the NID moved in like the speed of lightening. AngloGold agreed to pay for security and guards were posted to ensure when the homeless returned they would be turned away.

So where did they move to? Carr Street outside Remade – a recycling paper and plastic business. They set up home on the pavements of Carr Street and lived quite happily there for a few years, making fires, cooking food, building shelters, sorting out recycled paper and plastic, and creating a tremendous mess. Until one day the JDA decided to upgrade the Carr Street pavements. They were moved and Remade were asked to manage the situation otherwise there would be consequences. And so they moved again to around the corner!

Mary Fitzgerald Square – the western side – transforms into a street party on the weekends when patrons ostensibly from Cappello and Sophiatown open their car boots, turn up the volume and drink their own beer – leaving an awful mess of broken glass and litter for the NID cleaners to sort out the following morning. The mayoral toilets on the square are open for limited hours during the day and so pedestrian males continue to use the highway pillars on Henry Nxumalo next to Museum Africa as urinals – the NID does a power wash once a week but it is not enough to stem the ammonia reek emanating from that corner.

On Saturday night I went to the Market Bar and Bistro and just before eight ordered supper. About fifteen minutes later friends joined me and we asked for a menu only to be told the kitchen was closed! On a Saturday night, in the middle of the World Cup, at a restaurant that purports to be opened from 12 to late every day except Monday, the kitchen was closed at 8.15pm! This morning I was sent an sms by a friend trying to get a toasted sandwich from Kaldis Coffee only to be told, "sorry, we don't have bread"! A message on the Newtown Facebook group in June describes trying to order food from Cappello on a Saturday afternoon. As the patrons went through the menu they were told that dish after dish was not available. Eventually they settled for a dish and when it came time to pay were told the credit card facilities were not working. The message indicated that the so-called restaurant was full of tourists all just sitting shaking their heads. Sophiatown and Cappello run as what Purkey (2010) refers to as "shebeens" – essentially late night drinking places. Cappello was evicted last week after not paying rent for nearly a year.

Belinda Hlaka, manager of the Workers' Museum, showed me a group of homeless people setting up their morning ablutions and kitchen facilities in a corner of the park next to the wall of the museum. They wash and cook and eat, fetching water from the tap inside the museum perimeter. She told me it had been going on for some time.

One Saturday near the start of the World Cup, walking through the Market Theatre Precinct, I came upon two women, a large plastic bin, and a sign. The bin contained two large boa constrictors and they were taken out in turns in order for members of the public to pay to have their photographs taken with the snakes. A large crowd had gathered and the women, I am sure, made some money.

Dagga smoking takes place in the Market Theatre precinct and on the Newtown park – unchecked. At Thursday's reggae nights at the Bassline, the rastas smoke dagga freely both inside and outside the venue, with no apparent regard for the law, and with no law enforcement officers about, they take the opportunity to practise their faith.

Most striking has been the recent opening of the 2010 Soccer World Cup. The NID estimates that there were 15 000 on Mary Fitzgerald Square – a much larger number than the event organisers had prepared for. There were eight operational portable toilets, limited access and exit points, limited security, a screen that was too small with inadequate sound, and a beer tent without enough beer. Men were urinating in the grounds of the Jeppe Street houses, youngsters had climbed onto the roof of the house nearest 1 Central Place which was in the process of being renovated by the JDA, the security fencing had to eventually be taken down because it was becoming more of a risk than a help with crowd control, security stopped searching and cooler boxes and glass bottles found their way onto the Square. After the match when the numbers had subsided, extensive damage to the square was revealed. About thirty percent of the paving on the square had been lifted and little plinths had been erected so that people could get a glimpse of the screen in order to try and watch the game – a creative solution to an untenable situation! If the City will not dignify its citizens with a big screen, adequate ablution facilities, and decent security, then the citizens will respond with a lack of respect for the public space and make a plan to urinate and see the screen. They will bring their bottles in if beer is not available and if there are not enough entry and exit points, they will push the fences out of the way.

Atterbury were awarded the Potato Sheds development but little did they know it would take over two years to evict squatters occupying one of the buildings on Carr Street. The squatters sought legal representation from Wits and secured their rights. It took much

negotiation and a large settlement to move them. Two years on the property investment landscape has changed and now it is a matter of 'wait and see' if Atterbury will in fact proceed with the development in the foreseeable future.

It is within the cracks, the spaces in between, that the 'other' will prevail and refuse to be excluded. As the Newtown Cultural Precinct has been planned and constructed only a small minority can have access to 'culture' and even where entry fees are not charged for museums etc they do not feel it is their space or comfortable entering the imposing doors. The free concerts on Mary Fitzgerald Square on occasion fill the gap but these concerts provided by the city or province are becoming fewer and fewer with no New Year's eve concert at the end of 2009 and no Africa Day concert this year due to budget constraints.

The City and its planners were operating in the imaginary of the northern hemisphere and urban renewal in terms of the northern hemisphere reality. In Johannesburg we have massive unemployment, 20 000 people move into the city each month, there is mass poverty, absentee landlords, hijacked buildings – the list goes on. I believe that the Newtown project was never contextualised in a real way to the conditions of this city.

It can be argued that the City and its planners tried to simulate a creative environment by taking the bits and pieces of what they perceived a creative environment to be in order to create a veneer of creativity. Creativity needs the fissures, the cracks and some darkness in order to flourish. What was created appeared to have no substance. I would argue that Newtown, despite the best intentions of the authorities, planner and consultants, has retained the tension needed for creativity to flourish but not because of all the grand frameworks and plans, but despite them.

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## **LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED**

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Reid, Graeme (11 February 2010). Interview, Johannesburg.  
Sack, Steven (9 February 2010). Interview, Johannesburg.  
Senior, Barry (28 July 2010). Interview, Johannesburg.  
Spiropoulos, John (5 February 2010). Interview, Johannesburg.  
Till, Christopher (12 May 2010). Interview, Johannesburg.  
Virasamay, Nadia (1 March 2010). Interview, Johannesburg.



## **APPENDIX A: PROFILES OF KEY ROLEPLAYERS**

Bethlehem, Lael

Lael Bethlehem is currently director: real estate investment in the corporate and investment banking division of Standard Bank. She was CEO of the JDA for five years until her resignation in June this year. Her involvement in local government started in 2002 when she was the Director of the Department of Economic Development. After graduating from Wits she took up a post at the Cosatu Research Centre where she researched worker issues in the forestry and paper industries. Her next position was as the Department of Water and Forestry's Chief Director.

Reid, Graeme

Graeme Reid is the Executive Director: Consulting at Urban Genesis, an urban management and development company focusing on the establishment and management of improvement districts, mixed use developments and urban regeneration strategies for cities and towns. He was Inner City Manager, Johannesburg and established and was the first Chief Executive Officer of the Johannesburg Development Agency. He was responsible for the conceptualisation and implementation of the Johannesburg inner city regeneration strategy and major catalytic developments, including the development of Constitution Hill (anchored by the new Constitutional Court); the re-development of Newtown (Johannesburg's cultural and creative centre); and the development of transportation infrastructure.

Sack, Steven

Steven Sack has worked as a cultural activist, an artist, an arts educator and an arts administrator for the past 40 years. He is currently employed in the position of Director: Arts, Culture and Heritage Services in the City of Johannesburg and is responsible for the management of the programmes concerned with Culture Life; Creative Industries; Heritage; Public Art; Public Spaces; and Museums and Galleries. Previous to this he held various positions in National Government as Deputy Director, Director and Chief Director in the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology and the Department of Arts and Culture when it became a stand-alone Ministry. From 1976 to 1989 he was a founder member and active participant in the Junction Avenue Theatre Company with a group of black and white artists and actors.

Spiropoulos, John

John Spiropoulos was, until recently, a director at Urban Genesis, working on large infrastructure consulting projects for government. Previous to this he ran his own consulting company, Special Places. During this time he managed the Gauteng SDI project for the Department of Trade and Industry, including the planning for the Newtown Cultural Precinct. Previous to this he worked as acting head of the Gauteng Department of Development Planning and Local government. In the early nineties he also worked at Planact as a projects manager.

Till, Christopher

Christopher Till is currently director of the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, as well as running a new gallery called Generator on Buitengracht Street in Cape Town. Prior to this he was Director of Culture for the City of Johannesburg and Executive Director of the first and second Johannesburg Biennales and he ran Johannesburg's new defunct Generator Art Space as an experimental venue in Newtown to give young artists with little money the chance to show new work. Before that he was Director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

## APPENDIX B: PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEWTOWN – THEN AND NOW

Image 1: The Market Precinct – showing the context



Image 2: Electrical Precinct – showing the context

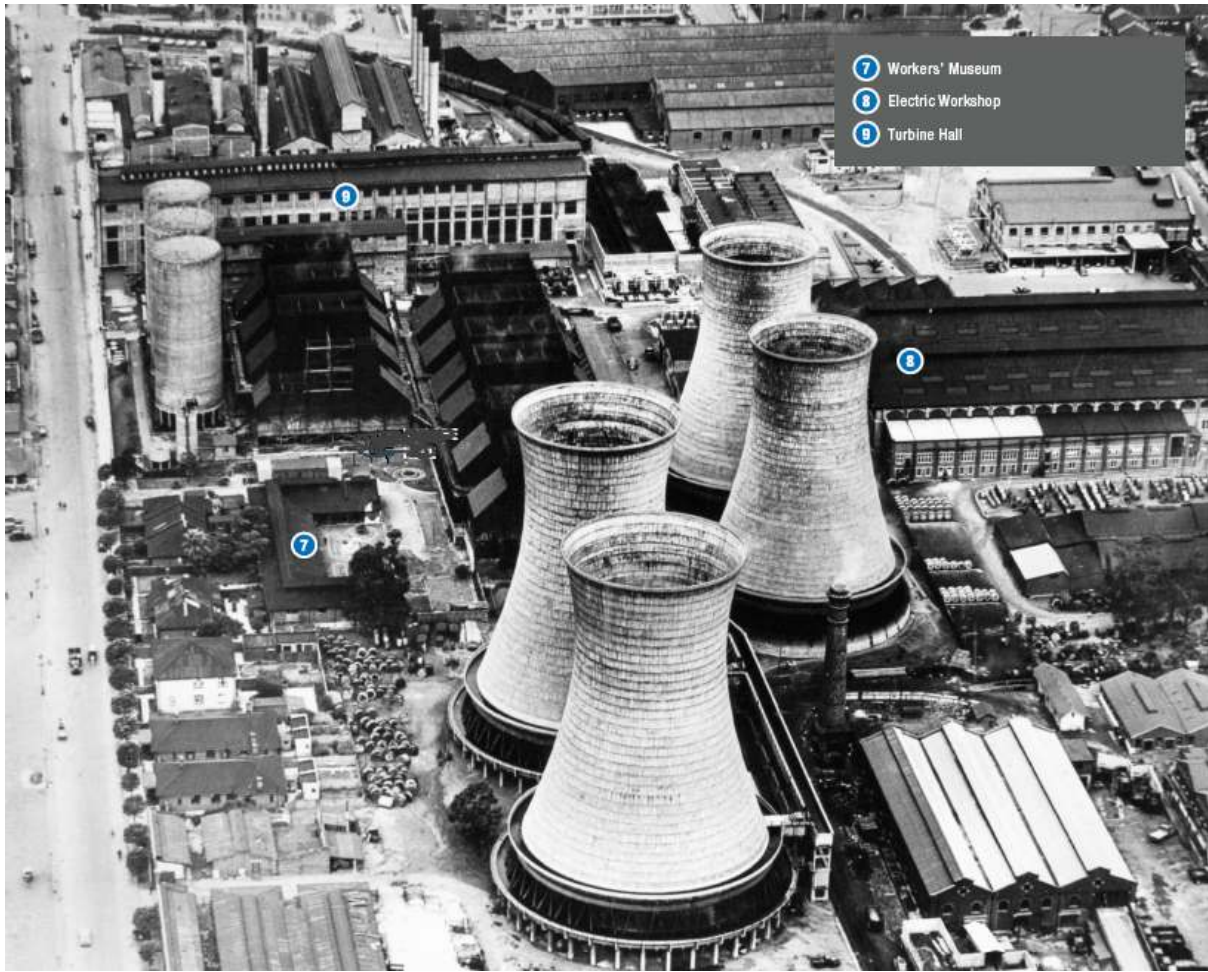




Image 3: Transport Precinct – showing the context



Image 4: Interior of the Electric Workshop (Johannesburg's first power station) – now Sci-Bono Discovery Centre



Copyright Museum Africa

Image 5: The interior of Sci-Bono Discovery Centre today



Image 6: Newtown in the 1930s



Copyright Museum Africa

Image 7: The Bus Factory after the introduction of double-decker buses



Copyright Museum Africa

Image 8: The Bus Factory today (offices for JDA and cultural organisations)



Image 9: Turbine Hall in the 1930s



Copyright Museum Africa

Image 10: Turbine Hall today



Image 11: The fresh produce market in the process of being built in about 1912



Copyright Museum Africa

Image 12: The Market Theatre today



Image 13: Interior of the fresh produce market



Copyright Museum Africa

Image 14: Interior of Museum Africa today





Image 15: The Market Theatre Precinct in the 1980s



Copyright Museum Africa

Image 16: The flea market (south) in the 1980s with the cooling towers still in place



Image 17: Mary Fitzgerald Square (north) today



Image 18: The refurbished Workers' Museum



Image 19: The new Moving into Dance building (2009)



Image 20: The launch of the refurbished Kippies (2009)



Image 21: Interior of Kippies in the 1980s



22: A Newtown heritage marker



Image 23: The paving on Mary Fitzgerald Square after the opening of the 2010 World Cup



Image 24: Homeless living on Carr Street (2009)

