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African diaspora: a place of integration in Yeoville

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African Diaspora

A place of integration in Yeoville

Kalonda Marcel Kimoto

This document is submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree: Master of Architecture [Professional] at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa in the year 2009.

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AFRICAN DIASPORA: A Place of Integration in Yeoville

Abstract

The African civilisation is grounded in the maxim" umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu", which may be construed to mean that " to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them" (Ramose 2002:231)

This dissertation, is sited in suburb called Yeoville, in South Africa where mostly lower income immigrants live. It discusses issues around the non integration of immigrants in South Africa.

This lack of integration manifests itself spatially by voluntary segregation and place creation. Place creation can be the physical and emotional relations with space that occurs along with a person or a group occupying and personalising it.

Integration at a certain level would alleviate social problems (like the infamous xenophobia attacks) and create a platform where people can interact.

The proposed architectural project is a multi cultural centre for immigrant communities. The principal aim is to provide them with spaces that support the integration of immigrants and their cultures, make a place of gathering and interaction, create a platform for enlightenment campaigns against xenophobia and create a space that promote business opportunities.

Declaration

I, Kimoto, Kalonda Marce (student number: 0214449r) am a student registered for the course 'Master of Architecture' in the year 2009. I hereby declare the following:

I am aware that plagiarism [the use of someone else's work without permission and/or without acknowledging the original sources] is wrong.

I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have stated explicitly otherwise.

I have followed the required conventions in referencing thoughts, ideas, and visual materials of others. For this purpose I have referred to the Graduate School of Engineering and the Built Environment style guide.

I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my own work.

Signation

Date 23-10-2009

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved grandparents

Acknowlegements

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people for having assisted me in the preparation of this dissertation.

Hannah le Roux - Thesis year Supervisor

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1.0 Introduction

"It is impossible not to notice that to dwell in the globalizing times requires us to negotiate increasingly palpable flows-of capital, ideas, images, goods, technology and people.

Contemporary migrancy, involving the movements of immigrants and emigrants, guestworkers, refugees, asylum-seekers, exiles, and other diasporic groups, is thoroughly caught up in these global flows.

As a consequence, its effects are more troubling, intensely felt and widespread than ever before".

(Cairns 2004 : 3) Drifting: architecture and Migrancy'

Ingles (2005:3) argues that the movement of people plays an important role in architecture because it also signifies the movement of architectural expertise and building traditions.

The dissertation will focus on the architectural space of African immigrants; it will attempt to address the context by utilising two fundamental concepts: contemporary Diaspora as place of integration and architectural space.

Space is central to many different areas of study and has varied meanings, ranging from totally abstract notions such as mathematical space, to physical ones such as astronomical space, to more earthly ones such as the expanse that surrounds us, to behavioural notions such as territorial space and personal space. "This great variety of possible 'types' of space ... makes any definition of space [in planning and design] difficult. Intuitively, however, space is the three-dimensional extension of the world around us, the intervals, distances and relationships between people and people, people and things, and things and things" (Rapoport 1980:11)

Most foreign nationals when arrive in South Africa, tend to group themselves into communities that create a sense of "place" , according to Swedish architect Erik Gunnar Asplung's declaration: that place leads to the creation of space. meaning the place created by foreign nationals with all it cultural activities will create a particular space where the local and foreign cultures can be welcomed.

Kollenberg (1986:) argues that "architecture is the articulation of space that is moved through, interacted with, to give the participator a defined special experience in relation to previous and anticipated special experience. Every aspect of man's existence, every emotion he experiences and every action he performs, he relates to the physical environment in which these experience take place. "The space that he perceives around him".

Heidegger has said that you cannot divorce man and space. Space is neither an external object nor an internal experience.

Socially and culturally conditioned influences are then also part of the operational system, influencing how people perceive space.
These outlines are further influenced by the activities that are socially and culturally acceptable in particular spaces.

Any building can be made to accommodate an unplanned activity, but it is a good idea to make a Diaspora a place of integration a growing, vital place, capable of change and incorporating as many activities as possible.

“Contemporary Diaspora should be seen not as given communities, a logical, albeit deterritorialized, extension of an ethnic or national group, but as imagined communities, continuously reconstructed and reinvented. It is in the context of intersection of connectivity and cultural reinvention and reconstruction that media technologies and Diasporic media become crucial factors in the reproduction and transformation of Diasporic identities”. (Tsagarousianou 2004:52).

The concept of African Diaspora as a place of integration serves to inspire and promote integration between the different Diaspora groups. To achieve this I have identified various common interests and requirements amongst the different Diaspora groups.
Secondly I have identified activities which will bring the host nation to join with the African Diaspora groups (see figure 1 on page 4).

This dissertation examines the sense of alienation and adaptation and social integration of the Diaspora community living in South Africa.

From my personal experience being born and raised into adolescence in my beloved country the Democratic Republic of Congo. Like so many other fellow Africans I was required to abandon my homeland and look for greener pastures due to political and personal reasons.

South Africa beckoned. It was and continues to be the beacon for many Africans. It is a land of opportunities, and also challenges, especially if you are a foreigner or Ma-Kwere-Kwere as we are sometimes called.

Isolation and segregation resulted in me attempting to find people that would accept me. As is the case with many other African nationals in South Africa my fellow countryman were the ones to whom I could turn to most easily for comfort, company and commiseration.

However, in doing so we have further isolated ourselves and have actually made it difficult for our adopted country to accept and welcome us. Our different cultural practices, education and sometimes language have created a barrier between us.

A walk through Yeoville, especially along Rockey Street, would clearly show the segregation between various ethnic, cultural and national groups. There is an area for Zimbabwean nationals, Congolese nationals, Nigerians, Somalis, Ethiopians, Cameroonians, etc...

The question is, if we as foreigners continue in this practice, will we perpetuate in segregating ourselves and restrict integration into South African society?

It must also be noted that the aim of this exercise is not to dissolve the existing Diaspora groups or force them to merge into one but to promote a common point of encounter for African Diaspora and the host country.

The proposition for an architectural solution here is an architectural product that allows for encounters and gatherings, a place of integration that allows the African Diaspora and the host country to partake in its activities.

The end result will be a structure which demonstrates how the world we live in both shapes and gives form to architecture.

The centre will play a pivotal role in facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and understanding, as well as re-introducing positive values to the future generation.

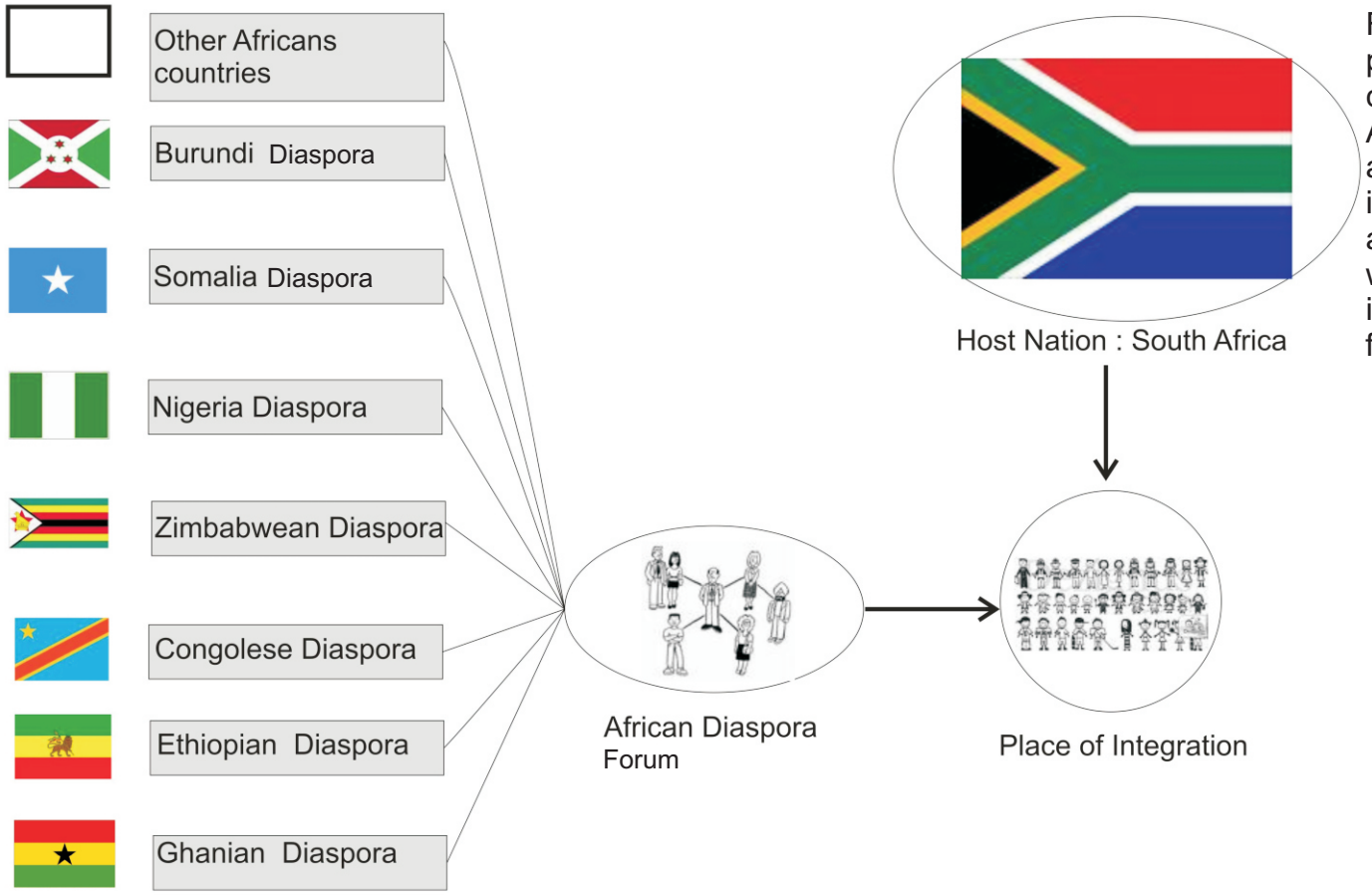


Fig 1 Showing the process of creating a place of integration. From different African countries we can form one group called an African Diaspora.
and from African diaspora group we can invite the Host nation (South African) to join and partake to it activities. and we create what a place of integration. where immigrant and local population can meet face to face.

Historical Notes

According to Wikipedia the term 'Diaspora' (in Greek, mean "a scattering [of seeds]") refers to the movement of any population sharing common ethnic identity who were either forced to leave or voluntarily left their settled territory, and became residents in areas often far removed from the former.

Clifford's argued that Diaspora is also not limited to movement to a foreign land, but could be a mere shift from one region to another within one's country, so long as it leads to cultures of displacement, characterized by longing, memory and (dis)identification. (Okungu 2006)

South African context

Historically, immigration to South Africa has been a white phenomenon. From the time a Dutch fleet landed in the Cape in 1652, South Africa's white population has constantly been built on through immigration. White immigration was encouraged and Europeans were given virtually free access to the country (Peberdy, 1998:22)

The African population has an older migration history, though it has not been as widely documented or publicised.

Archaeological finds that date back to the 3rd century AD (Cornevin 1979:77) suggest that significant movements of populations used to take place by those inhabitants that conversed in the Bantu languages.

From the last quarter of the 19th century Africans from Mozambique, Malawi, Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Angola have migrated to South Africa to work in the mines of the Orange Free State and the old Transvaal.

As a result of immigration and colonisation, South Africa has imported and adopted various architectural styles, methods of construction and techniques. South African architecture is a derivative of these foreign architectural styles, primarily due to colonization. Different factors gave rise to different architectural manifestations (Ingles 2005).

In the case of colonization, part of the legacy that ex-colonies inherited from their colonizing countries was their architecture, which to some extents neglected local architectural traditions.
also migrant communities often design structures for themselves on smaller scale in order to recreate a bit of the homeland they left behind.

Reasons why immigrants left their country of birth

It is not only colonization that was a factor of immigration. Other factors such as climate, war, religion, labour prospects, economy and political freedom also influenced the movement of people.

Most immigrants migrated to South Africa to escape poverty and destitution in their own countries, and sometimes to escape civil unrest and political instability. The majority of the countries of origin have sufficient food and land for cultivation and development. However, unemployment was a serious problem. (Harris1995:189)

Although many people come to Johannesburg for greener pastures, there is still a necessity to keep contact with their respective places of origin, so as to have a relationship not only with their families and friends but with activities and opportunities that arise as a result of contribution both to their adoptive countries and the course of development for their birth countries.

Through interviews I have conducted with immigrants and my personal experiences as an immigrant, some of the reasons that convince people to leave their homelands today are as follows:

- The desire to pursue Tertiary studies is the most frequent reason.

- The desire to escape political instability and economic paralysis.

-The necessity or the will to seek employment or trading opportunities.

- A desire for a change and a sense that South Africa is a land of opportunity
When immigrants arrive in the host country they have a perception that they will be warmly welcomed and treated with respect and humility. Unfortunately this has not often been the case.

A study suggests that racism in post-apartheid South Africa is taking on new forms and that foreign black Africans,

Reception in the host Country

especially those originating from countries north of South Africa's neighbours, are being portrayed as a major threat to the success of the post-apartheid development. (Morris & Bouilon 2001)

Some of the reasons why immigrants feel unwelcome in South Africa are as follows :

-The immigrants have been accused of stealing the jobs of South Africans;

-Many have been referred to as Makwere-kwere (derogatory word for African immigrant);

-As there is a black government in power and Apartheid is gone, many black South Africans can no longer blame the system for their short comings and a lot of people have turned to the most visible scapegoat - immigrants;

-South Africans generally believe that immigrants have a negative impact on the country.

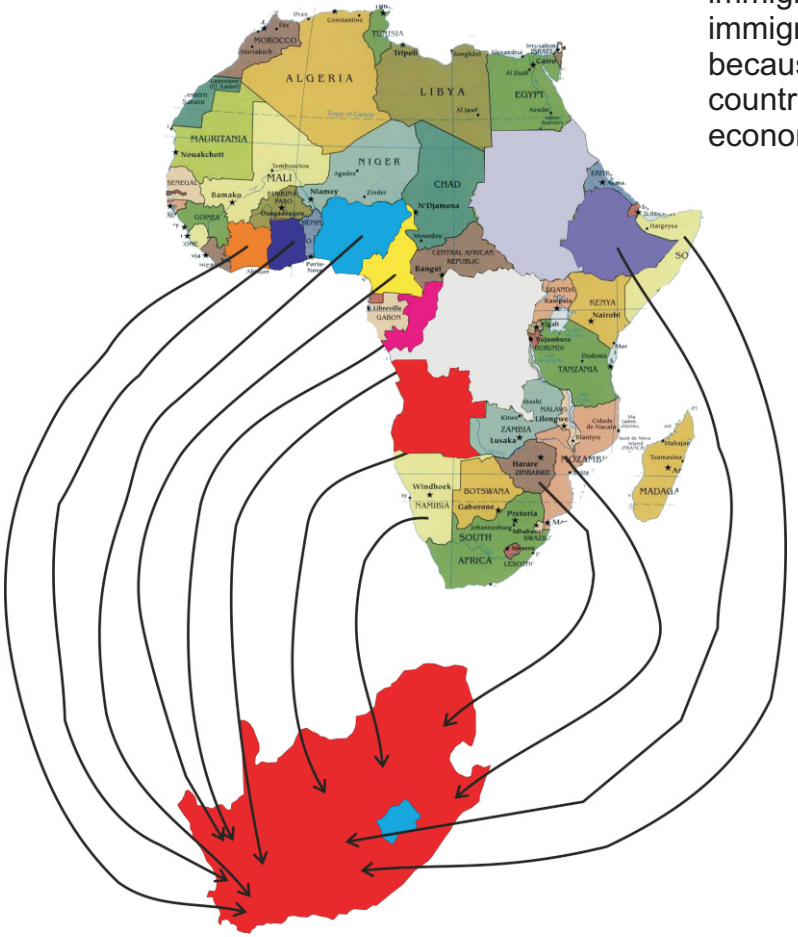


Fig 2 Diagram showing the movement of immigrants to South Africa. in most cases immigrants leave they countries of origin because of political instability. these are countries that was affected by either war or economics reason.

History of Immigration within a South African context

South Africa has a long history of urban segregation and this problem did not only affect the local people. It also extended to the migrant populous.

Planning policies from the Apartheid era have affected the structure and form of South African cities.

Historically, the mining and agriculture sectors in South Africa have been dependent on migrant labour from southern African countries. In fact much of South Africa's mineral (and natural) wealth has been produced on the backs of migrant mine workers (Jeeves, 1985; Murray, 1995).

The economy of South Africa is divided into two streams, namely the formal and the informal sector.
This resulted in a huge gap between the rich and the poor. As can be seen in the media by recent boycotts in informal and low cost settlements this has incited a lot of frustration and anger among those occupying the lowest spot on the economic stratum.
As result of this phenomenon there is a vast discrimination in terms of class, race, gender, and economic status amongst South Africans.

The freedom of expression, though it is enshrined in the South African constitution, is limited in practice; the individual is deprived mainly because of the influence caused by segregation, exclusion and urban fragmentation which then highlights the lack of cohesion amongst local communities. It is difficult for a visitor who is willing to be accepted to fit into the segregated communities that are also seeking acceptance amongst themselves.

With these ongoing social challenges that South Africans are currently facing, it has resulted in the creation of different Diasporic groups by foreign nationals.

These Diaspora groups have also segregated themselves into smaller groups according to their country of birth.
In addition they have even segregated themselves into neighbourhoods such as Hillbrow, Berea, Yeoville, Bellevue ect...

In so doing people within these communities are able to provide aid and security to one another, working through tribulations as communities rather than as individuals. Unfortunately the criminal element has also caught onto the benefits of segregation.

These communities have inadvertently created a base from which criminals can operate with relative ease and comfort.

The question one must ask is: why immigrants are trying to congregate more base on their countries of origin, without making much of an attempt to interact with other immigrants (from different countries within Africa), this therefore hinders integration among themselves. Worse still, it makes it hard for the large immigrant community to integrate with the South African people.

Presently the distance between the immigrant groups and the South African citizens has lead to certain unhealthy hostilities between them. These hostilities thrive on certain negative perceptions held against each other.

From interviews undertaken with different individuals the findings have a common consensus of negativity both by the locals (towards foreigners) and the foreigners (towards the locals).

The perceptions which different parties have of each other without interaction or consultation and therefore it becomes more difficult for interaction to occur between the cultural barriers of these communities

Black South Africans perspective towards Immigrants

- All foreign nationals are involved in drugs and other illegal activity.

- The general perception out there is that foreign nationals have an agenda to pirate South African - women and force them into illegal activities.

- Foreign nationals are considered as parasites and are responsible for the decline of urban conditions of certain suburbs such as Hillbrow, Yeoville, Berea, etc...

Throughout history and in different contexts there are examples of the tendency to find groups of 'aliens' who can be blamed for society's ills, and different groups have at various times been singled out as the social scapegoat. (Hudson 1993 : 22).

- The persistence of unemployment, poverty and crime has intensified the tendency for the local population to blame African immigrants for the lack of order and progress in the post-apartheid society.

The Immigrants perspective toward Black South Africans

- South Africans, especially black South African men are not welcoming of immigrants and often treat them harshly and with disrespect. This has evoked anger and unhappiness within immigrants.

- The most prominent perception of black South African men is that they are violent, lazy, adulterous and not nurturing of their partners and kin. This perception is primarily attributable to the urban dwelling black South African.

- The general perception when there are instances of wrong doing by both foreign nationals and locals: the sensationalism when the act of wrong is committed by foreign national is elevated out of proportion, whereas the result is the opposite if the crime is committed by a local.



Alexandra xenophobia people left homeless (woldofjh 2008)



Alexandra xenophobia (woldofjh 2008)



Alexandra xenophobia (woldofjh 2008)



Alexandra xenophobia (woldofjh 2008)

The implications of the perceptions

These perceptions developed by the South African public seem to take psychological, social and economic dimensions that make it difficult for them to fade away very easily.

The continued existence of the perceptions creates an additional barrier for the immigrant and South African citizens to integrate.

The hostilities arising from the perceptions has led to some South Africans staging violent attacks on the immigrants - the infamous xenophobic attacks in May 2008 - where some hostile South African groups killed and maimed many immigrants and displaced them from their homes and neighbourhoods.

The violence, killings and displacements of the immigrants led to an international outcry thereby creating a bad image for South Africa. Eventually the violence stopped but the lives and properties lost were not recovered; furthermore, most of the displaced people never re-integrated into their neighbourhoods.

However, the continued separation of the immigrants and the South Africa citizens does not seem to be in the interest of African unity. Therefore, there is need to find a way to kill or weaken the perception that led to the separation and also to find some socio-economic activity situation that would bring the immigrants and South Africans together.

There is already an enlightenment campaign to dispel the negative perceptions from both sides. This is where the centre I am proposing will create an environment, whereby people from different cultures and communities could meet face-to-face and interact with each other in a friendlier manner that is devoid of such wrong perceptions.



Alexandra Xenophobia

3.0 Methodologies

Conducting the interviews

the interviews were conducted in June 2009 in Yeoville
The inability to speak an indigenous language was a major obstacle in the terms of integration and often set the stage for hostile reactions.

Interview with Lydia: I don't like the taxi because when you are in a taxi the first thing you will find is that people will do their best to ask you questions in their home language. They ask you questions and when you don't know the answer to those questions it's not good some of them are saying bad things to me, like "go home" or "makwerekwere".

View from a South African: I've met a few of them, either through ordinary interactions, coincidence, or sports, and I found them, they are quite pleasant people. But rather unfortunately, they are much of a... secluded community. They are very much into themselves. So it's even difficult to penetrate them... to be able to understand what kind of people we are talking to... (Sisa Njikelana Councillor, Ward 18).

General Questions

- Why did you leave your country of origin and what was your expectation when coming to South Africa?

- How did you get to South Africa and was it easy to get all the necessary documents needed for you to be here ?

- How easy or difficult was for you to integrate into south African society?

- Do you socially interact with south African population?

- Do you speak any South African indigenous language?

- Do you still have some family member back home? If yes how do you communicate with them?

- Do you think there is any chance for immigrants and South Africans to understand each other?

- Are you going to go back to your country of origin?

General Answers

- Most the people come to South Africa Because of political instability in their countries of origins.
The expectation when coming to south Africa were that they will live in peace.

- Most of the people that lives in the southern Africans countries come to south Africa either by bus or by foot in case of Zimbabweans. people that lives in the west are using plane.

when arrived in South Africa there is a struggle to get the right document needed , because of like of information.

- Most of them find it difficult to interact socially with South Africans citizens, because of culture and language boundary.

- Most of immigrant have difficulties to learn any indigenous south Africa language because non integration in social level.

-most of them still have family member in their countries of origin, they communicates a lot trough internet and public phones.

How to bring the two parties to interact

Firstly in order to bring the Diaspora groups together, the intension is to find common activities or legal services that most immigrants in need for (see diagram on page 14). This will open a corridor for different people with different background to partake in the same activities.
Secondly is to identify keys activities that would have pulling power to attract people in Yeoville. (see diagram on page 16) . Such as:

Access to Communication

Technology is most important for the immigrant, because it keeps them in contact with their respective country, informing them trough the media with any important news which would concern them. By access to technology we are looking at communication, access to the internet, multi media etc...

Culture

Culture is a very complex issue, which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of

Visibility

In most cases foreign nationals tend to isolate themselves, or to live in hidden places, but architecture in this case will play the role of openness and closure where by foreign national will fill comfortable in all different spaces.

Legal Service

There are many useful services that all migrants need , for instance sending money or receiving money from their home countries. Because some of the African countries do not have proper banking systems, for migrant to send or receive money they do it through agencies like moneygram and others. It is very important when designing an architectural space to accommodate for this kind of services. Also other services such as:
- Immigration right
- A place to promote Anti - Xenophobia
- Protection of Human Rights

What will bring the host nation to integration?

Cross Cultural Exchange

By combining both interests: The African Diaspora and The Host Country. The architectural space will be a place where all people will feel comfortable and it will be appropriate for different users:
The building will be a constant magnet of activities throughout the day
The function will be categorised into two activities:
Primary Activities: will be like a magnets that will attract different people to the building such as:
- Music concert
- African film festival
- Art Exhibition.
- Fashion show

Secondary activities: will be the activities that cannot by themselves have the pulling-power to attract people. But the activities will keep the place alive. such as:
- Business suite (for entrepreneur) - Internet café - Transfer of money- African cuisine (restaurants)
- Night Clubs

what legal services is the immigrant mostly in need of ?

what will bring the host nation to integration ?

Access to Technology

Legal Service

Social

Entertainment

Culture

Cross Cultural Exchange



P.R China 2009



P.R China 2009

By combining both interests : The African Diaspora and The Host Country.

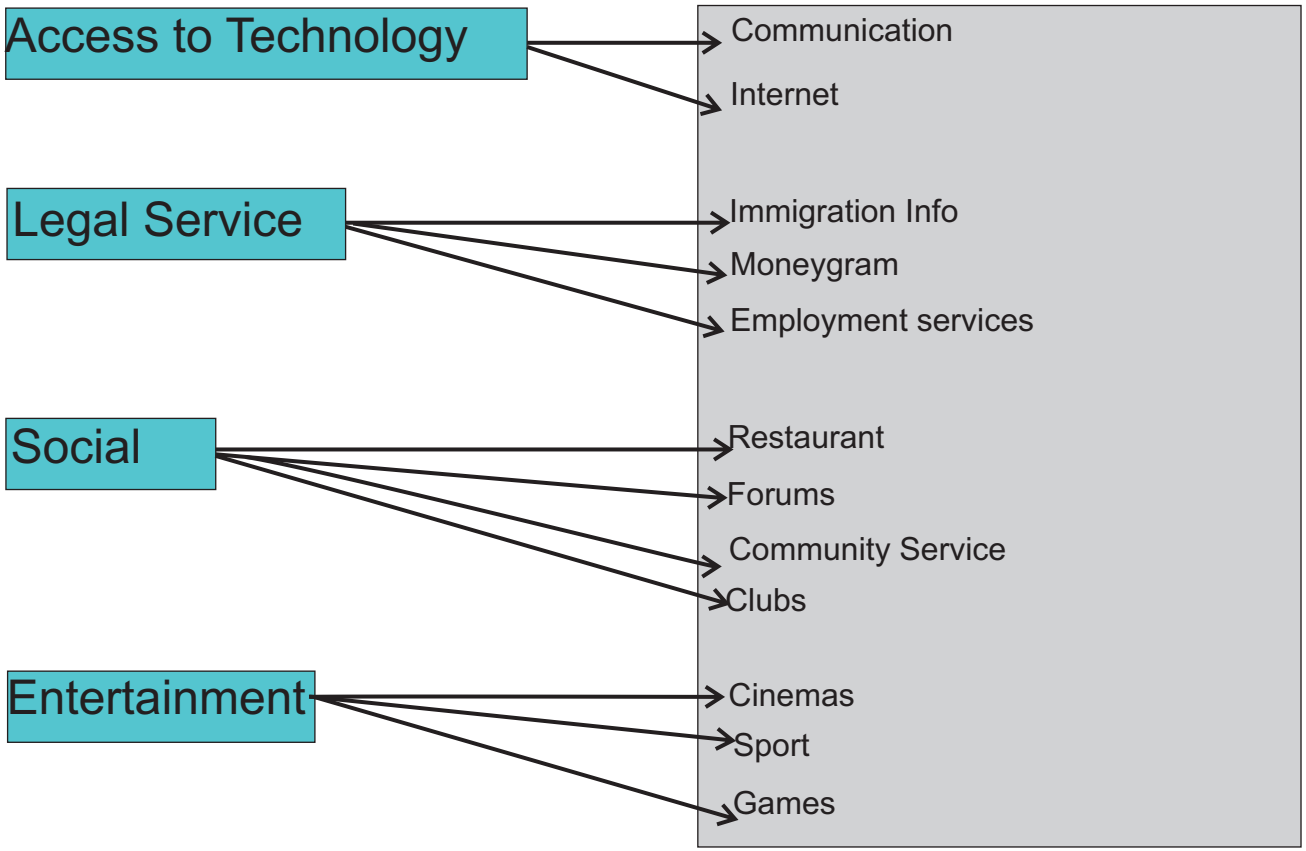
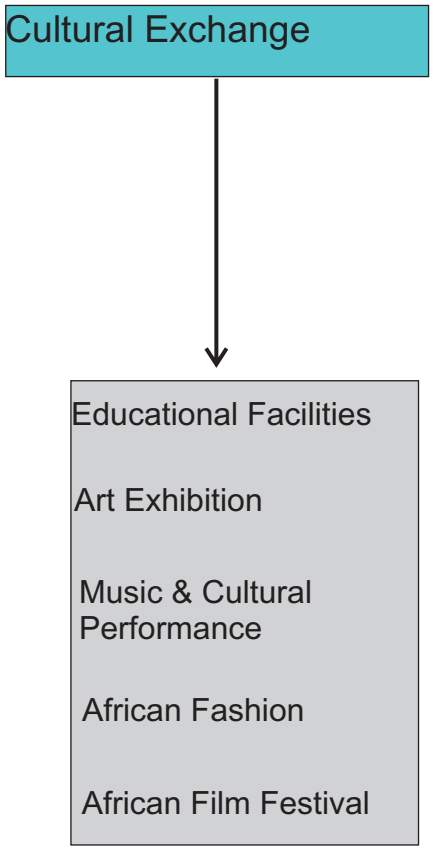


Diagram showing the program of the building where it generate from.



the building will be a constant magnet of activities throughout the day

The function will be categorised into two activities :







Primary Activities : will be like a magnets that will attract different people to the building like :

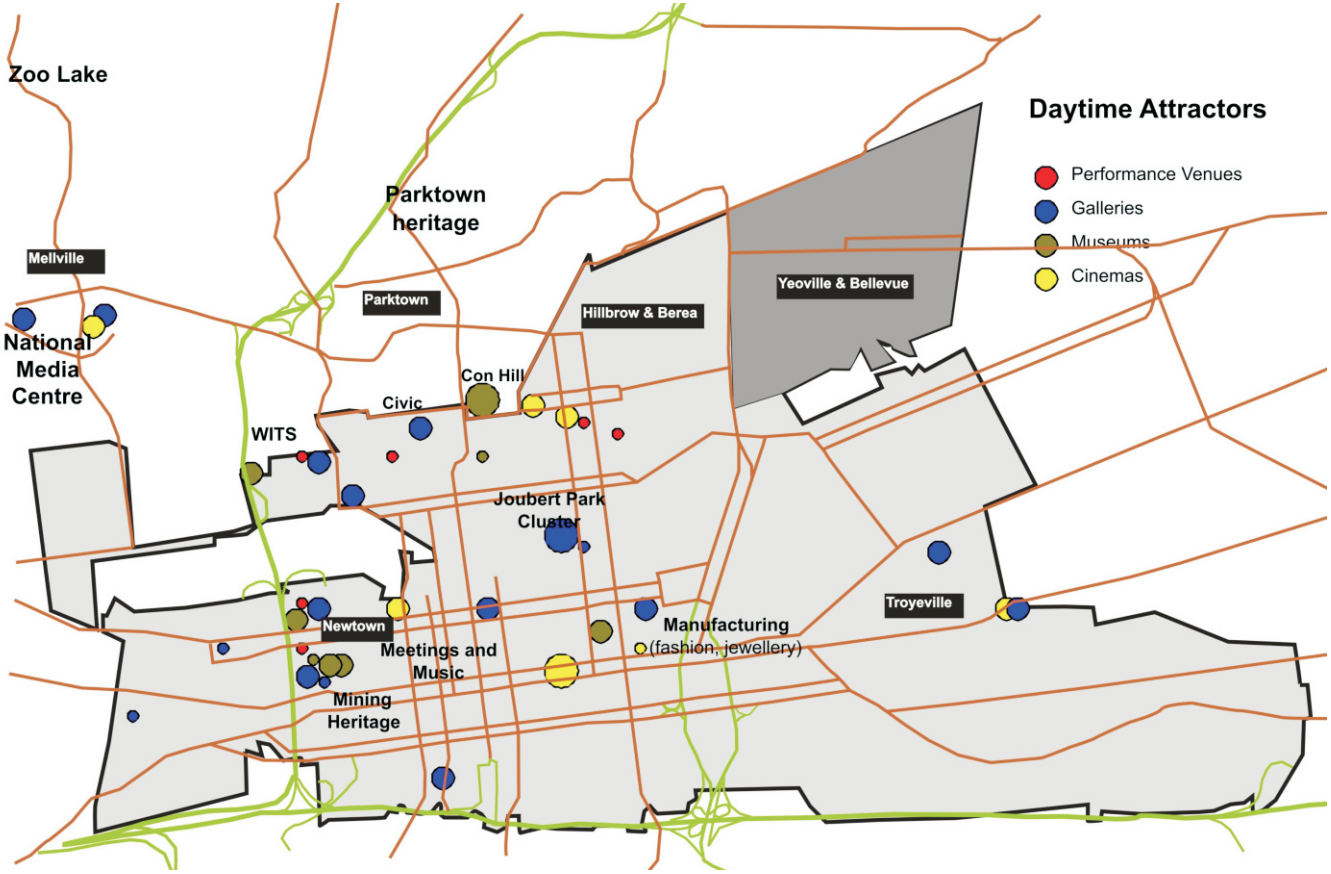
- *a Music concert*
- *an African film festival*
- *an Art Exhibition.*
- *a fashion show*

Secondary activities : will be the activies that cannot by themselves have the pulling- power to attract people. but the activities will keep the place alive

- *Business suite (for entrepreneur)*
- *Internet café*
- *Transfer of money*
- *African cuisine (restaurants)*
- *Night Clubs*

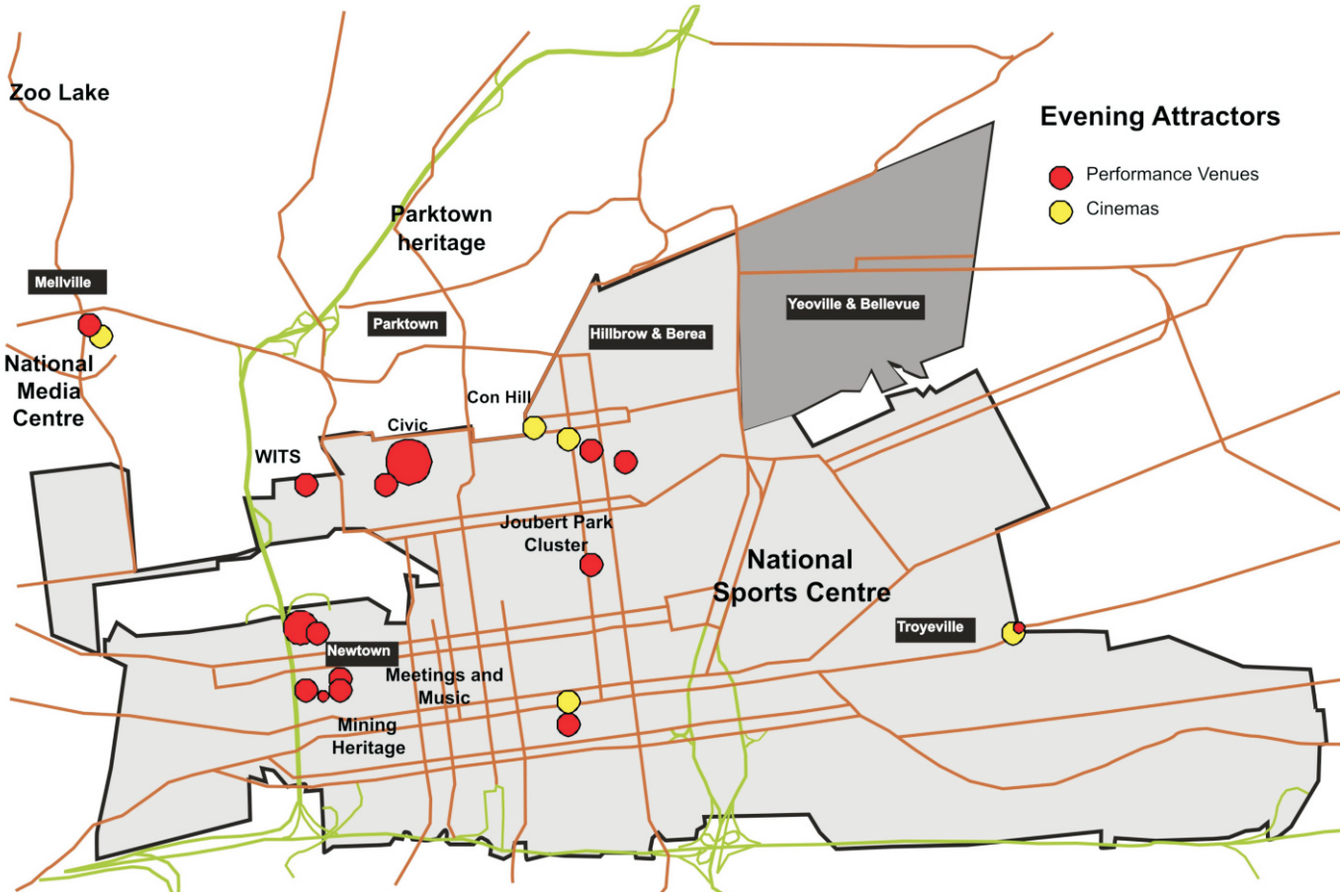
Maps showing activities that are not in Yeoville but can be found in other places. The findings also contribute to people not been attracted to visit Yeoville suburb.

Day time attractors can be found in other suburbs of Johannesburg but none in Yeoville.



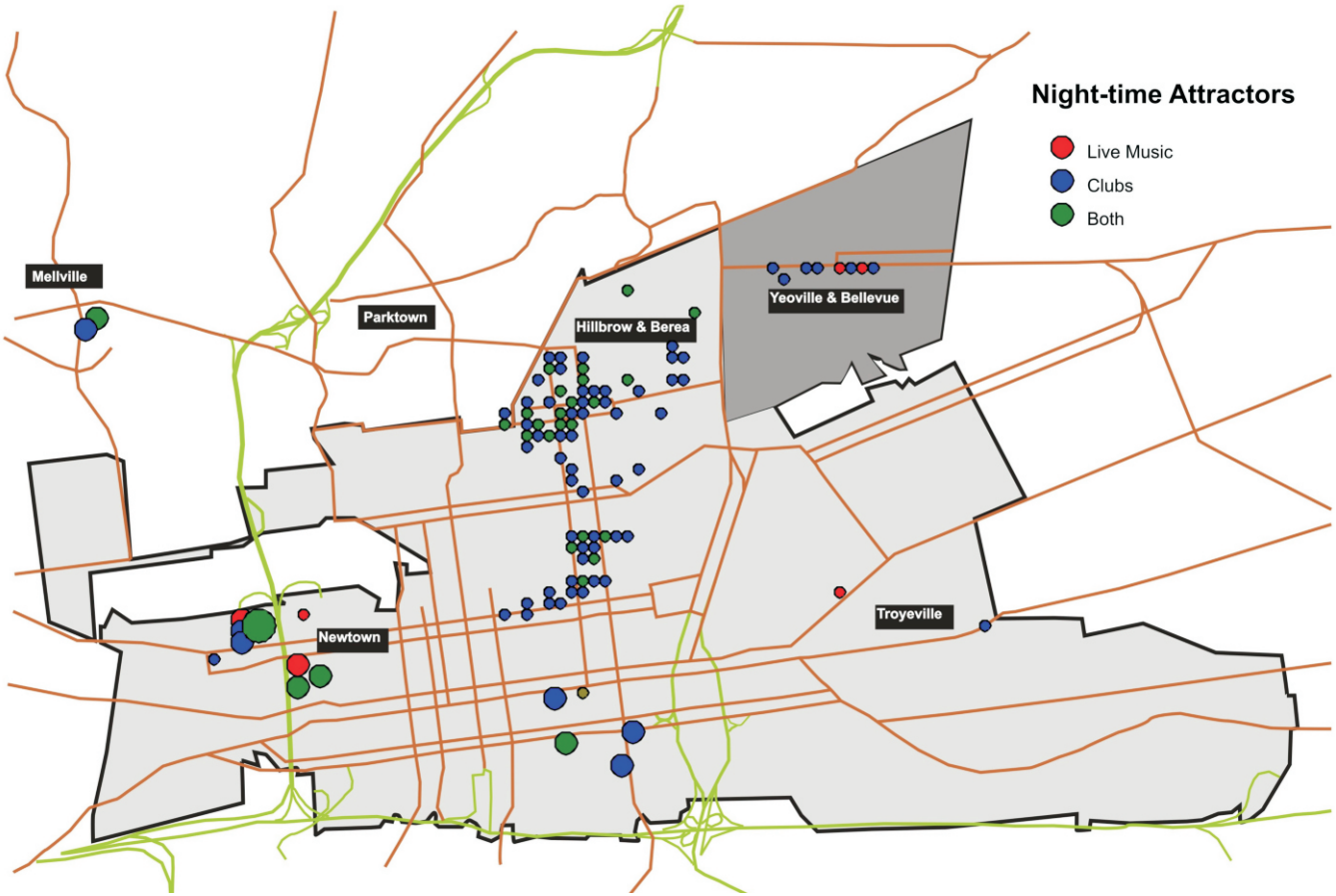
Drawn after Peter Stark (2009)

Evening attractors can be found in other suburbs of Johannesburg but none in Yeoville.



Drawn after Peter Stark (2009)

Night - time attractors can be found in other suburbs of Johannesburg also in Yeoville.



Drawn after Peter Stark (2009)

Project brief

Project description

Brief by Maurice Smither . chair of Yeoville forum.

Establishment of Integration Centre, on Rockey St, Yeoville

Aim of project

- To promote cultural diversity and international tolerance and to fight the scourge of xenophobia

- To provide an information service about migrancy and for migrants

- To provide premises for the location of services useful to migrants

Proposal

- The parking behind time square building is turned into an Integration Centre which

- is a venue dedicated to the eradication of xenophobia and to the empowerment of both the immigrant community and the local community through programmes aimed at raising awareness of the challenges posed by a diverse community such as exists in Yeoville/Bellevue and encouraging a celebration of the pan-African nature of the community

- is a cultural centre where language and other cultural courses can be run and cultural events held

- is a place where information services related to migrancy are available on a regular basis, particularly with respect to applications for asylum, refugee status, residence permits, IDs etc

- hosts an immigration exhibition which helps people to understand and honour the migrants who have come - and continue to come - to our shores, and to embrace rather than fear and reject them.

- once the building has been completed, a Trust be set up to develop a business plan for the property and to provide ongoing oversight over the building and its activities

- Funds to be raised by the Trust to develop the Centre

-The organisations nationally and internationally involved in programmes related to migrancy and integration

(eg, the Migrancy Desk in the office of the Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, the Forced Migration Centre at Wits University, the Human Rights Commission, Home Affairs, the UNHCR, the African Diaspora Forum (ADF) etc) be invited to rent permanent or periodic space in the building from where they can offer their services - this makes sense as their constituency lives in the area