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An enabling framework as a holistic intervention to address physical developmental constraints in the Johannesburg inner city

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7.1 A call for a non-programmatic approach to the planning of South African cities – the enabling framework

For over two decades now, beginning in the early 1990s, South African cities have seen a resurgent interest in planning (Todes, 2011). The state, motivated by a desire to redress the spatial footprint of apartheid, has taken planning as an important tool within its arsenal and it has used this tool vigorously, legally mandating the production of Integrated Development Plans in all its municipalities. This reinvigorated planning system has churned out a voluminous amount of plans at varying scales, from the National Development Perspective down to Regional Spatial Development Frameworks (for sub-regions within cities). The years since the early 2000s have also seen a shift in focus within planning in Gauteng towards the regional scale, beyond the city and the local scale, which has further emphasised the multi-scalar nature of contemporary urban planning. This paper has argued that urban design has a role to play within this hierarchy of plans.

This research report seeks to assess the extent to which an enabling framework may be useful as an urban design approach that attempts to better align urban design practice with the policy context within which it occurs – the larger objective being the creation of urban environments that espouse the values of the urban design profession. Chapter 2 has argued that the policy context in Johannesburg is characterised by: (1) a focus on public transportation; (2)the pursuit of an open-ended approach to planning (spatial planning);(3) and a desire to promote public participation. These are the policy elements to which the enabling framework seeks to respond.

The salient features of the enabling framework were identified in chapter 3. It is argued in chapter 3 that the enabling framework as a process involves three principles. The first principle is the belief that movement is the most important informant of urban development and urban form. The second principle is the belief that it is possible to plan the city "as an act of will" by changing a few essential elements and allowing urban change to emerge as a response to that small intervention. The third principle, which is closely related to the second, is the concept of democratic feedback, which argues that when a designer makes even a small change to the physical environment allowing the user to formulate a response to that change represents a far more meaningful form of participation than when the user is invited to talk about a wide range of changes that they might or might not like to happen. It was further argued in chapter 3 that the organising concept, the actual plan that is produced when one undertakes an enabling framework, comprises two spatial features: points in space and simultaneous movement systems. Chapter 4 discussed historical examples of the use of use of enabling frameworks while Chapter 5 developed an enabling framework for a site in the inner city of Johannesburg in response to the problem statement identified in the first chapter. Chapter 6 developed precinct plans, which responded to the opportunities and constraints set by the enabling framework. These precinct plans demonstrate possible responses to the enabling framework. Chapter 7 assesses the quality of these responses against two sets of criteria. Firstly, the chapter is concerned with assessing the extent to which the environments proposed by the precinct plans embody core the urban design principles of place making.

7.2 Discussion of research findings

A. **Focus on large scale –** In general the precinct plans are more effective at fulfilling larger scale principles (those that organise space as a coherent legible whole) than they are at articulating the content and quality of the spaces proposed
    - However this is not necessarily a reflection of the enabling framework because there is strong evidence that the precinct plans have not complied with the enabling framework, especially with regard to the use of physical objects to inform the character of spaces (the principle of points in space as discussed in chapter 3).

B. **Overreliance on figure-ground** – Figure ground theory has been applied uniformly across the site and the result has been that soft spaces, such as the linear park at the centre of the scheme, has been strictly confined between buildings (as should typically be the case with streets). A distinction may be made between urban space (which is what streets are) and soft space (which is what parks are). One key difference between these two categories of space is the way in which their boundaries are defined. For urban space the emphasis is on enclosure and the creation of rooms, the feeling of being inside. For soft space the emphasis is on the feeling of being outside, creating openness and the perception that the space is continuous.
    - This distinction is noticeably absent in the literature review. As a result the precinct plans rely heavily on figure ground as a rationale for balancing the relationship between solids and voids. Future research must take cognisance of the fact that the literature on enabling frameworks tends to be biased towards urban space and must seek out other theory to balance this.

C. **Compliance with the enabling framework is not enough to create rich environments that have variety and novelty –** There is evidence to suggest that compliance with the enabling framework may not be desirable inasmuch as it tends to create monotonous environments. The only nodes identified in the precinct plans are those that were already identified in the enabling framework. Therefore the precinct plans may be compliant but the result is nonetheless an environment that only satisfies the bare minimum. Moreover, there is also a tendency (which begins with the enabling framework and translates into the precinct plans) to define nodes in terms of transportation and land use, stepping back from determining what happens at the very local scale and leaving that decision up to the user.
    - The assumption that stepping back from planning the existence of difference (and uniqueness and authenticity) would result in plans that are more sensitive to local

particularities has been proven to be incorrect in this case. In this research report, because there is vagueness regarding what difference means, the enabling framework creates a situation where whoever makes the precinct plans can adhere to the bare minimum requirements that have been articulated.

- The result is a functionalist environment where no attention is given to detail and where no protection is afforded to those details that already exist. As such, in the absence of detail it is difficult to imagine how a marginalised issue such as informality could be retrofitted into the proposed scheme now that it has been overlooked by all of the precinct plans.

D. **Translating objectives and values into space**

- Ultimately, by avoiding deliberating on development objectives and values exhaustively from the onset (and instead leaving them up to the end user), the enabling framework overlooks the fact that some objectives and values are easier to express than others. Indeed (beyond their expression) certain objectives and values are easier to pursue, perhaps even cheaper to pursue. These may perhaps be objectives that are already being pursued in a particularly efficient (albeit dull) way elsewhere. It is thus very easy to import that dull efficiency onto a new site.
- This can be seen in the precinct plans but it is also possible to imaging how, in the absence of clearer urban design guidelines articulating how development objectives must be pursued, it will be very difficult for property developers who already have a safe, efficient and lucrative plan to let go of that plan in order to respond creatively to the requirements of the enabling framework.

E. **Pursuing the public interest** – The enabling framework recommends stepping back from the design process as a means toward expanding the 'right to the city'. The argument is that everyone should have an equal opportunity to determine the contents of place – to respond to the enabling framework. The question may be asked however about how those who are marginalised are expected to formulate their response?

- In a situation such as this, where planning has been inadvertently relegated to a private concern it seems unlikely for instance that participants in the informal sector can rally together to formulate a graphic response to the plan. Moreover, the fact that the phenomenon of informal trading relies on the existence of other urban development to support its emergence also means that informal traders cannot respond to a vague enabling framework. Informality needs a clear plan (and sometimes a physical reality) where it is clear to see where the big shops are and where all the traffic is in order to decide where and how to locate.

Table 3: Assessing the extent to which the precinct plans comply with the enabling framework

Spatial concepts that constitute the enabling framework (as identified in Ch.3)	Rating				Comments	
	Weak	**Moderate**	**Strong**	**Rating/10**	**Positive**	**Negative**
Physical points and Landmarks (Bacon, 1967) (Lynch, 1975)	◉			3	- There are seven physical objects of varying sizes, which are used as points in space within the scheme. These are the Mandela Bridge, the MOTH monument, the Old train station structure, the Rotunda building, the Firewalker statue, a monument at the north end of the of the Queen Elizabeth Bridge, as well as the two statues at the entrances of the new mall. However all of these points already exist.	- The precinct plans do not introduce any new objects and so, in regards to the use of physical objects, the principle of points in space has not been used proactively as a means of ordering space. - The resultant scheme has very few small points in space, such as statues, which are supposed to be used to inform the shape and character of spaces in the way discussed in chapter 3. - see the discussion on **7.4 (B)** (below)
Figure ground (Trancik, 1986)			◉	9	- The use of the **perimeter block** type creates coherent figure-ground and it is applied consistently - Notable examples of the application of the perimeter block to achieve figure ground around a public space can be found around the MOTH monument, the Firewalker statue, and throughout the linear park	- There is overreliance on figure ground. This results in confusion between soft space and urban space (for instance the linear park looks like a street, a hard space, rather than a park). Over-reliance on figure ground suggests that the report has not identified a sufficient variety of theoretical concepts to inform the enabling framework. This point is elaborated on later in this chapter.
Nodes (Lynch, 1975)			◉	9	- The precinct plans establish nodes of different sizes and these are used to anchor development around public spaces.	- Nodes are defined in a strictly functionalist sense that tends to [over]emphasise transportation. But this is not evidence of non-compliance since this is how nodes are defined in the enabling framework - see the discussion on **7.2 (C)** (above)
Total score				**21/30 70%**		**Very strong evidence of compliance with enabling framework**

Table 4: Assessing the extent to which the precinct plans adhere to urban design principles

Place making principles		Rating				Comments	
		Weak	**Moderate**	**Strong**	**Rating /10**	**Positive**	**Negative**
Imageability (Lynch, 1975)	Districts		◉		6	-The four precincts are distinct from one another in terms of use, building height and in the outward appearance of the housing typologies presented within them - An attempt has been made to match urban development on the edges of the each precinct with existing development, thereby acknowledging and strengthening the character of the existing districts - The new development also has enough distinctive features that define it as a district in its own right. The most distinct of these are (1) the use of Vancouver-style tower-townhouse block typology; and (2) the stepped heights, where buildings on the north side of a block are taller than buildings on the south side.	- The precinct plans are too vague regarding the physical features that ought to make that district. - There are limited cultural considerations in the way that the spaces are conceived and shaped, even though they are shaped differently from one another. Even though the buildings and spaces are shaped differently from one another there is little indication beyond land use (since activities are only discussed in sections and with little detail) of what kind of user is expected in each district and, consequently, what kind of character each district will have. - Because *place* (the character of each district) is not considered from the perspective of the user it is less meaningful
	Nodes			◉	7	- The precinct plans have a strong emphasis on nodes, in the form of transport termini and retail centres. - The centres have been mapped carefully, with sensitivity to their different size and different functions. - Land uses have been proposed with due reference to the nodes around which they occur, with the most intense uses occurring nearest to the nodes. - Very clear guidelines have been set out for mixing uses and managing building heights around nodes.	- There tends to be a dullness in the nodes proposed in the precinct plans. Because the nodes are defined strictly in terms of land use and traffic flow (in order to remove potentially prejudicial value judgements)the resultant urban development within the nodes seems to be no different from the development in every other place: the nodes are just busier. The nodes proposed by the precinct plans are characterised by concentrations of the same elements found elsewhere and not by the presence of something unique, valuable or magical. Consequently, despite intensions to produce the opposite, the precinct plans may have produced functionalist environments that tick many boxes but are nonetheless sterile where it counts the most.
	Paths			◉	7	- **Well articulated** and **differentiated** – The precinct plans create a strong discernible system of paths comprising of a loop of public transport routes,a connective highly permeable grid pattern, and a network of pedestrian streets. - The most legible path is the **linear park**, which thrusts westward from the Park Station node. It has a strong pedestrian component at its centre that is supported by vehicular movement on either side.	- The sections of the streets do not show enough detail about the physical conditions necessary to ensure the proper functioning of each kind of path.
	Edges		◉		4	- The **Nelson Mandela bridge** is essentially an edge between east and west, even though it is a connector between north and south. The precinct plans creatively use public space to transform the bridge into a connector of all directions by making it a place to gather. The edge is in fact used as a strength, as a threshold separating the busy, mostly business and mixed use side eastern side from the quieter western side which is predominantly residential. - **Topography** is used as a soft edge to separate uses of different intensity. This is best illustrated in Precinct 3 where the taxi rank and shopping centre below are separated from the upmarket apartments which sit on the elevated decking over the railway line. A series of steps elevate the apartments a distance of about 9m from the ground, away from noise and intense activity - **Railway lines** – Decking bridges over the railway lines, the historic edge between the north and south of the inner city	- **Highway** –The precinct plans fail to address the effect of the highway as an edge. This is especially critical with regard to highway overpasses as the enabling framework has proposed movement channels with cyclist and pedestrian routes along routes that pass beneath the highway - **Building frontages** have not been dealt with – the threshold between public and privates and ground floor activity have not been explicitly considered **- Streets, edge condition** – the enabling framework proposes simultaneous movement systems but does not go into detail regarding how the different modes of movement might be separated on the same street by different categories of edges, as well as how movement might be separated from other forms of activity on the street
				◉		- **Existing landmarks** – The precinct plans highlight existing	- **Pedestrian experience** – The precinct plans do not explicitly

	Landmarks				8	landmarks (Mandela bridge, the old Park Station iron structure, the MOTH monument on Noord Street, several existing buildings). - **New towers** have been introduced - **Public spaces** are provided around landmarks so that they are also gathering spaces, which increases their significance as cognitive elements that shape pedestrian experience	show how people are expected to interact with landmarks, especially at the local scale, seeing as these landmarks will be the center pieces in public space. The content of the public spaces around landmarks is not made clear. It is not clear, for instance, how these might differ from nodes.
Responsiveness (Bentley et al, 1985)	Variety	◉			2	- **Land use** – there is significant variety in the land uses proposed	- **Horizontal mixing** of the proposed uses – insufficient consideration of the three dimensional qualities of space. - There is limited variety in activities, the shapes of buildings, textures and building materials
	Robustness		◉		4	- **Land use** sets a programme of activities that allows robust use of public space by making sure that there are different users using the spaces throughout the day	- **Physical design** – There is no discussion of the physical features (such as the size and shape of public spaces, street furniture and lighting) that would enable robustness
	Legibility			◉	8	- **Grid** pattern and road hierarchy - The **linear park concept**, which is reinforced by the looping public transport route - **Differentiated precincts** – Landmarks, changes in height, as well as variety in block sizes, block structure and building height have been used effectively to create legible distinctions between the precincts and between parts of each precinct - **Public vs private** – perimeter block structure has been used to clearly distinguish (external) public space from (internal) private spaces	- **Street level legibility**– There is no discussion of legibility at the level of the street: the use of trees, textures, setbacks, slight changes in height to differentiate between the different parts of public space (e.g. sidewalk vs. Road). The precinct plans run the risk of assuming that public space is homogenous -
	Visual appropriateness				1	- The use of **Perimeter block structure** emphasises the distinction between public and private space.	- Because the precinct plans avoid specifying details about the buildings the very important question of visual appropriateness is deferred almost entirely to the architect - The precinct plans also make no recommendations regarding visual appropriateness of items that are to be found in public spaces (such as benches and trees) that inform the visual appropriateness of those spaces.
	Richness	◉			1		- As explained above in reference to nodes, the environments prescribed by the precinct plans are essentially composed of a few generic elements that are configured in a variety of ways or agglomerated together in an attempt to create something new. However, these environments are almost entirely lacking in terms of genuine difference and novelty, which are characteristics that are essential for the creation of richness.
	Personalization	◉			3		- The precinct plans in this report may be open-ended but it is just as likely, given the broad nature of the enabling framework, to adhere completely to the requirements of the framework but nonetheless arrive at explicit and binding precinct plans. Thus if detail (as well as accuracy and directness) is a threat to personalisation, then that threat is still not addressed by the use of an enabling framework since it is still possible for such detail to be added by precinct plans.
Total score					**51/110 (46%)**		**Strong evidence that precinct plans do not adhere to urban design principles**

7.4. Critical reflections on the research process and recommendations for future research

A. **Does having a single designer limit the richness of the response to the enabling framework?** The argument could be made that the monotony in the scheme is the result of all four of the precinct plans having been produced by the same designer. The same could be said about how some issues (such as informality or architectural details) have been glossed over. That is to say that the scheme reflects the individual designer's own prejudices and preferences and that it has been limited by the designer's own limited technical capacity, limited understanding of urban design principles and limited experience with urban development processes. The argument then is that in the real world the process would be far more pluralistic.
    - However it is clear to see that plurality would most likely only exacerbate the issues experienced in this research exercise because, when the process of responding to the enabling framework is opened up to the public, the very same resources (such as technical capacity) which were noted as being too few to allow an adequate response, would become even more scarce among members of the general public. In this report the response to the enabling framework has been formulated by a post-graduate student who: (1) has had extensive training in urban design techniques and principles; (2) has objectives that are closely aligned with the ideal of creating a good urban environment; (3) has had firsthand experience of living in the inner city and growing up in the context of informality. If the enabling framework falls short of its objectives in such a well-resourced case it is highly unlikely to be effective in contexts where the responses to the enabling framework are expected to come from parties who do not have a direct interest in urban development and urban design and who do not have training in urban design techniques and principles.
    - Thus, it is not the number of designers which limits richness but, instead, richness is limited the vagueness of the enabling framework with regard to the desired quality of the urban environment.

B. **Assessing the impact of the enabling framework requires that the production of the framework must be separated from the production of the precinct plans and that the precinct plans must be separated from the assessment phase.** There must be a clear end to each process.
    - In a case such as this research report, where there is one designer responsible for developing both plans, this separation is necessary because of the reiterative nature of the design process. There is the risk of the precinct plans continuously revealing issues in the enabling framework, which the designer goes back to address. If this continues to happen then the designer is effectively assessing the enabling framework but without noting the findings, which defeats the purpose of the research. There needs to be a clear end to the enabling framework before the precinct plans may be drafted and there needs to be a clear end to the precinct plans before assessment can commence.
    - In the case of this research, this separation between precinct plans and assessment was presented by the examination but the separation between the enabling framework and the precinct plans is not as definite and the two processes continuously flowed into one another.
    - It may be possible to achieve better distinction between these three steps in future research by having a public presentation of the plans. It would also be useful to develop an assessment of the enabling framework, where it assessed against the theoretical framework prior to proceeding to the next step. This would prevent a situation where (as was the case here) the enabling framework has not been adequately constituted (the enabling framework in this research report does not consider the use of physical objects as *points in space* even though this is a central aspect of the theory).

C. **Not just separate but different plans** – it is important to ensure that the precinct plan is a response to the enabling framework and not simply a translation of the latter into a different colour scheme. While they aim to fulfil the same objectives, the two plans must play two separate roles towards that end (i.e. the enabling framework produces an organising concept and then the precinct plan responds to that organising concept by articulating the detail necessary to achieve the set objectives).
    - Since the ultimate goal is the fulfilment of urban design principles and urban policy objectives, what stops the person drafting the precinct from responding directly to these principles and objectives rather than following the enabling framework? It is necessary, in order to carry out the experiment proposed in this research report, to manage the separation of the precinct plan from the assessment criteria (the principles and objectives) to make sure that the precinct plan is produced as a result of adherence to the enabling framework rather than adherence to the assessment criteria.
    - In this report, separation was facilitated by the exam. Initially the research sought to demonstrate the application of an enabling framework and how it can be translated into precinct plans. The requirement that the resultant development should adhere to urban design principles and should create a good urban environment was only added after the fact, which had the benefit that the precinct plans were drafted almost purely as a response to the enabling framework and not in pursuit of urban design principles.
    - In future research such separation could also be maintained by proposing a second assessment criteria that assesses the precinct plan according to how well it has adhered to the central tenets of the enabling framework. For instance in one such experiment student designers might be assessed and awarded marks for following the enabling framework but then in a separate study their precinct plans would then be assessed in terms of the extent to which adherence to the enabling framework corresponds with

adherence to the objectives and principles. A similar system has been employed in this research report by using a table to score the precinct plans on how well they have incorporated the concepts of points in space, figure ground, linkage and so on, thereby evaluating their adherence to the enabling framework.

D. **The end-product and the process of making a precinct plan needs to be defined more clearly –** At some points there seems to be confusion regarding the nature of the precinct plans and their purpose and about how that differs from the nature and purpose of an enabling framework. Primarily, the source of confusion is that the application of an enabling framework is by no means limited to being a tool for mediating between urban planning (policy objectives) and urban design. The enabling framework is applicable at both scales. It is possible in fact to argue, using the same theoretical framework discussed in this report, that the spatial development framework is actually also an enabling framework (with an organising concept, democratic feedback and a proactive management approach). The application of an enabling framework at a specific scale and towards specific objectives thus has to be a deliberate decision. In this report the decision to use an enabling framework has been made but it is not deliberate enough, especially with regards to the distinction between the enabling framework and the precinct plans.
    - It is taken for granted that everyone knows what a precinct plan is. While the report is very clear about (1) the desired outcome of producing the enabling framework (which is to create an organising concept made up primarily of nodes and transport routes); and about (2) the process by which the outcome is to be achieved (an open-ended approach), the report does not specify any desired outcomes for the precinct plans. Consequently, the precinct plans a characterised by vagueness and they seem to also be concerned with remaining open-ended, rather than providing specific details about the spaces they are proposing. This stems from the report's inadequate distinction between the respective definitions of the enabling framework and the precinct plan.

E. **The treatment of informality –** The report grounds its treatment of informality in the argument that informality is, at its most fundamental core, no different from other urban development. That is to say: *all urban development is equal and should be awarded an equal right to struggle for its existence*. This is an inadvertently neo-liberal distortion of Roy's (2006) remark on the right of the informal to exist within cities. In drawing parallels between the informal and the formal Roy only seeks to emphasize the equal right of informality to exist; planning is still necessary to even the playing field, to assist informality in the fulfilment of that right.
    - The research tends to take on a somewhat detached approach to conflict and the struggle to exist in the city. While valid at a theoretical level, the Marxist argument that conflict is good ignores the subjective experience of conflict and it downplays the brutality that can take place in instances of conflict. In Johannesburg, the men and women who sell on the sidewalks are different from the protesters in Stuttgart in one fundamental way: their livelihood depends on their ability to keep selling in public spaces. For them conflict is not good.
    - A good urban design guidance must thus show how occurrences of informality

7.5 Reflections on the applicability of the non-programmatic approach

It is interesting to note that, although Bacon (1967) wrote about an open and democratic approach to settlement making, this is not what he came to be remembered for. In Philadelphia, the city where he practiced with the most authority – as its chief planner – Bacon's ideas produced sterile environments that were not much different from the modernist townscapes produced in many other places during that time (Heller, 2004). This could be said to be the key weakness of the non-programmatic approach: in its openness it leaves a lot of the responsibility to build correctly in the hands of others and not the urban designer (ibid).The organising concept that is produced when one undertakes an enabling framework is often referred to as a language between those involved in the settlement making process. This language allows collaboration between architects and designers over a long period of time because it is an almost permanent inscription onto physical space that can be read by each designer to inform him on how to proceed before doing so. However this assumes that the designer can read this language; or that he is interested in reading it in the first place. There is also an assumption that the organising concept will be interpreted in the same way by every designer who reads it. These assumptions were proven wrong even in Ed Bacon's own professional practice. When Bacon re-planned Philadelphia using enabling frameworks he did so during the height of modernism. Even when third party professionals did not resist him (in fact he is said to have been good friends with Louis Khan (Heller, 2004)), the way that the frameworks were interpreted was fundamentally limited by the professional outlook of the time. The modernists had a very particular ethos on urban design that was very different from how settlement making had been undertaken in the ancient cities from which Bacon had drawn his inspiration. In light of this it seems very likely that in the case of Johannesburg the development generated by an enabling framework would still resemble the ongoing developments in places such as Rosebank and Sandton, which still fall short of many urban design ideals.

In practice, urban design professionals may be reluctant to embrace the idea that the final product of their work should be determined by a third part (not the designer and not the user). In theory this third party and the user are one and the same, each individual responding to the plan in their own way. In reality however, most responses to the enabling framework are likely to be formulated by built environment professionals.

The enabling framework needs a very long time in order for it to work. Perhaps 300 years is a luxury that modern citizens simply cannot afford. In the wake of apartheid people want redress to spatial injustice

now, today, and in such a political climate enabling frameworks are likely to be very difficult to implement. The problem of time is compounded by the fact that modern political power is typically short-lived because in democracies people can only hold office for a few years and there is no guarantee that their descendants will enjoy the same benefit. This reality is in sharp contrast to the position of the French monarchs when they made use of enabling frameworks and, given this reality, modern political elites are likely to make very different decisions regarding urban development because enabling frameworks are far less likely to serve their own needs as they had served the needs of their historical counterparts.

Power today is not the same as it was before. More specifically, power is no longer geographically tied to the spaces within which it operates. It could be argued that pre-modern elites had a greater incentive to create good urban design because they had to live in the cities that they governed. Today power can make its fortunes in one inner city slum even while it resides in some distant garden city. In fact, power today can be global.