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Title: **Rethinking Park Spaces in Johannesburg: Decolonising the African Urban Landscape through Public Space Design**

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Abstract

The report is an investigation of urban parks as public space in Johannesburg inner-city. It investigates the current situation of a deteriorating degree of public space in Johannesburg due to growing levels of privatisation and incapacity of the public sector to design, manage and maintain good quality, inclusive and safe public open spaces in the city. My research aims at being a radical re-imagining of Inner-city of Johannesburg, through urban design, in how the inner-city can be (spatially) transformed and reconfigured through open public space, as part of the decolonization agenda for African cities.

In my study, I investigate the nature of urban parks in Johannesburg's inner-city, in an attempt to understand the ways they are being used by different user groups and how this is affected by the way they are physically designed and managed. It presents three chosen parks of study; Joubert Park, End Street Park (North and South), and Nugget Street Park, located in Doornfontein Johannesburg, and look into the chosen park's connectivity and accessibility to streets and other public spaces.

I assess how the parks' location and proximity to activities and public infrastructure/amenities (such as housing units, retail outlets, schools and public transport interchanges) affects the number and type of users that use them as well as the kind of activities within them. As part of this assessment will be the issue of safety and security within parks and how current management approaches have been used to address the issue.

I, through my research, question current urban design and management approaches; aimed at achieving increased levels of use and safety in terms of the impact they have had on the city's public open spaces. Questions are asked on the effectiveness of safety measures such as fences, gates and security cameras and personnel and how they impact on the degree of 'publicness' and safety in the city's public open spaces.

As part of its aim of understanding the nature of parks in the inner-city of Johannesburg, the research reviews existing literature that has been written on public space/public park use and design and the 'ideal' approaches to good design and management. It focuses on the ideal of an 'Open City' and questions of 'publicness' in park use and management.

The notion of decolonising Johannesburg as an African city (in its current neo-apartheid segregatory form) is also interrogated. Questions are asked on the definition of what African urban space is and the principles of its form and function, based on precolonial African city examples. The principle of common space and collective ownership and use is discussed as an essential principle that framed the configuration of african public space, which was lost in the introduction of colonial city formations.

The report¹ presents an analysis of End Street North and South Park located on the north and south ends of the railway line along Nugget Street in Doornfontein. It assesses the process in which End Street South Park was (re)designed and upgraded in 2009 as part of the Ellis Park precinct development for the 2010 World cup, and critically assesses the outcomes of its design in terms of both the successes and failures of the upgrade.

The report has benefited from CUBES support and ongoing engagement with Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo, within the NRF-funded research programme 'Practices of the State in Urban Governance' (96277) coordinated by Prof. Claire Bénéit-Gbaffou. It has also used information from the 3rd year ARPL3012 Urban Design class project, conducted by Solam Mkhabela, and focused on park uses in Joubert Park and End Street South Park.

In the analysis the report illustrates how though the park's upgrade reduced violent crimes such as muggings in the park, the park contains illicit activities such as gambling and drug use spots along its edges and corners.

The use of high fencing in the new design and deployment of private security in the park was found not to be entirely solving issues of safety in the park. Although the fence was intended to assist in the management and control of who accesses and uses the park for safety reasons, it contributes towards creating hidden spaces for gambling, drug use and bullying to occur away from the eyes of the public.

The analysis of End Street North Park involves the documentation of the End Street North Park upgrade pilot project that tests a participatory approach to park design and management for safety. The objective of the project was to demonstrate an integrated stakeholder approach to public space design and management that involves sector contributions from different city departments as well as engagement with city residents and other park users in designing a safe, inclusive and sustainable public space through participatory tools and methods.

This set of findings from End Street North and South Parks reveal that park use and safety issues cannot be completely addressed through design and installation of physical safety measures such as high fences, law enforcement and regulation of use by security guards or park managers alone.

The report indeed proposes a radical and aggressive urban design framework and/or strategy towards transforming inner-city Johannesburg's spatial fabric through urban park and open public space design. Part of this process involves looking into alternative design related ways of dealing with aspects of use and safety in parks as well as aspects of public participation, community co-design and co-management processes.