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Retrofit repair rethink : redevelopment of the typological suburban retail node

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Abstract:

Retrofit Repair Rethink: Redevelopment of the Typological Suburban Retail Node

In the context of ever increasing sprawl and our suburban growth, a new polycentric urbanism is evolving as our future cities. Our dependency on vehicular transport and the search for alternative energy sources exacerbates these phenomena and hampers growth towards sustainable urban environments.

The relevance between retail design and the associated negative effect this building typology has on urbanism initiates the conversation on localised living. These privatised developments are usually located in the peripheral city areas but over time become more central at the neighbourhood scale. Retail, as a building typology, relies on public interface as an inherent characteristic. These privatised and internalised spaces have an urban character that need to be explored and even exploited. Sustainability strategies to live locally and be connected to public transportation can change how these building typologies manifest.

The aim of the research is to identify possible scenarios in our local context for the redevelopment of suburban nodes. The study explores retrofitting the archetypical retail typology at an architectural and urban scale. Suburban repair is needed at neighbourhood level to increase density and mix of uses. The drive towards complexity and walkability is proposed.

Local contextual influences and opportunities in public transport systems, as well as the informal economy, could deviate from the norm and allow for uncharted opportunities. Our Apartheid legacy, with issues regarding connectivity and spatial divide, will challenge the proposed interventions.

Nodal redevelopment of our polycentric city is proposed as a first point of departure. Infill development and the strategic densification of the linkages and corridors between these nodes become part of the wider city densification strategies. The introduction of the BRT and Transport Orientated Developments, aim at creating an interconnected mobility network.

The integration of informality and the micro economy of our cities have the opportunity to alter the traditional approaches to city building. The opportunities that the traditional retail nodes hold for retrofitting are endless. The repair of our low density sprawl environment becomes paramount in order to address the deficiencies that exist. We need to rethink how we approach these challenges in order to resolve the current urban crises and economic disparity for the creation of a democratic urban environment.