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Basecamp: the design of an inclusive urban tourist precinct in a development world context; Johannesburg case study

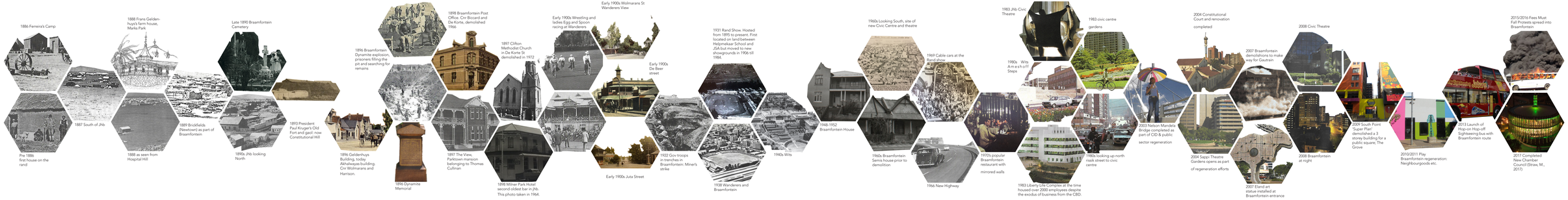
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2018

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/25689

Kluth, Charnelle Else (2018) Basecamp:the design of an inclusive urban tourist precinct in a developing world context :Johannesburg case study, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/25689

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The city blocks in Hillbrow were laid out in half blocks to accompany night soil wagons down a sanitary lane used for the collection of sewage buckets (Leyds, 1964). It is not clear whether Braamfontein's half blocks and alleys that can still be seen today, were used for the same reason.

Johannesburg experienced a few other obstacles to its urban development. In 1895, Cecil John Rhodes conspired with a medical doctor; Leander Starr Jameson, to overthrow the Kruger government and take control of the Transvaal. The plan failed dismally and Jameson was captured and Rhodes stepped down as Prime Minister (Palestrant, 1986). The Jameson Raid caused greater mistrust between the Anglo and Boer populations until finally in 1899 the Anglo-Boer war broke out. The city emptied out slightly and several of the mines closed down or were run for revenue by the Boers (Leyds, 1964). "All the shops were shut. Most of the houses had their windows boarded up. The night was falling swiftly, and its shade intensified the gloom which seemed to hang over the town, on this the last day of its republican existence" p. 78 Winston Churchill (Palestrant, 1986). The British won the war and Johannesburg became populated once more with greater confidence in its future development and a slight economic boom resulting in more permanent building structures and grander homes (some designed by Sir Herbert Baker). The booming period lasted for approximately two decades. In 1922, following the minor global depression of 1921, Johannesburg experienced a miners strike due to the vast retrenchment of white mine workers as black workers were cheaper (Palestrant, 1986). It was during this strike that the Brixton ridge and Fordsburg square were bombed and Braamfontein became home to government trenches. The University of the Witwatersrand opened in 1926 and was located next to the new Rand Show grounds which moved from its previous 1906 site located between Helpmekaar Hoerskool and National School of the Arts (Palestrant, 1986).

EARLY RACIAL SEGREGATION

Racial segregation had always been prominent in Johannesburg's layout (Frescura and Radford, 1982). The city centre comprised of various 'locations' for the various races which were predominantly located to the west of the city such as in Mayfair, Fordsburg, Newtown, Brickfields and the poor white community of Vrededorp. 1937 Saw a large slum clearance and many of the 'non-white' communities were relocated out of the centre to remote townships such as Orlando and Pimville (Palestrant, 1986). The city centre was mainly reserved for the white population and white businesses. This was reinforced by the introduction of the Apartheid system in 1948; "The party undertakes to protect the white character of our towns. The native in our town must be regarded as a visitor with no claim to political rights there. The number of detribalized natives is to be frozen. Movements of native to town must thereafter be controlled by the state" p. 119. National Party's commission on apartheid as appeared in the star 29 march (Palestrant, 1986).

JOHANNESBURG POST WWII

Johannesburg started gaining independence from its mining industry as other secondary and tertiary institutions such as the financial sector, matured especially after WWII. Post WWII also saw the initial bridging of the railway from the Central Business District to Braamfontein due to land pressures and a need for expansion (Frescura and Radford, 1982). The railway had already absorbed the old Wanderers grounds which had moved to Illovo (Leyds, 1964). Braamfontein at that point consisted of mostly lower income residential flats and a few small but underdeveloped industries. The bridging allowed for a process of decentralization and business rights were given to the greater part of the suburb in 1950 by the 1946 Johannesburg Town Planning Scheme (Frescura and Radford, 1982). This proved successful as developers showed interest and by the 1960s Braamfontein solidified into the new subsidiary commercial sector. Braamfontein went from having 923sq m of commercial space in 1950 to 163 113 sqm in 1965 (Beavon, 1998). This consisted predominantly of businesses relocating from the CBD, small retailers located on the ground floors of the now large skyscraper office buildings and a few dispersed hotels and blocks of flats (Beavon, 1998). Braamfontein's expansion was contained by Wits University, as well as by the Braamfontein ridge which allowed Parktown and Auckland Park to provide development relief from growth pressures experienced in the inner city (Frescura and Radford, 1982).

It was during the 1960s that the Civic Centre and new Civic Theatre moved to Braamfontein. A 7.5ha portion of Hospital Hill was earmarked for demolition and a few blocks of houses were destroyed. The civic centre, a 17 storey office building, officially opened in 1972 (Beavon, 1998). Commercial building continued through the 1970s and 1980s and often integrated a few stands or a whole city block into a single building to form a superblock so as to overcome the initial haphazard layout of Braamfontein in Johannesburg's early development stages. Extra building bulk or height was negotiated via providing additional public areas at street level – this can be seen in many developments where sections of a building corner was 'carved' out to be left open to the sky (Beavon, 1998).

INNER CITY DEGRADATION

By 1986 Influx controls on the movement and migration of black populations were lifted and the inner city experienced an accelerated population increase specifically in Hillbrow, adjacent to Braamfontein (Bremner, 2000). Unfortunately landlords capitalized on the 'illegal' status of black tenants and increased rents accompanied with reducing building maintenance fueling the 'white flight' of white communities. The inner city soon commenced with a process of decline and degradation which spurred racial stereotypes and prejudices (Bremner, 2000). Johannesburg experienced yet another process of decentralization to distant suburbs such as Sandton, Parktown, Randburg and Rosebank and the inner city saw an exodus of main institutions with only a handful such as Liberty remaining (Frescura and Radford, 1982).

PROCESS OF REGENERATION

With a rapidly declining reputation of widespread crime and grime, Johannesburg City Council embarked on a few selected strategies to reinvent the inner city during the 1990s (Bremner, 2000). Urban Development Zones were implemented and meant tax incentives for institutions located within the inner city. Braamfontein fell within its borders and influenced regeneration efforts greatly (Garner, 2011). Key role players in the regeneration of Braamfontein were Sappi, Liberty and later South Point, Aengus Properties and Play Braamfontein. The Braamfontein Improvement District (BID) was formed in the early 2000 by a range of institutions located in the area and in conjunction with the Johannesburg Development Agency invested in the regeneration of the neighbourhood; "Everyone was keen except SAB. Wits was enthusiastic but its bureaucratic structures prevented it from participating in a meaningful way' – Andre Oberholzer (Group head: Corporate Affairs at Sappi) p. 141. (Garner, 2011).

Some institutions such as Transnet and Dunwell were not interested in forming part of the BID and thus the BID does not extend to the boundaries of the entire Braamfontein. The new ballet theatre and theatre gardens were developed by Sappi and the JDA and underground parking lots were constructed to counteract the deficiency that contributed to the inner city's deterioration. The Nelson Mandela Bridge was completed in 2003. The period between 2001 and 2008 realised an injection of R55.7m Public Investment and R3 968b Private investment into public upgrades (Garner, 2011).

South Point and Aengus Properties bought up buildings and converted them into student accommodation to respond to the niche created by the close proximity of Braamfontein to the University. By 2011 South Point was housing over 4000 students and Aengus Properties were housing 1800 students (Garner, 2011). As residents in the area increased so did business and Braamfontein had an influx of investment. Play Braamfontein experimented with regeneration efforts in 2011 to attract mainstream retailers and together with South Point, changed the faces of buildings to become more porous, extroverted and diverse with introductions of boutique shops, galleries and coffee shops etc. This was a direct response to the student and young professional populations now residing in the suburb; "One needs life, flow and energy in a city and this is what students have in abundance" – Rob Lowden p. 90 There was an interest in shaping a walkable and cohesive urban environment and truly investing in the social needs of the Braamfontein community. The Grove, which is a public square opposite the South Point head office, was created by demolishing a three storey building as part of the Braamfontein South Point Super Plan by Silvio Rech and Lesley Carstens commissioned in 2009 (Garner, 2011). This sent a message throughout the neighbourhood that it is necessary to cater to the physical as well as social needs of the community; "Even though this does not make sense if only measured against short term cost, it is a huge investment in Braamfontein. These kinds of spaces underpin the value of Braamfontein and it enhances the value of the surrounding properties" p. 91 Lowden. Today, South Point owns close to 25 buildings with a diverse range of land uses (Garner, 2011).

Braamfontein has undergone extensive regeneration efforts, the most recent being the Council Chambers completed in July with more interventions probable in the near future. Threats to investment however, have been the recent spout of student protests over exorbitant university fees which have taken to the streets of Braamfontein and resulted in the damaging of public and private property in the vicinity.