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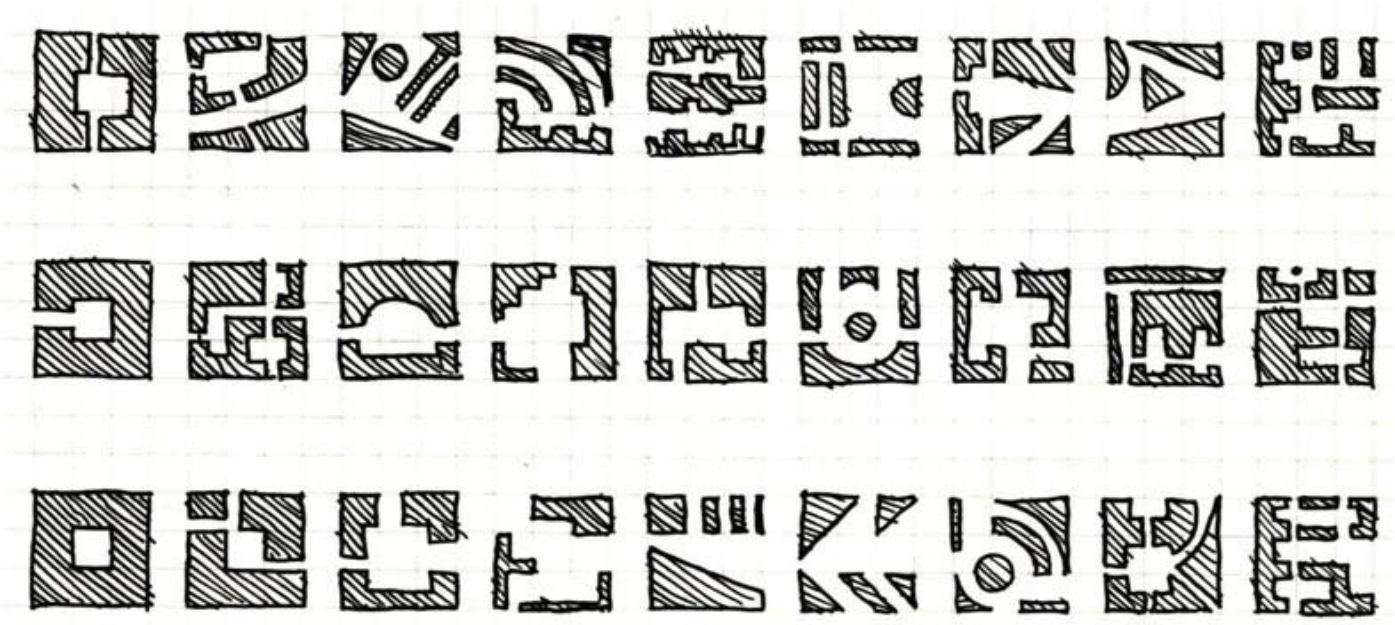
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URBAN PLACE MAKING IN MAPUTO:

An investigation towards a contextually appropriate urban design approach

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Christopher Alexander - A Pattern Language

Research Report

Urban place making in Maputo:
An investigation towards a contextually appropriate urban design approach

By

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Urban Design

Johannesburg 2017

Supervisor:

Prof Paul Jenkins

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted to the degree of Master of Urban Design the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other University.

(Signature of candidate)

____ day of _____ 2017.

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I have been blessed, and look forward to new adventures and changing lives as urban designer.

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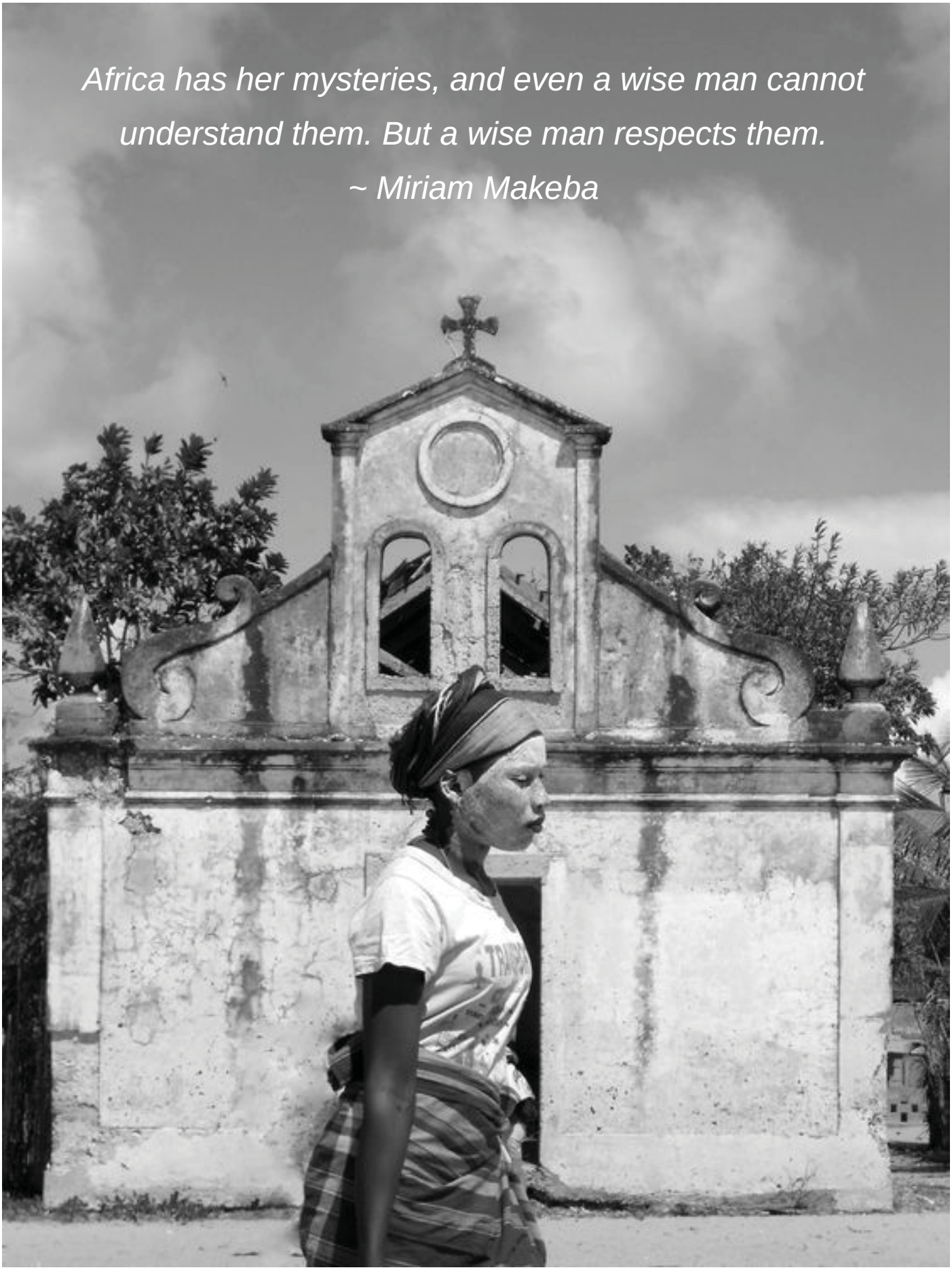
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CHAPTER 01: INTRODUCTION




Africa has her mysteries, and even a wise man cannot understand them. But a wise man respects them.
~ Miriam Makeba

1. PROJECT BRIEF - INTRODUCTION

The research project is located within the city of Maputo, Mozambique as a case study, but aimed to provide insights into the contextual difficulties and realities of designing for and working within a developing African, and more specifically Sub-Saharan African context . The approach is conservative and aims to be realistically implementable while maintaining a bigger vision of what might be possible. It is foreseen that these type of projects will become the norm as urban development in Africa is rapidly growing and the state's capacity to keep up with development and infrastructure provision will likely remain limited.

The research will be investigating place making through contextually appropriate urban design approaches, with a strong focus on appropriation within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. The conclusion will be a desk-based urban design proposal for the Maputo Bullring site.

1.1. THE ROLE OF THE URBAN DESIGNER

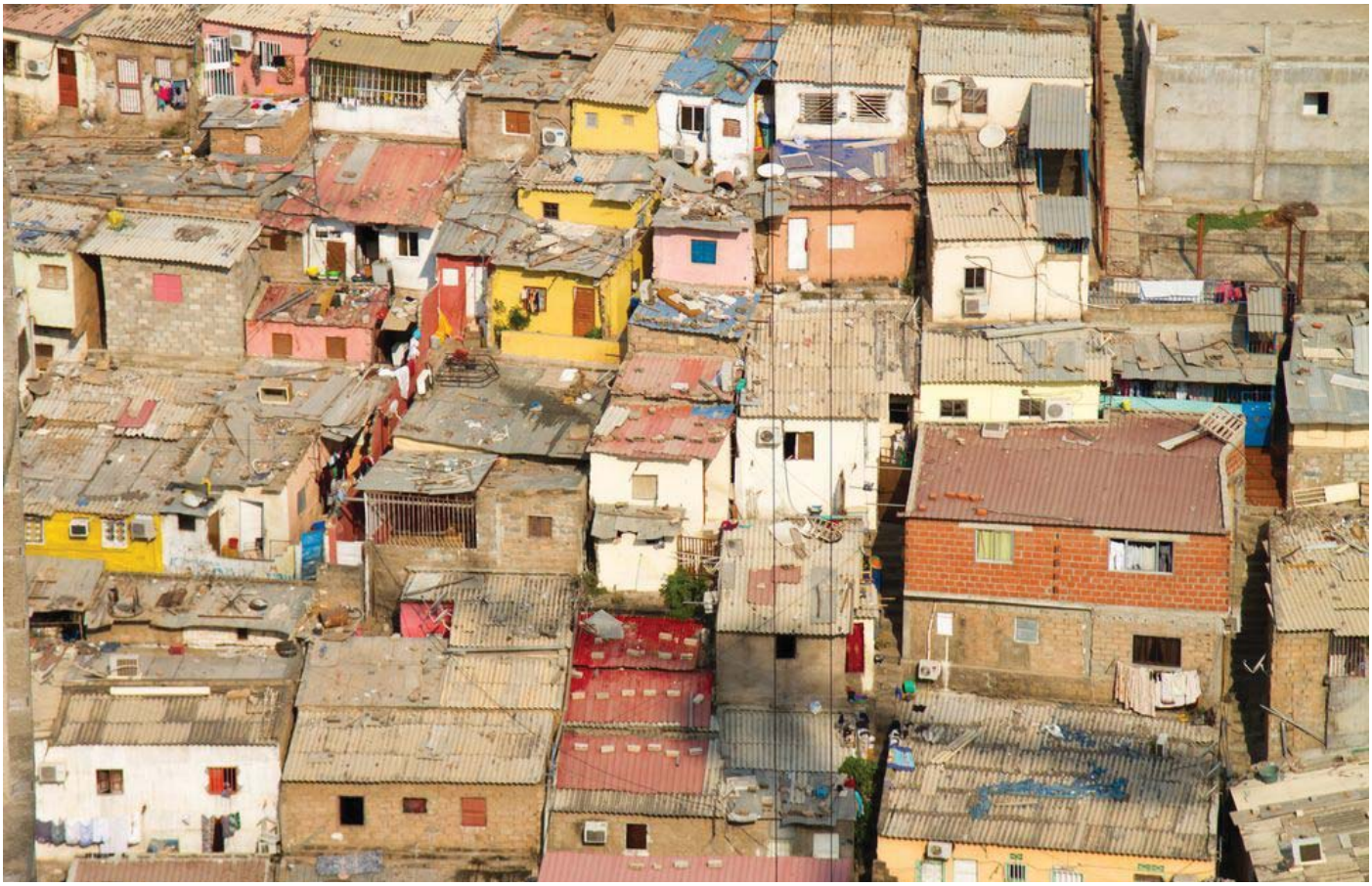
It is important to consider and understand the input of both those who are willing to invest in the public and private sector as well as those who are affected by the spatial development of the city, enable development and create opportunities. Including all the various stakeholders (young and old, rich and poor, male and female) in order to establish a sustainable integrated community.

One of the key questions as an urban designer would be to ask oneself why. Why is urban design necessary, and what is the role of the architect and urban designer if people can organise themselves?

The urban designer, however, has the role[1] to understand the bigger picture, to see a site within the greater context and the role that it can and should play to contribute to the system of the city as a whole.

1 The role of the urban designer is a research topic on its own and was investigated separately. More information is available in Annexure A.

Left: Photograph by Vikram Rastogi (National Geographic - 'Your Shot')



1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

'(T)he production of urban space...entails much more than just planning the material space of the city; it involves producing and reproducing all aspects of urban life'
(Purcell; 2002: 102)

African cities are rapidly developing, and current planning[2] approaches are often based on theory derived from the global North, as opposed to the developing cities of the South (Mabin, 2013; Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004.). These are often limited in relevance when planning and policy-making[3] decisions have to be made in a much more diverse and dynamic urban environment, of the developing South.

This traditional master planning approach,derived from (Northern) 'modern' urban planning models, are repeatedly imposed onto the African planning context. These approaches also often ignore the fact that the majority of growth in African cities occurs on the urban periphery and informal settlements.

In densely populated areas with limited economic resources, public open spaces are increasingly important, yet in danger of disappearing when there is no clear vision for its future or ownership. The question then becomes, who decides what this future should be?

If this is an urban designer's responsibility, urban designer are often not originally from the context, city or even country which they are appointed to design for, leading to the question of how one decides on what the 'appropriate' approach for an unfamiliar context and user is, and could be.

2 The notion of using the word 'planning' is highly debated among scholars in the field of urban design. The term is used in this document to represent the urban design process which includes aspects of architecture, reference to town planning concepts and a general understanding of the larger context within which the design interventions are proposed.

3 The research report is for a Masters in Urban Design - planning and policy making decisions will be referred to but will not be elaborated on or evaluated - the focus of the research will be on the urban design component and possible interventions.

Above: Photo by Shiri Paamony Eshel (National Geographic, Yourshot)

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the problem statement above, the following main research question has been identified and is discussed as part of the literature review:

What is an appropriate urban design approach in the spatial analysis of (often contested space in) Sub-Saharan African peri-urban areas?

The research approach will further include the following sub-questions:

- What are potentially appropriate urban design approaches?
- How can the concept of appropriation be unpacked?

1.4. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this Research Report and design proposal is to develop a mitigating and appropriate urban design approach reinforced by the principle of appropriation within the context of a developing African city and to enable optimal appropriation and potential for users and stakeholders, through minimal interventions and infrastructure.

Below: Photo by John Wessels (National Geographic, Yourshot)

1.5. APPROACH

As African cities often develop out of immediate need, the urban environment might seem haphazard, without a clear sense of identity and with a lack of structured public urban space to an outsider. The opposite is, however, true, and these spaces develop as places over time by those who use them. The role of the urban designer, however, is to envision and create a bigger picture of the current and future potential of the space. A place where livelihoods can prosper and the various stakeholders can each benefit from the place according to their needs and priorities[4].

The Research Report will focus on appropriation[5] as design informant to derive a potential appropriate urban design approach within the specific context of a developing African city. A theoretical framework will support the context analysis in providing a basis for designing a development framework. The proposal will investigate appropriate design alternatives to enhance and improve the daily urban life of the citizens through contextually appropriate urban design interventions and strategies in the form of a precinct plan and detailed design interventions on a block level.

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4 These priorities and needs differ for each stakeholder depending on the overarching goal, which ranges between basic human needs to self-fulfillment. Urban design should, however, provide opportunities for the broad spectrum of users and stakeholders.

5 In the context of this investigation, appropriation refers to the use of space as place.



1.6. METHODS AND APPROACH

The research methodology will be a qualitative investigation using the site in Maputo as a case study to explore appropriate planning approaches in an African context, specifically peri-urban areas in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Part of this approach to urban design will be to test the methodology and approach to working in an (often unfamiliar) African context with limited time, resources and access to in-depth knowledge. The desktop research (peer reviewed articles combined with social media, blogs, and travel information) as well as a site visit will form the basis for the context analysis.

The Research Report will approach the site in Maputo as a case study of an African City with the proposed outcome of a precinct plan which will include street sections, development guidelines and a precinct plan for the public domain and future development as well as detailed design interventions on a block level. The research approach will consequently be including the investigation of the following:

- A desktop study via the internet, books, published, peer-reviewed and academic articles relating to the background and context information on life in Maputo, Mozambique. A site visit to experience the immediate context of the site in Maputo and include photographic documentation
- Visual information such as photographs (acquired through the site visit) to be familiarised with the environment and identify the key areas for strategic planning interventions as well as a sense of the existing spatial and environmental conditions. The documentation of the urban experience of the site (writing, photographing and drawings) through observation during a site visit. The area and everyday life observed during the site visit (the observation is limited to observing without participating due to time constraints).
- A literature review will form part of the research methods to ensure a deeper understanding of the theoretical context within which urban design and planning decisions are informed both from the global North as well as the global South. The key theories which will form part of this review includes literature on contextually appropriate planning and urban design approaches; the re-evaluation of master planning and its effects on African cities; planning for informality which is an everyday phenomenon in the global South (and sometimes the global North); place making in Africa; and the appropriation of space in a global as well as site-specific context. These key concepts are briefly expanded on in the next section and will form the basis of the literature review which will critically look at the work by various authors in order to develop a theoretical premise for the Research Report which will inform the design development framework.

1.7. CONTRIBUTION TO URBAN DESIGN

The research on particular cities of the South and appropriation, in this case in Maputo, may produce new layers of creative and alternative planning proposals, developing a new shared theory as a contribution to global planning.

1.8. FUTURE OR SUPPORTING RESEARCH:

Ethnographic research such as participant observation may be useful to further enhance a project such as this in order to gain more insight pertaining to the daily lives of the population in Maputo, what their living conditions are like and the way they see the area developing.

The following team is recommended in addition to an urban designer for a similar project in practice:

- Local stakeholder/Architect/Partner (for a deeper understanding of the local context, planning context and practices, policies, practicalities regarding implementation and culturally sensitive design interventions);
- Social Anthropologist and or Urban Anthropologist (for insight and a more comprehensive understanding of the local context, culture, urban life and associated practises);
- Urban economist (to provide insight into the current economic context and the role which urban design can play in positively contributing to the local economy through strategic interventions);
- Civil engineer (for the infrastructural opportunities and constraints, and realistic as well as practical infrastructural solutions);
- Landscape architect (to design and provide input in the landscaping components such as indigenous trees and landscaping).

1.9. LIMITATIONS

Lefebvre delineates the three dimensions of space as ‘perceived’, ‘conceived’ and ‘lived’ space. ‘(T)he production of urban space...entails much more than just planning the material space of the city; it involves producing and reproducing all aspects of urban life’ (Purcell; 2002: 102). In order to successfully ‘produce and reproduce’ these aspects of urban life, a deeper understanding of these are required, and participatory processes allow the concerns of locally affected stakeholders and community members to provide input to this ‘production of spaces’. As the Research Report is on a masters level and will have a design component, the study will be limited to a site visit and desktop research. Further research on an anthropological level is advised in order to establish a comprehensive understanding of the local culture.

As Watson says, ‘planning professionals on their own can make very little difference to these issues without certain broader conditions being in place’ (2009:186).

The entire future of new planning approaches, challenging and re-evaluating the traditional modernist approach, is not solely in the hands of planning (or urban design) professionals. The way forward is dependent on the integrated and inclusive approach between various role players, including both the affected communities as well as political role players. The Research Report will not look into the legislative aspects, but rather focus on strategic design interventions and the role of the urban designer, that will form part of a precinct plan.