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Jarateng: Making social-ends meet by embracing public living

Bogatsu, Katlego

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4.
SITE ANALYSIS



Fig. 88

(https://www.maps.google.co.za/maps)

The site I have chosen is the Eyethu Cinema which is located in Mofolo Central in Soweto. The Eyethu cinema is an old cinema which functioned as a black cinema during the apartheid era. The Eyethu cinema has not been used for nearly twenty years. At around the late nineties the cinema closed its doors. The Cinema lost its popularity when the city became integrated and black people were allowed to watch movies in the city.

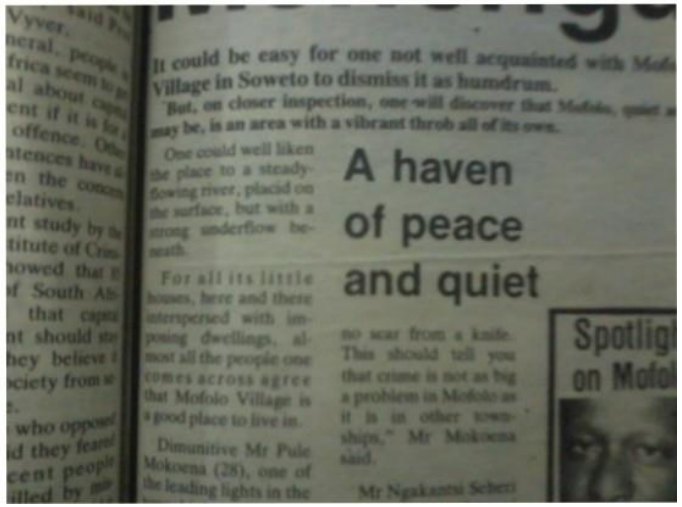
Because of the Eyethu cinema, the area of Mofolo became the central cultural area which saw people from other townships areas of Soweto congregating there. I chose this site because of its attachment to cinema which is one of my passions. In addition to this I saw the potential of the site in terms of my design intervention to revive the building and to bring the cinema going culture back to Mofolo central. The site is also very central and accessible and therefore has great potential of becoming a public shared space.






I found the site to be ideal because it addresses the need to develop these kinds of historic or heritage sites in South Africa. The site is surrounded by residential and if developed will boost the image of the surrounding houses. The site also presents a great opportunity for commercial viability in the area. The site has the potential to uplift the community and improve the surrounding environment. My design is all about public life of a community and the site is ideal as a meeting place for people.

Pieces of the history of Mofolo and the Eyethu cinema from the newspaper archives of the Johannesburg library.













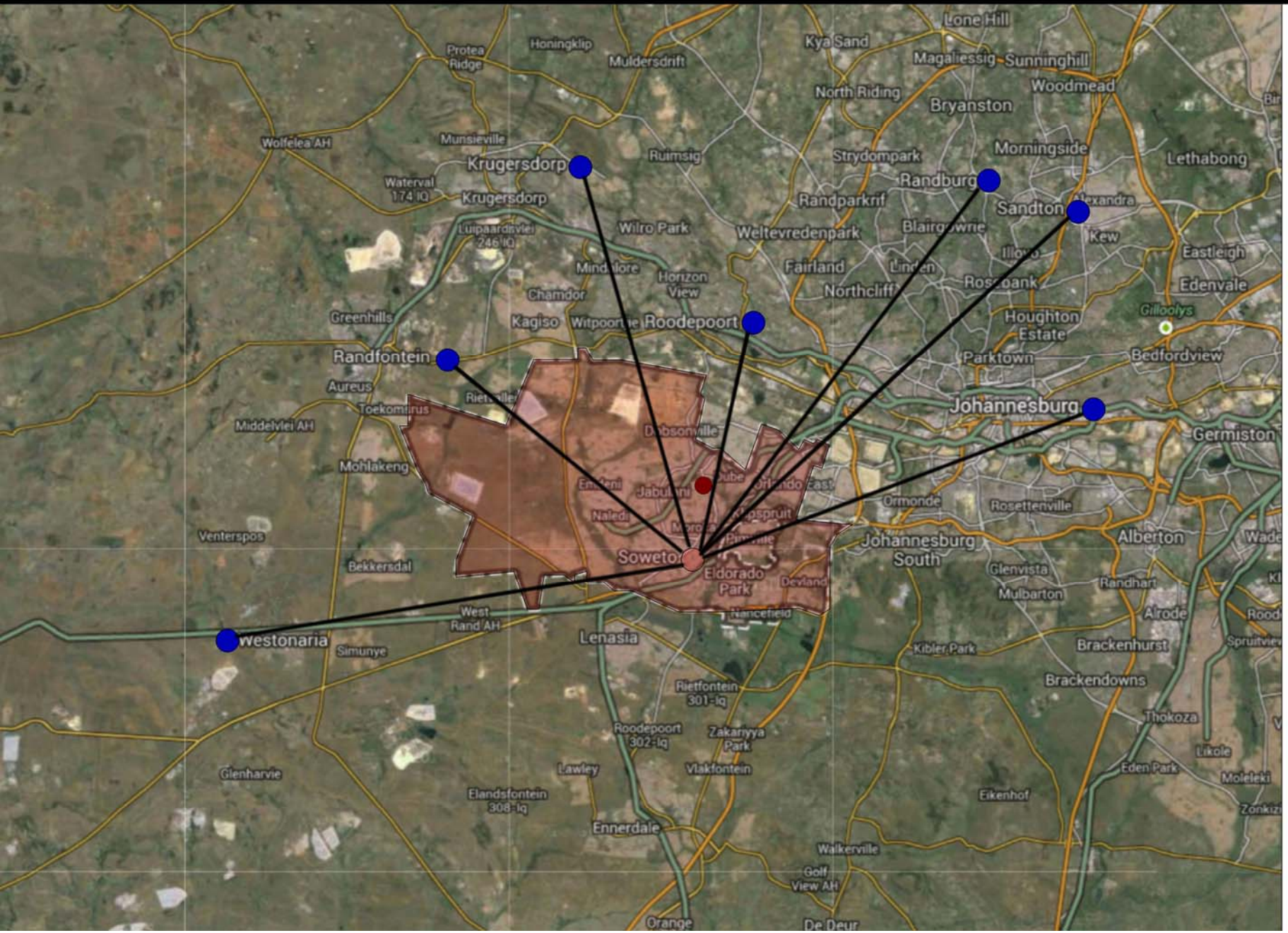




(Taken from a South African newspaper article of 1982- source newspaper publication unknown- from the archives of the Johannesburg library. Snap shots taken by author)

Site Analysis

Locality map

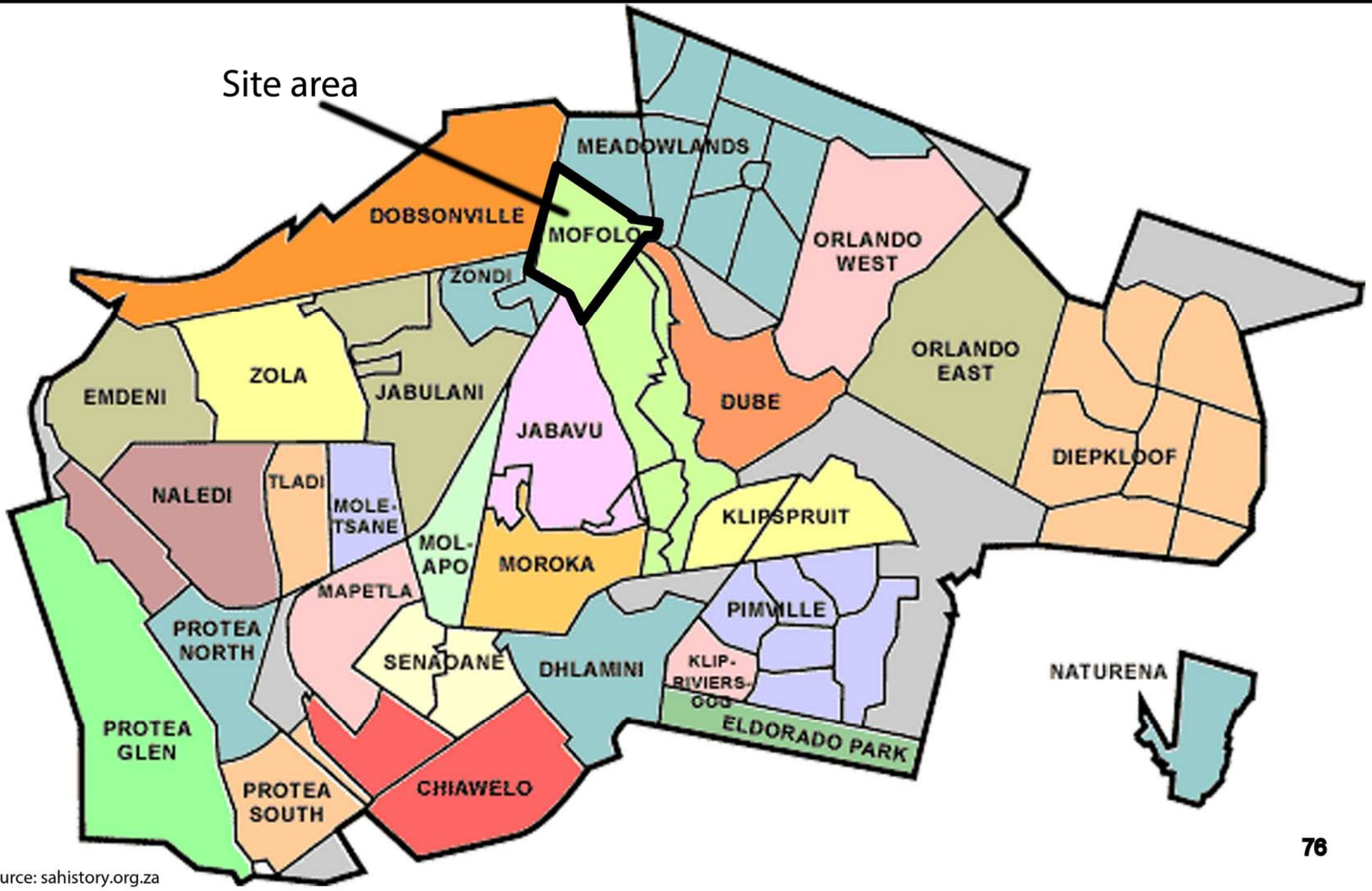


KEY

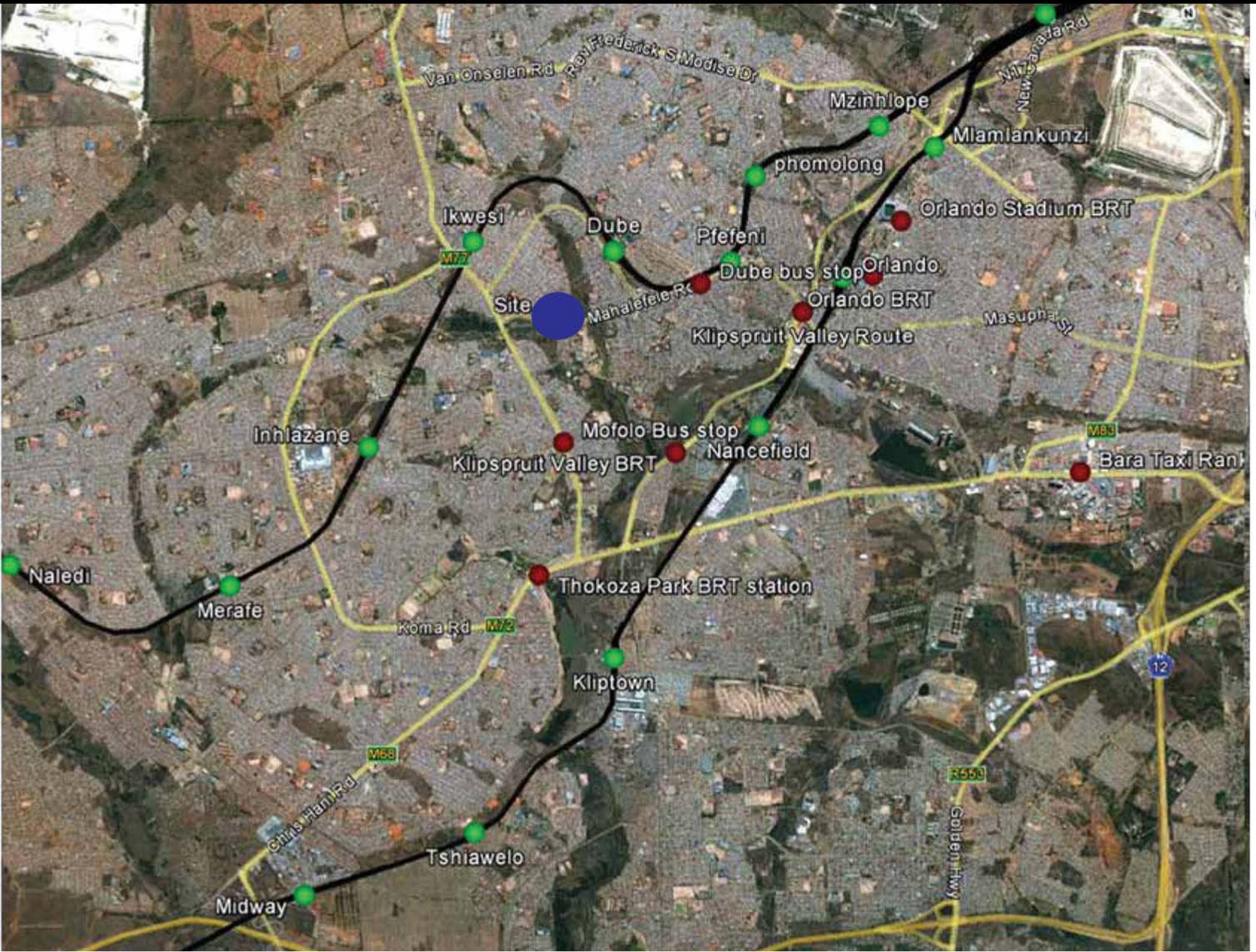
- Site
- Soweto
- Surrounding cities

Site Analysis

Locality (map of Soweto)



Source: sahistory.org.za

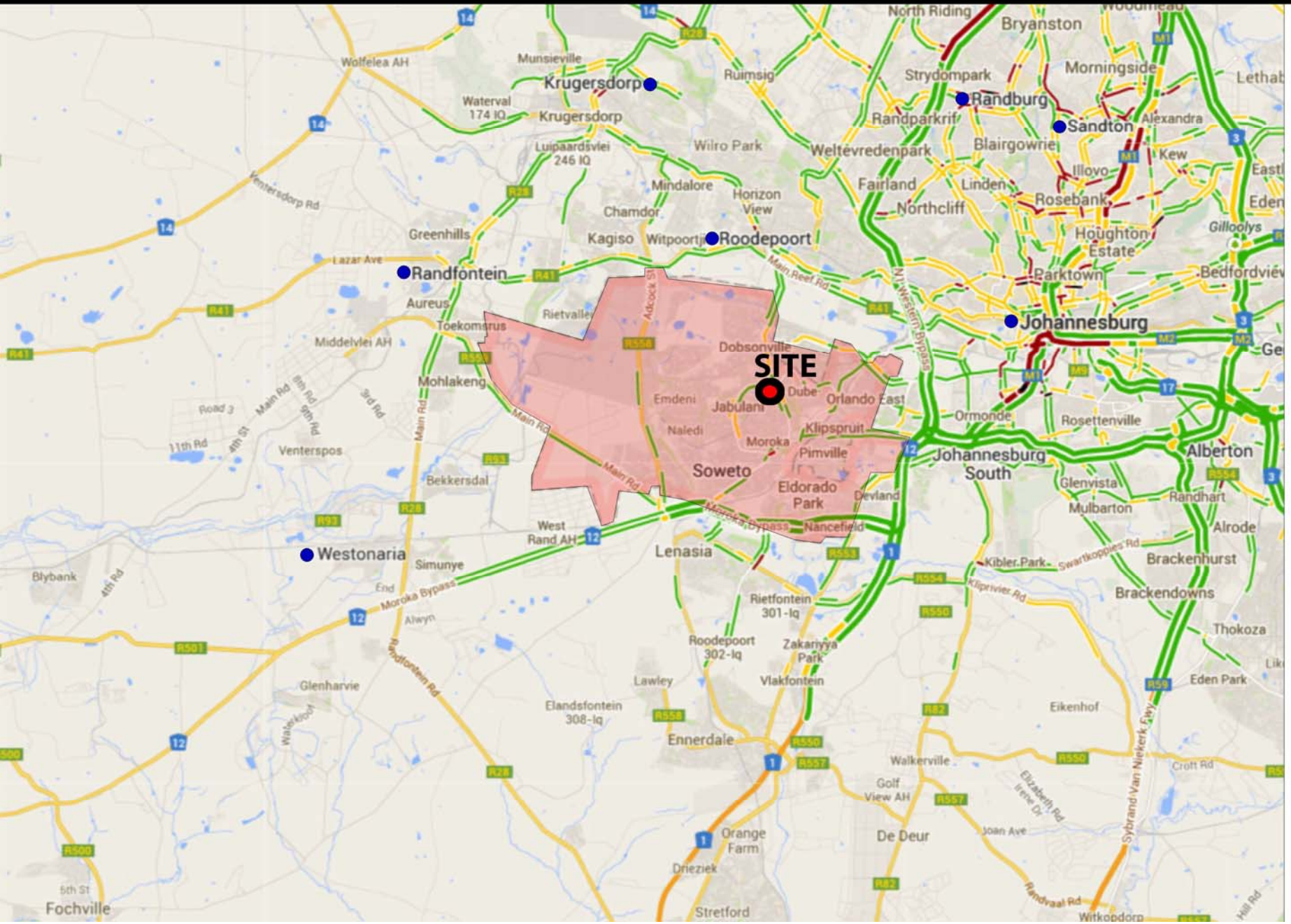


Key

- Site
- BRT bus stops and routes
- Railway transit stations
- Railway
- Main roads

Site Analysis

Traffic flow patterns



Site Analysis

Transit routes



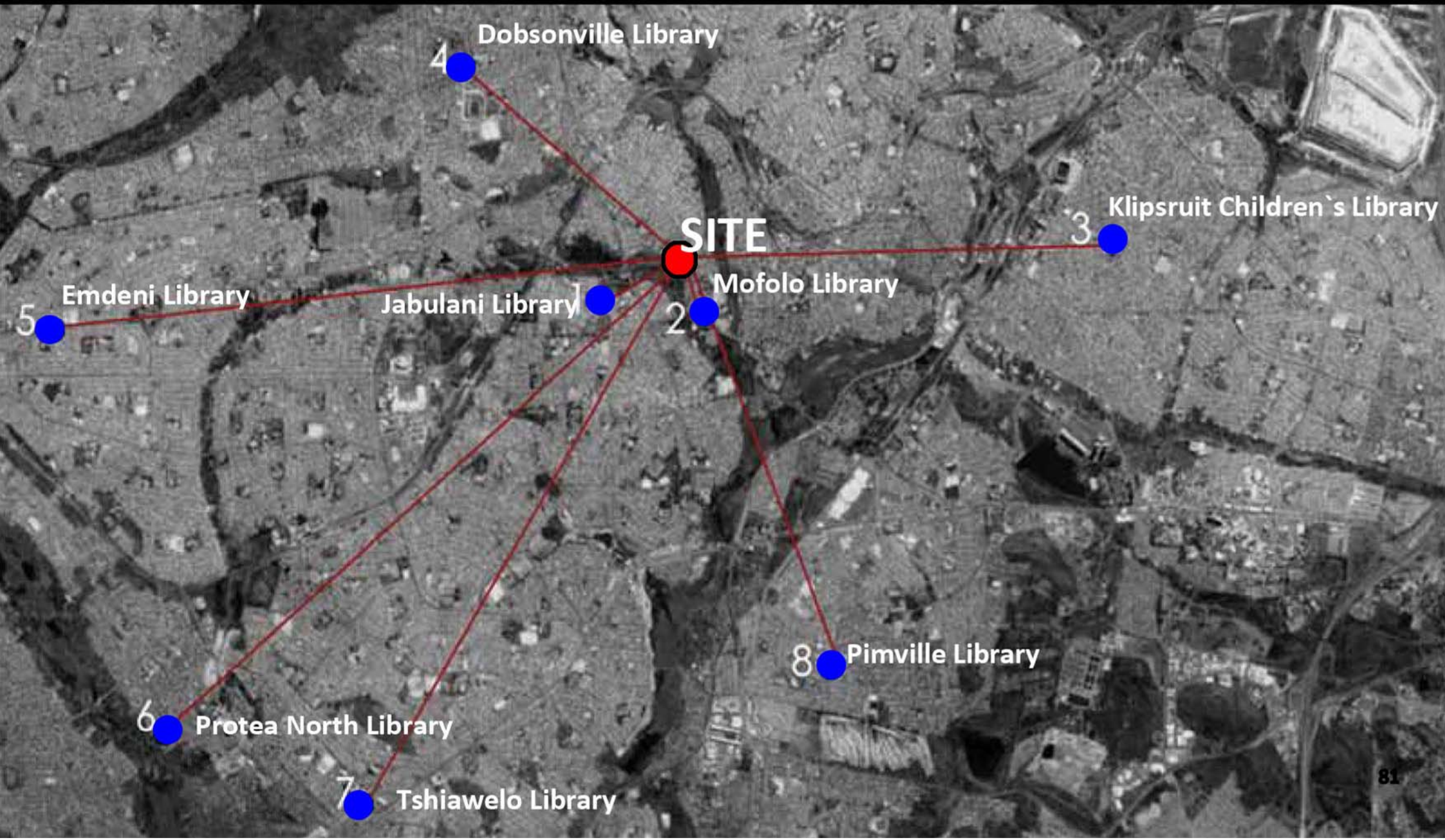
Site Analysis

Historical Sites and Landmarks



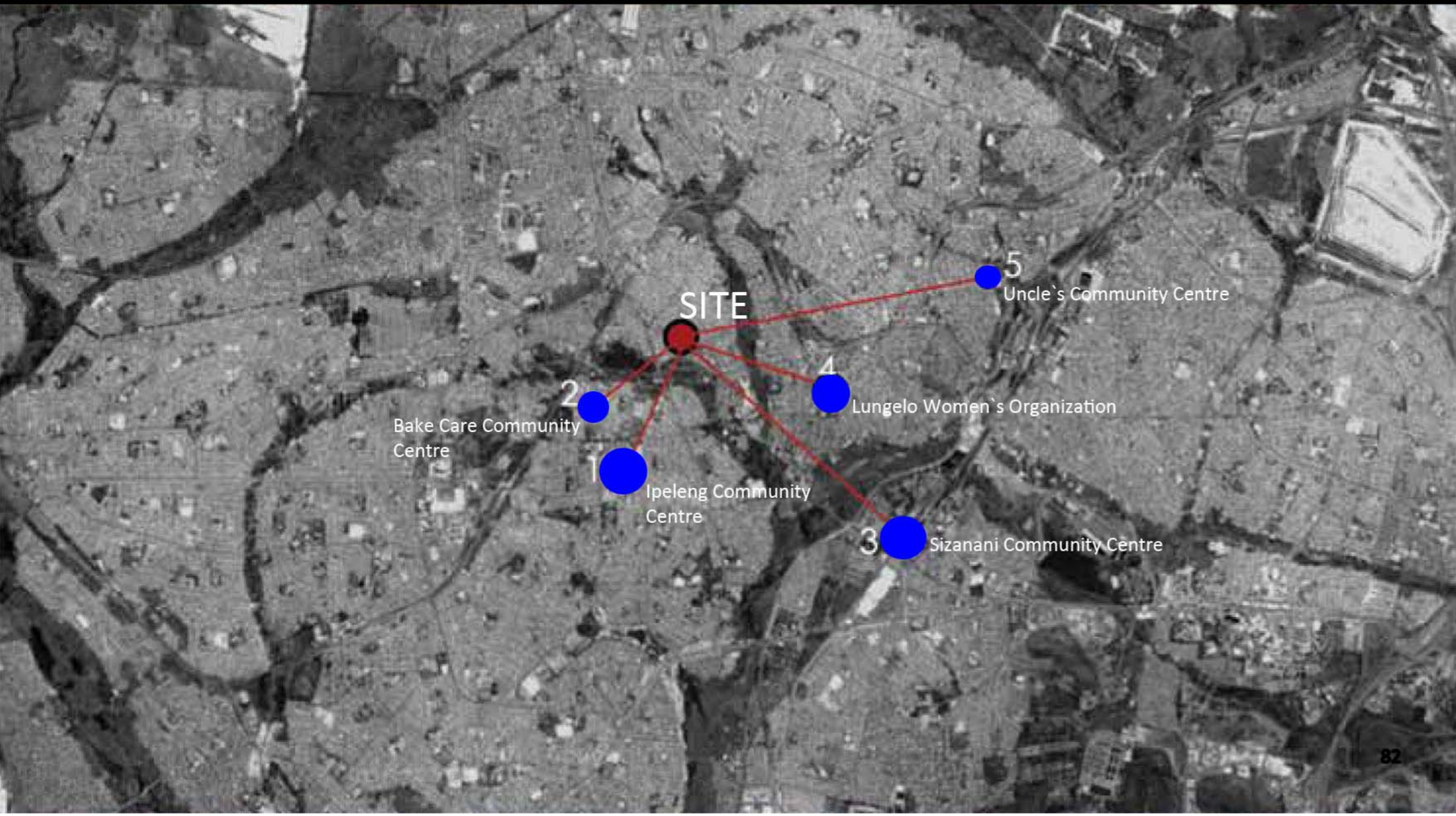
Site Analysis

Public Institutions



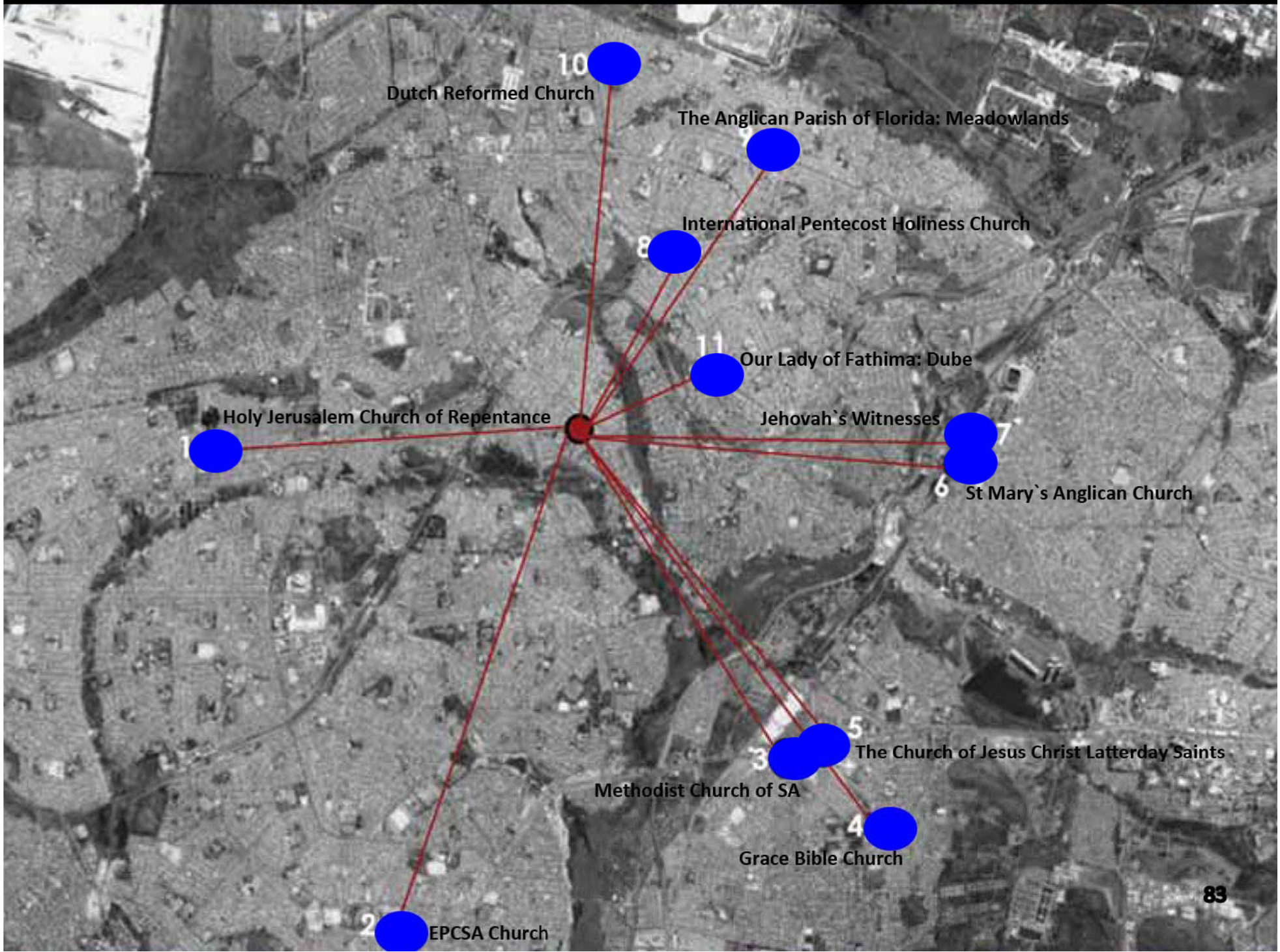
Site Analysis

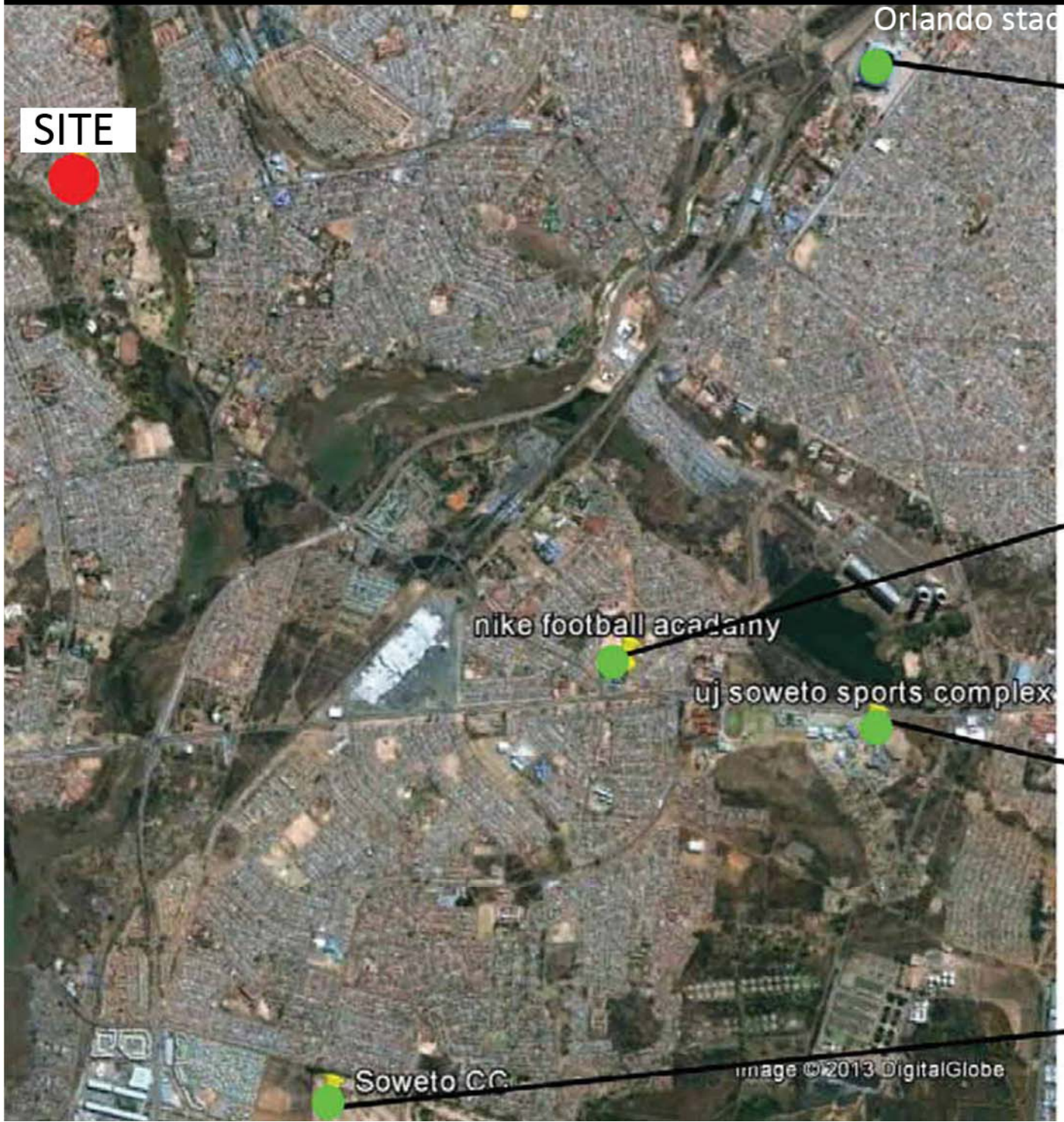
Public institutions. (community centres)



Site Analysis

Religious institutions






Orlando stadium







Site Analysis

Existing structures and land use



Site Analysis

Immediate surrounding Green spaces



Site Analysis

Timeline (Active functions around site between 12pm - 4pm)



Site Analysis

Timeline (Active functions around site between 4pm - 6pm)



Site Analysis

Timeline (Active functions around site on the weekend)



Site Analysis



Active and inactive buildings on site

Inactive

Active

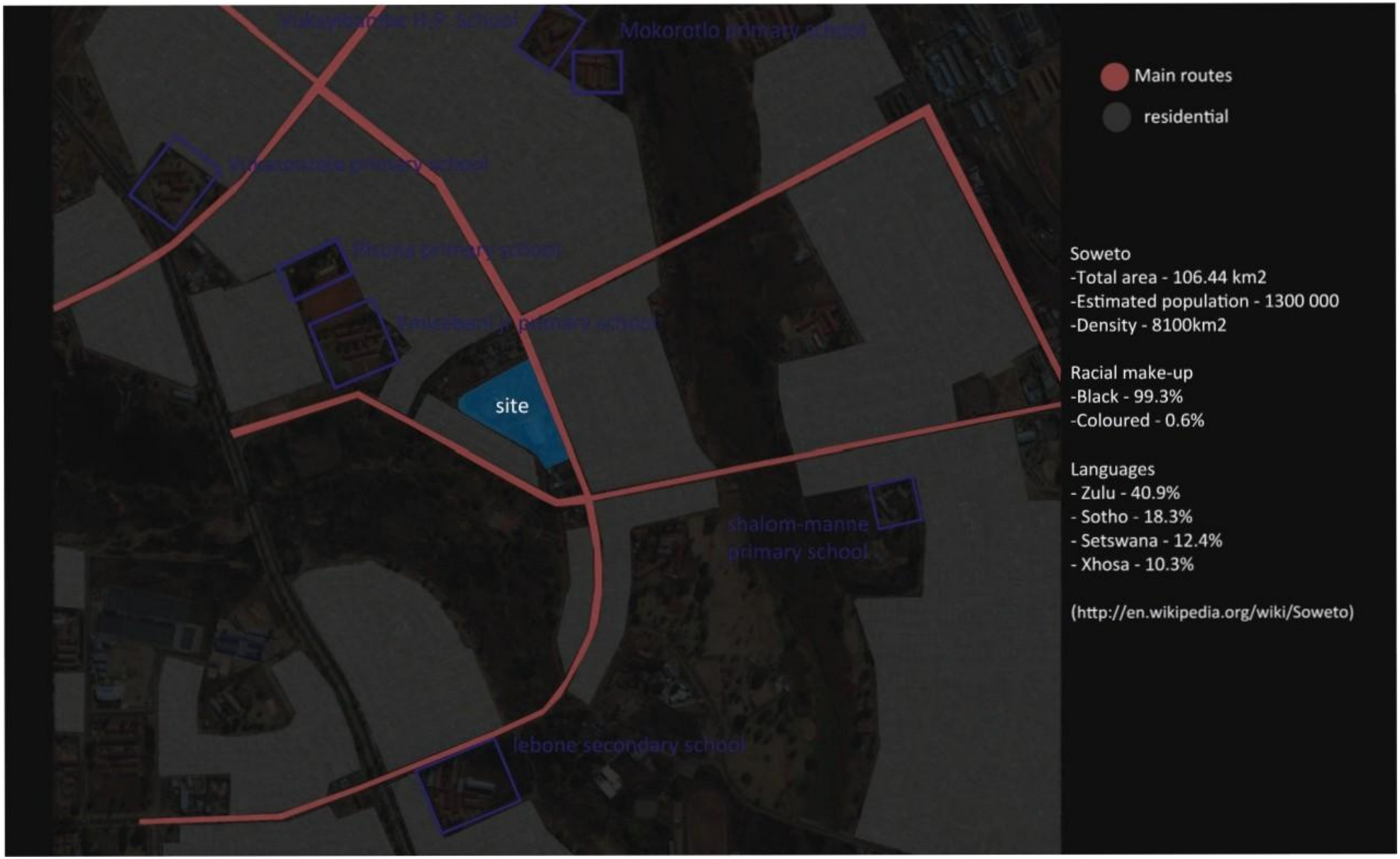


Pedestrian movement

Footpaths

Sidewalk

Residential



Surrounding streets



Commercial use




Spa and shisanyama (braai place)


Spaza shop


Old filling station
into a shisanyama


Shabeen and creche

SURROUNDING OPEN SPACES AND PARKS





Mfolo cultural bowl



Mfolo park



Play ground



PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Open spaces link neighbourhoods. these open spaces also divide neighbourhoods and they are used to cross from one neighbourhood to the other.

The red thin lines indicate foot-paths as a result of people using open spaces as crossing points to other areas. In the township the word `dublap` is used to describe this action which means shortcut.

For a long time little pockets of open spaces were used as dump-ing sites and some were used as playgrounds for kids.
Some of these pockets of open spaces doubled up as soccer pitches where local teams would play.


Zola Eco Park


Dorothy Nyembe Park


Thokoza Park


Mfolo Park


Orlando West Regional Park


CULTURAL SITES AND LANDMARKS
TO HONOUR
Hector Pieterson Musem
Credo Mutwa Cultural Village
Vilakazi street
Soweto theatre
Maponya Mall
Power Park
Nike football academy
UJ Campus
Orlando stadium

THE EYETHU CINEMA



(author`s own)

The Eyethu cinema

There is a mystery behind the Eyethu Cinema in Mfolo Central in Soweto. The mystery behind this cinema is what are its current use and what happened to it for it to be left abandoned and no longer in use. The Eyethu cinema seems to have a hidden history, hidden in the memories of those who experienced the cinema in its former glory days. It seems that not much is documented on this cinema which was the center of cultural entertainment for the inhabitants of Soweto. Those people who experienced the cinema when it was in full operation talk about it with a great sense of nostalgia and excitement, and even sadness as they can only wonder why the cinema died.

The Eyethu Cinema stopped operating in 1996. The cinema lost its popularity when the black population - of which the majority came from Soweto - were allowed to watch film at cinemas in the city of Johannesburg. The idea of watching films in the city was seen as more prestigious than watching a film in the township. The Cinema has not been in operation for almost twenty years and yet it still stands as it had last been used, almost untouched accept for broken windows and graffiti on its exterior facades.

The cinema sits central surrounded by residential houses. It is a building with a massive scale and hard architecture. The concrete and brick face are dominant. It is clear from its appearance that it was a very significant building. The architecture speaks of modernity and was contemporary for its time. The cinema stands at about three storeys in height. It has a dark brown face brick appearance which can be described as an apartheid style aesthetic. The front face of the building has a large plastered block form sitting above the entrance which is the foyer space of the gallery and the control room.



(author`s own)



(author`s own)

The building along with all its elements is still intact. The interior is untouched and everything is as it was when it was last used. The foyer consists of the ticket booth and ablutions. There are also stairs which lead up to the gallery space. The main hall still has all its furniture which is all intact. Rows of steel framed chairs sit on a floor that slopes towards the stage. The space in the main hall is dark with the only source of natural light coming in from the slivers of the wooden doors. The stage is large enough for musical performance, theatre and the area high enough for a large screen. One can almost image what once was, what once happened and the atmosphere in the cinema of the past. One can also imagine the sounds of people cheering, the anticipation in the foyer and a large crowd of people gathered outside by the front entrance.



Foyer space



(author`s own)



Cinema auditorium *(author`s own)*



Gallery space *(author`s own)*

The story of Eyethu begins with a man called Ephraim Tshabalala. Tshabalala was a prominent business man in Soweto who was reputed to be Soweto`s only millionaire. He was also the mayor around the early 1960`s. It was around that time that he used his power and money to build the Eyethu cinema. The word 'Eyethu' means 'ours' or 'our own'. To the residence of Soweto this building was the first of its kind to be built in Soweto, a building that symbolized the pride of Sowetans. Finally Soweto had a building of its own of this kind which they can call their own - eyethu.



The man responsible for building the Eyethu cinema Mr Tshiabalala on Stage when the Cinema was fully operational (https://www.cargocollective.com)

According to people who had the privilege of having experienced the cinema when it was fully operational, this cinema was the central social meeting place for the residents of Soweto. People would travel from Dube, Dobsonville, Pimville, Diepkloof etc.- some by foot- to go and watch a film at the Eyethu cinema in Mofolo. The cinema was most frequented on the weekends starting from Friday afternoon through to Sunday evening. During the week the cinema would screen movies in the evening. The Eyethu cinema was also the place to be where big musical names among black people would perform. Big names like Sipho "Hotstix" Mabuse would perform to thousands. Some international acts such as Gospel legend Andrew Crouch would also perform there. Even theatre performances would be held. In addition choir performances would be

held from school level upwards. It was a multi-purpose venue which catered for the social needs of the residents of Soweto. The cinema was also a venue used to hold funeral services of prominent people among the black people of Soweto. In an old newspaper article, the Eyethu cinema was described as being popular with the youth of that time.

According to one source, Eyethu was not the first cinema house to be built in Soweto, but it was the biggest and most successful of all the cinemas in Soweto. When I asked this particular source if musical performances would be held outside he expressed that every activity relating to the building happened inside because firstly there was no decent 'jarata' or yard to hold performances outside and secondly Sowetans wanted to feel a certain level of prestige and importance, and they wanted to have the same experience as the white South Africans of enjoying film, music and theatre in a formal environment, something they had been deprived of.

There was a desperate need for cinemas in the townships but the apartheid government still controlled what would be appropriate to screen in the black cinemas. They had to be careful not to provoke the black people of Soweto in the films that they were screening and at the same time they had to make sure that they promote apartheid and make it to be an acceptable thing among the black Sowetans. Movies that were popular were the western cowboy movies and kung-Fu movies. The subject and story lines of these movies were popular with the black movie goers because these movies had a hero who would triumph at the end. So it talked more of hope than revenge or vengeance - as far as the apartheid government was concerned.

Before any cinema was ever built in Soweto, people used to gather at a certain house which had a television to watch their favorite shows or a soccer match. At times the owner of that house would charge a certain fee. Niq Mhlongo states that for him what stands out in Soweto is the life that happens on a social level (2010:11). "Watching movies was one of the most exiting social activities in Soweto. People used to watch predominantly Chinese movies and this happened mostly on Saturdays. The movies were screened during the day and at night" (Mhlongo, 2010:11).

"In my street, the few families that were considered `rich` were the ones that owned a television set. There were only two houses out of about twenty that had a TV set. I used to pay ten cents to watch the A team TV series starring Mr T at the Mthombeni family house at the corner of our street" (Mhlongo, 2010:11).



(author`s own)



Surrounding residential *(author`s own)*



Restaurant which sits behind the cinema *(author`s own)*



Spa and restaurant *(author`s own)*



Restaurant seating area *(author`s own)*



(author`s own)