
Revitalising the public open spaces in the CBD of Pietermaritzburg to Immortalize a Great Place

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ABSTRACT

Pietermaritzburg has the potential to be a great city. It has been the capital city of three governments and is currently the capital city of KwaZulu-Natal. Its prime location has been partially responsible for this because it is a commercial, social and economic node with a rich cultural heritage and a CBD that is the administrative central authority of the province. It's internationally acclaimed competitions and sports give it global appeal. Great cities are also made by great public places. Msunduzi Municipality embarked on a project to regenerate the CBD of Pietermaritzburg and restore it to its former glory by using the Freedom Square Precinct as a catalyst to inspire further development and upgrading. In the heart of Pietermaritzburg is Freedom Square Park. It has been transformed from being the Market Square for social gatherings, sales and political demonstrations in the fight against political oppression. By virtue of its history it has all the ingredients and features of a Great Place. However, parts of the changes are due to a trend towards the privatisation of urban space through projects to revitalise the inner city and enhance its tourism and investment potential. Public open spaces provide an area for communities to, amongst other things, relax, learn, exercise, enjoy nature and socialise with others. Their design and quality is important in creating cohesive societies because they welcome people from different cultures, incomes and age groups. They provide the platform for society to exercise their democratic rights which is important for the new political dispensation that accommodates diversity. When some of these characteristics or uses are, however restricted or threatened the ability of the square to be a great place that enable tolerance and social cohesion or act as a platform for democratic activities is questioned. This paper discusses the transformation of the Greater Freedom Park Precinct and the specific public spaces within it. The changing nature and function of the public open spaces within this precinct was understood by documentation review for historical and spatial analysis, site observation on the use of space and selected interviews. It shows how this urban space has changed and highlights the implications for urban planning and design. Interesting questions are raised for intellectual debate around creating environments that promote inclusive societies and the role of history in creating great places. Although this project is just at city centre scale, within a particular precinct, valuable lessons can be learnt as to how a great place can be transformed and perhaps immortalised.

KEYWORDS: Public Open Space, Transformation, Privatisation, Democracy, Urban Renewal, City Precinct Interventions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Great cities are made by great public places. Throughout history great cities have been known by their great public places, for example the Piazza de Campidoglio and St Peters Square from the Renaissance and Baroque Rome, the Piazza del Campo in Florence or the Piazza San Marco in Venice. Public places, in particular great squares or piazzas have also become the heart or center of the city in many cases, surrounded by the main institutional buildings and functions, for example the Great Market Square in Brussels or the City Square in Antwerpen. In the new world, squares have also become reflections of the changes within great cities, for example Times Square in New York.

Pietermaritzburg also have the potential to be a great city. It is located in the heart of KwaZulu Natal and has played a significant role in the early history of the city. The city's name itself goes some way in articulating its history because Pietermaritzburg is an amalgamation of the names of Voortrekker leaders; Piet Retief and Gert Maritz, who laid out the town and declared it the capital of the Republic of Natal in 1883 and IsiZulu speakers know the city as "UMgungundlovu" (the place of the elephant), which translates to the place of the head of the kraal of the Zulu king, Dingaan (Msunduzi Municipality, 2010). Its capital status was re-affirmed when, in 2004, the KwaZulu Natal Provincial Government re-instated it as the sole (previously shared as the Legislative while Ulundi was the Administrative) provincial capital. Its central location within the province is one of the characteristics that contribute to its popularity as a capital. According to the South African Cities Network (2013: Online), Pietermaritzburg is the one of the best preserved Victorian cities in the world. There is more to the city than aesthetics because its calendar boasts global events such as the: 89 km Comrades Marathon (Durban to Pietermaritzburg), Midmar Mile swimming event (world's largest inland swimming race) and the Duzi Canoe Marathon (Africa's oldest canoe marathon) (Msunduzi Municipality, 2010). At the core of this global city, is the Central Business District. This central area is a major regional, commercial and social service centre for KwaZulu-Natal's Midlands and an economic centre of the UMgungundlovu District Municipality. Although it contributes significantly to the non-industrial economy, it also has parks where people can meet and share ideas (Udidi, 2004).

Great places develop over an extended period of time to become a 'successful place' (Montgomery 1998:93), going through many changes that may influence its use and meaning (Short 1996). In the heart of Pietermaritzburg is Freedom Square Park. This is an important public place with great historical value. In recent years, the space has undergone several changes to renew and upgrade the area. The completed phases of the renewal include an extension to the public library, and a new tourism hub and taxi rank. The last phase is an outdoor museum that will honour heroes such as Nelson Mandela, Alan Paton and Mahatma Gandhi and their association with Pietermaritzburg. This will be displayed along pavements that lead to nodes of historical interest on a Piazza that will replace Freedom Square Park. Yet, some of these changes involved the privatisation of public space with restricted access. Internationally, modifications of public space in terms of privatisation have been severely criticised (Carmona 2010a). These spaces have been criticized as being over-managed and controlled and for serving only a selective group of people (Madanipour, 2010; Carmona, 2010a). It therefore raises questions regarding the implications of the changes in the Freedom Square Park Precinct, not just for the city and its people in terms of use, but also in terms of planning and design more generally. This is especially important in South Africa, where access to well-developed public

open spaces is a right that is enshrined by the supreme law of South Africa. This is encapsulated by Section 24 of Chapter 2 (Bill of Rights) of the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), where “Everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that – (i) Prevent pollution and ecological degradation; (ii) Promote conservation; and (iii) Secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development (South Africa, 1996:1253).”

This illustrates the obligation that government have to provide public open spaces that are socially inclusive, economically viable and ecologically sustainable. The importance of these public spaces as part of the desired future for South Africa is even recognised by the National Development Plan, as captured in this excerpt:

“To make it easier for South Africans to interact with each other across racial and class divides, the country needs to improve public spaces and public services.” (National Planning Commission, 2011: 291)

There is no denying the imperative role that public open spaces play in uniting society in our new political dispensation. The city of Pietermaritzburg (PMB) in Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) has taken cognisance of this. The Local Authority has initiated projects to develop the Public open spaces within the Central Business District in order to draw citizens back to the city centre and promote Pietermaritzburg as the City of Choice by honouring heroes of the political struggle for liberation. Yet, some of the interventions, involves the restriction of access at certain times and over-management and control of some of the spaces. In line with Madanipour’s (2010) question, one may therefore ask whose spaces are they and who do they serve? It also raises issues around accessibility and the publicness of these spaces. “Without being accessible, a place cannot become public” (Madanipour 2010, p.8). In a young democracy, celebrating 20 years of existence, this remains a critical issue to consider, especially given the important role that public spaces can play towards greater democracy (Mattson, 1999) and bearing in mind the specific history of these public spaces in particular. This paper sets out to discuss these changes in the Freedom Square Park Precinct and their implications for the city and its people, as well as for urban planning and design in particular.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining public open spaces

There are many definitions of public space, highlighting different aspects such as the common ground, sharing through contact with strangers and peaceful coexistence or free access. For example, one definition considers public space as “the common ground where people carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community, whether in the normal routine of daily life or in periodic festivities” (Carr *et al.* cited in Madanipour 1996:146). “Public space is space we share with strangers, people who aren’t our relatives, friends, or work associates. It is space for politics, religion, commerce, sport; space for peaceful coexistence and impersonal encounter” (Walzer cited in Madanipour 1996:146). Another definition of the public realm is concerned with access: “all the parts of the urban fabric to which the public have physical and visual access. Thus, it extends from the streets, parks and squares of a town or city into the buildings which enclose and line them” (Tibbals, cited in Madanipour 1996:146).

In essence, public space can be summarised as “... space that allows all the people to have access to it and the activities within it, which is controlled by a public agency, and which is provided and managed by public interest” (Madanipour 1996:148). Public open spaces are therefore unrestricted, publicly owned areas. They can either be man-made (“hard”) or occur

naturally (“soft”), although most of them consist of varying degrees of both elements (CSIR, 2005:109). There are numerous classification systems for public open spaces based as size, type and layout. The functional types are the most relevant for the CBD of Pietermaritzburg. Carmona, (2010b) identifies these 11 functional types as public parks, squares and plazas, memorials, markets, streets, playgrounds, community open spaces, greenways and parkways, atrium/indoor market places, everyday spaces and waterfronts.

Although these public open spaces are classified as separate entities they work best when interconnected with one other (CSIR, 2005:1). This makes them attractive to people that have different needs. People are likely to stay longer when public open spaces are designed with elements that can accommodate different activities during the day, night, on weekdays or on weekends. This determines which users are catered for and translates into diverse group’s users being accommodated for a diverse range of activities (CSIR, 2005:1). Beyond serving as a functional platform for these activities, public open spaces also have an essential societal role to play.

2.2 The importance of public open spaces for society

There are many psychological and physical social benefits associated with well-developed public open spaces. Visually-stimulating environments are associated with happiness and can potentially boost social morale. They break people’s daily routines and allow their minds to wander (Sherer, 2006:12). For most city dwellers, natural public open spaces may be the only link they have to nature. Public open spaces can also stimulate people to become more physically active. They are an alternative recreational facility for those who cannot access or afford health institutions such as gyms. This is important because physical health and psychological well-being are closely linked. A positive feedback cycle is created when people are exposed to the activities of others and encouraged to participate or imitate (Cattell et al, 2008:544). These spaces don’t only benefit individuals, but rather, the society as whole. Cattell et al.(2008:553) is of the opinion that they make a space feel safer because they draw people in and provide “eyes on the street”. This character invites people from all walks of life. Their socially inclusive nature affords those who are from different cultures, incomes and age groups, an opportunity to interact. This is the essence of a vibrant democracy as captured so well by Thompson, (2002)

“What remains true for public open space, and for urban parks in particular, is that they are the places where democracy is worked out, quite literally, *on the ground*, and therefore, the way such spaces are designed, managed and used demonstrates the realities of political rhetoric” (Thompson, 2002:60)

It is well-established that public open spaces are important in creating an inclusive democratic society and enhancing social interaction (see also for example Mattson 1999). This line of thinking is in direct contrast to the rule of government under the Apartheid. The nature of the history between these two ideal makes it difficult to speak of one without reference to the other.

2.3 Public open spaces in the Apartheid City

Prior to 1994, the political system of Apartheid that governed South Africa fostered separate ethnic growth pathways and severely restricted movement and opportunities for prosperity for the non-whites through discriminatory legislation (Adams et al, 2012:378). Each race was assigned a separate region in an urban area where they could own land, do business, live and play. The government dictated where people of different racial groups were permitted, to set them apart from each other so they perceive themselves as separate social units (McConnachie &

Shackleton, 2010:245). The city was a reminder and focal point of this policy because it was where most people needed to be for various reason but also served as a powerful means to demonstrating the apartness (Popke &Ballard, 2004:100).

The socio-geographical borders under Apartheid and the deeply rooted segregation resulted in the imbalanced spatial patterns that are common in South African cities today which also contribute to the lack of access to public open spaces. McConnachie & Shackleton, (2010) found that overall access to public open spaces in South Africa is low by world standards and those that are available for the less fortunate are of low quality. There is also disparity between townships and suburbs because suburban dwellers have disproportionately more public open space available for the use and enjoyment. The spatially-orientated racial policy of Apartheid was detrimental to access to public open spaces for non-whites and this is currently exacerbated by privatisation of public open spaces.

2.4 Conflict between the privatisation of public open spaces and the ideals of democracy

In a democratic society the public open spaces should incorporate all of society as a whole rather than being set aside for select few (Thompson, 2002: 59). These spaces were historically made to entrench certain ideas and have now been reconfigured for the new political outlook. There are those who still don't want to associate themselves with people unlike them or viewed as being in at a lower social standing. When public open spaces are privatised, the ownership and maintenance are transferred from the government to private entity. This system excludes people based on their inability to afford to use these spaces which is threatening for social integration (Spocter, 2005:10). This type of exclusion is facilitated by excessive control of the privatised spaces and an emphasis on security; a trend to which Carmona (2010a) refers to as the over-management of public space. In sharp contrast to this is the under-management of public spaces that often leads to neglected and lost spaces in the city that are ultimately only used by certain groups of society as others choose not to visit them due to a lack of maintenance or fear (Carmona 2010a). The privatisation of public space has symbolic meaning because these spaces are where society can define and freely express itself doing things they cannot do anywhere else. The government, as a custodian of public open space, has the responsibility ensure that areas which are the face of public interaction are inclusive and representative because a truly democratic society accommodates diversity.

Public space is therefore important because it “expresses and also conditions our public life, civic culture, everyday discourse” (Walzer cited in Madanipour 1996:146). Tibbals points out that the public realm is “the most important part of our towns and cities. It is where the greatest amount of human contact and interaction takes place” (in Madanipour 1996:146). Tensions, however, emerge when over-emphasis on individual places leads to the transformation of public spaces into privatised common spaces for only a selected few through access control and over-regulation. The question is whether this poses a problem in cities. According to Madanipour, it is important that the development of urban public space, as part of a larger public sphere, addresses the tensions inherent in the contemporary transformation of the urban public realm and contributes to the emergence of an urbanism which promotes social integration and tolerance (Madanipour 1999:879). There are continuous calls for greater integration and interaction between different groups of people in SA cities. Along these lines, a number of urbanists have discussed the important role of and access to well-developed public and open spaces to enhance the level of diversity and increase social and economic interaction and opportunities in cities (including Gehl 1987; Carmona 2010a & b; Talen 2008). Given this, it is important to understand the changing nature and function of urban spaces in South African cities and the implications

thereof for future urban planning and design in terms of the promotion of greater diversity and access to opportunities for all urban residents.

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the paper is to show how the Freedom Square Precinct and the specific public spaces that form part of it has changed over a number of years and what the implications are for urban planning and design in the city in terms of promoting greater diversity and access to opportunities for all urban residents.

4. APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a qualitative approach to understand the physical changes and use patterns and explain many complex aspects of this process. The study made use of four methods to obtain the relevant data regarding the transformation of the spaces and their implications. These methods included a documentation review, historical analysis, spatial analysis and observation of the site, and semi-structured interviews. A historical and spatial analysis of the study area was carried out to describe how these five spaces had changed over a period of ten to 15 years. A number of documents were used to describe the context in which the selected public spaces are located, including selected newspaper articles, journal articles, land use applications and building plans, the Freedom Square Project Business Proposal, Zoning and Land use maps, environmental management plans, Google photographs and maps, personal photographs and the Integrated Development Plan of Pietermaritzburg. The objective was to outline the physical changes, changes in buildings around or on these spaces, changes of land use, changes of vegetation and other physical features and changes in general use patterns. They also contributed towards providing a short background on the city and the neighbourhood whereas the planning documents outlined some of the intentions related to the subject.

A brief historical and spatial analysis of the five selected public open spaces in the Central Business District of Pietermaritzburg was also carried out. The aim was to get an understanding of the changing nature and function of these areas. This analysis included a description and spatial analysis of the various types of open spaces within the geographically defined area by making use of maps, plans and photographs. In addition, a specific period of time was spent at each of these spaces to just silently observe and record what people are doing. This aided reflection on the types of activities that people are busy with and the types of people using the spaces. The study furthermore necessitated that a few semi-structured interviews with willing participants in some of these open spaces had to be conducted.

This enabled the study to gain further information about the way in which the nature of the space meets the needs of people in the built environment and allows them to perform their daily activities. People, who regularly used the various public open spaces within the Study Area, were identified from the site visits. The strategy was to sample at least one/two/group from each category of user and get an understanding of what they perceive as being the changes in the space identified and subsequently, how those changes have influenced the manner in which they use the space. The following users were identified, namely metered cab drivers, informal traders, passengers, taxi drivers or assistants, couples, working people, groups of students and groups of people that have common interest. The total number of interviewees was 21. Of these there were four municipal officials, two metered cab drivers, five informal traders, one passenger, one taxi driver and two assistants, one couple, one working person, two groups of students and two groups of people that have common interests.

5. RESEARCH ANALYSIS & FINDINGS / RESULTS

What is now known as Freedom Square Park was originally the Market Square, a main center for the town before any major buildings were erected in Pietermaritzburg (Thorrington-Smith, Rosenberg & McCrystal, 1973:12). It is bordered by a taxi rank (what was once Administration Avenue) in the North, Chief Albert Luthuli road in the South and Langalibalele and Church Street on the east and west respectively (number 12 in Figure 1). This market was responsible for transforming Pietermaritzburg into the economic hub of the Natal midlands because it catered for farmers and traders, en route to either the coast or inland (Laband & Haswell, 1988:122).

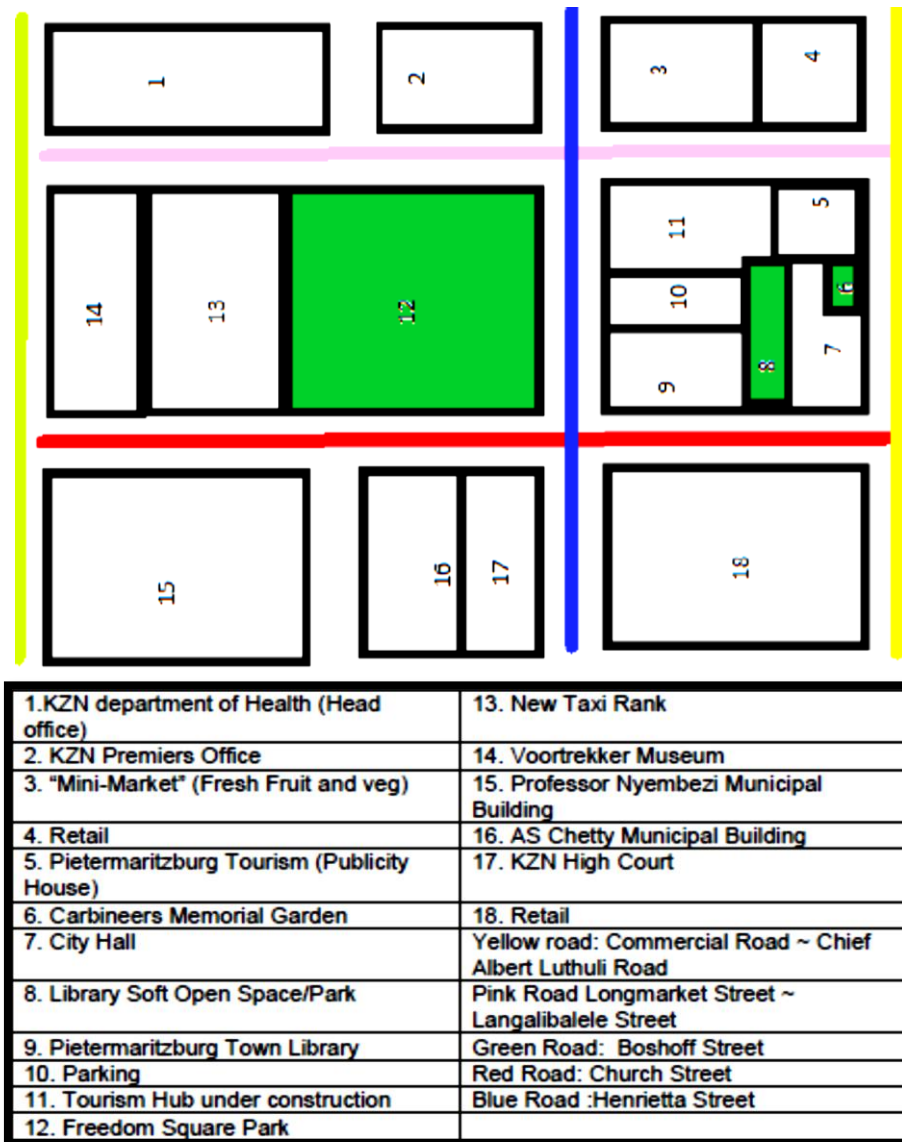
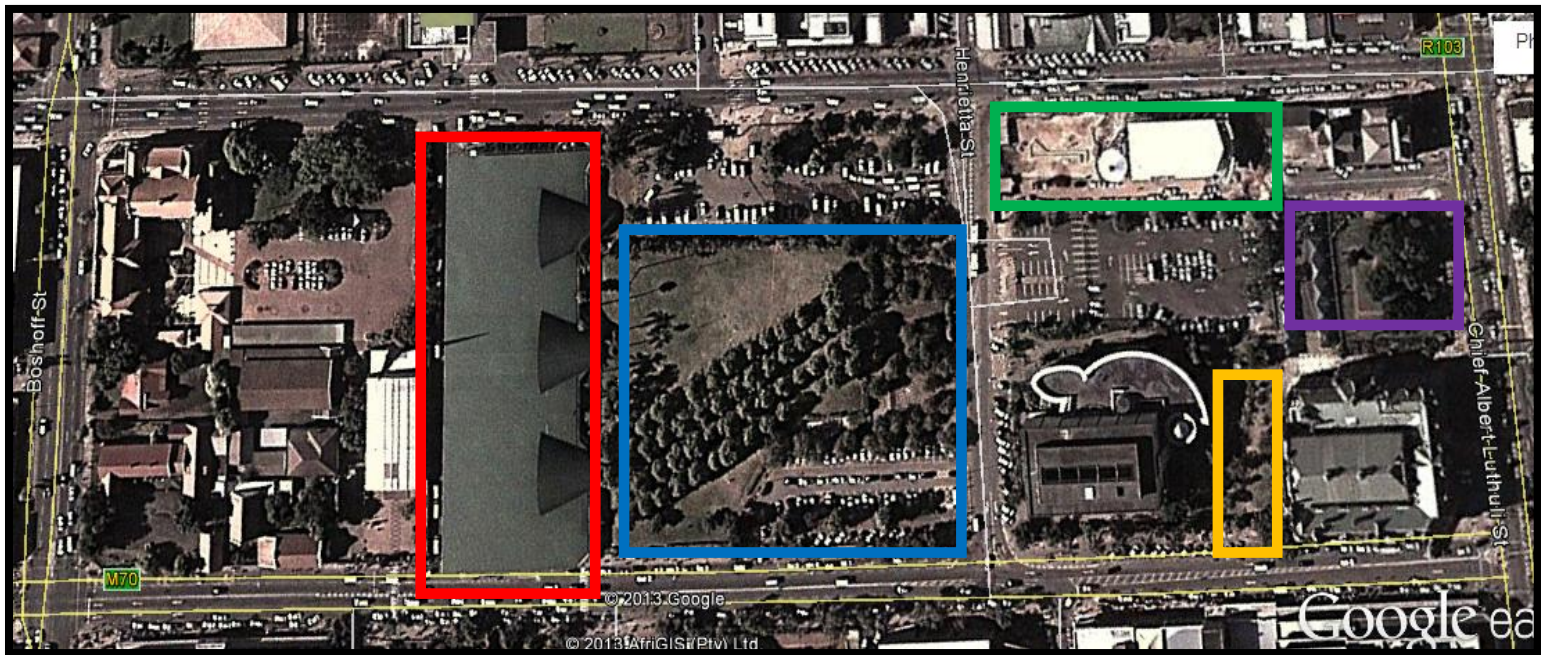


Figure 1: Schematic of the Central Business District of Pietermaritzburg (Source: Author).

Its proximity to the formerly “whites only” City Hall (number 7 on Figure 1) and Council Chambers influenced its selection as a meeting point for demonstrations, political rallies and marches. Gatherings in this precinct are associated with addresses by names such as Ghandi, Mandela and Alan Paton (Devereux, 2013). In order to demonstrate this rich socio-political heritage an Executive Committee resolution was taken on the 25th May 2005 to create a Masterplan for Freedom Square Park. The fundamental aim of the project was to renew the inner city in a bid to draw investment, streamline the transportation networks and create a tourism attraction (Msunduzi, 2007:2).

The overall renewal project is phased in smaller scale projects. The following have already been completed, namely a new taxi rank, the upgrading of Carabineers Memorial Garden of Peace, the fencing, landscaping and vegetating of the Freedom Square Park, and the extension and upgrade of the Children’s section of the Bessie Head Library.

The Study Area is bordered by Boshoff Street, Langalibalele, Chief Albert Luthuli and Church. The specific public open spaces of interest are shown in Figure 2. The red block has the New Taxi rank. The blue block outlines what is now Freedom Square (previously Market Square). The Green block is the site of the Tourism Hub which is currently (August 2013 under construction). The Purple block outlines the Carbineers Memorial Garden of Peace. The orange block is the Library Park.



- New Taxi Rank
- Freedom Square park
- Tourism Hub under construction
- Carbineers Memorial Garden of Peace
- Library Park

Figure 2: Study area (s) (Google, 2013)

5. The transformation of the public open spaces within the CBD of Pietermaritzburg in the past ten to 15 years

Figure 3 clearly shows a bird's eye view of the drastic changes that have occurred in the Study Area. A new Taxi Rank has been built on the site of a thoroughfare/connecting the street known as Administrator Avenue. The Freedom Square Park has been rehabilitated. Its trees are much bigger now and the grassed area is less degraded. What were once sheltered benches for the public to wait for metered cabs, busses and taxis, is now the construction site of the Tourism Hub. The Carbineers Memorial Garden has street furniture, a fence and gate, vegetation and monumental statues and plaques. The Library Park was badly managed but now is a major attraction for recreational purposes during lunchtimes.

In a bid to attract investment into the Central Business District (CBD) the Msunduzi Municipality has invested in a number of projects to revitalise the precinct that is bordered by Church, Langalibalele, Chief Albert Luthuli and Boshoff. The first of these that will be discussed is the new taxi rank. The speech in quotation marks is transcribed verbatim from interviewees. The initials in the brackets are their name and surnames which have been reserved to ensure anonymity and comply with the confidentiality agreement. The following section will explain how each public space within the study area has been transformed. The first of the spaces that will be discussed is the Freedom Square Park and taxi rank.

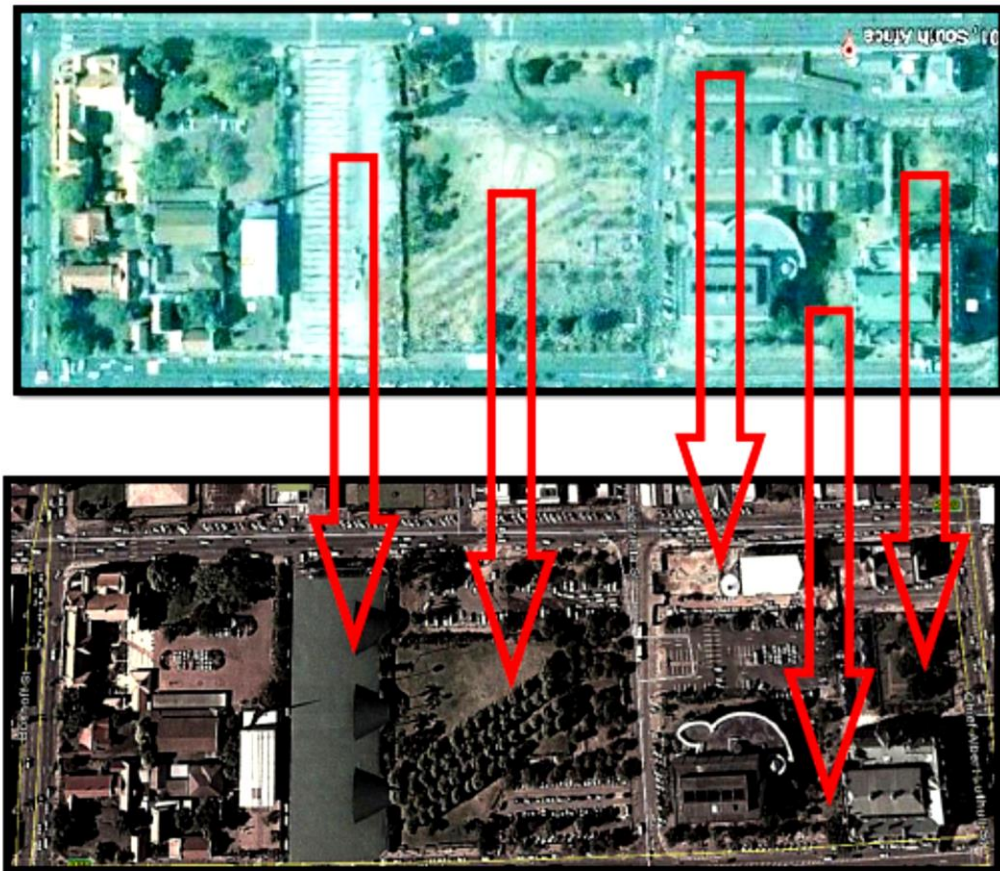


Figure 3: The transformations of the Study Area from 2006-2013 (Google, 2013)

5.1.1 Freedom Square Park and the new taxi rank

The location of the new taxi rank used to be Administrators Walk. This was a Public Open Space which was a tarred street that served as a thoroughfare between Langalibalele and Church Streets. It was one of the borders of Freedom Square Park. Another transformation in the function of Administrators Walk was the relocation of informal traders from the Freedom Square precinct into the inside of the new taxi rank. No hawkers are allowed to be housed outside the area designated for traders inside the taxi rank (as is illustrated by Figure 4 which is placed outside the new taxi rank).



Figure 4: No hawkers allowed (Source: Author).

The traders were moved so that they could be regulated and allow the Freedom Square Park to be vegetated as stated by the Manager for Economic Development and growth:

“What we did is that we moved traders on the square into an organised trading area. And we also moved all of the taxis that were all over the place into this facility. Then we fenced the square and re-grassed it in anticipation for the next phase. The main change over the last ten years is that the access to Freedom Square has become problematic because of the large number of informal traders that were occupying the square illegally in a sense. The traders were not regulated and it was chaotic and the Freedom Square Master plan showed that we needed to reclaim that part of the square for the use of the public”

The intention behind the move was not only to regulate the informal traders on Freedom Square park but also as a means to create order from the apparent chaos resulting from the lack of co-ordination between taxis and informal traders in the same space. The consequence is a relatively well-structured environment (Figure 5 and 6)



Figure 5: Inside the taxi rank-labelled taxi bays (Source: Author).



Figure 6: Orderly layout of the stalls inside the taxi rank (Source: Author).

Most of the activity that occurred on Freedom Square Park has been transferred into the new taxi rank, but the park is still eventful in its own right. Even though Freedom Square Park has been fenced off to allow the grass to vegetate, the entrance gate is open for those who use the parking within the Park's premises. This has allowed homeless children to smoke glue freely on the premises and the washing of taxis from water collected from the toilets housed within the taxi rank. It now looks quite messy and there is a lot of litter-mostly take away containers and newspapers (Figure 7).

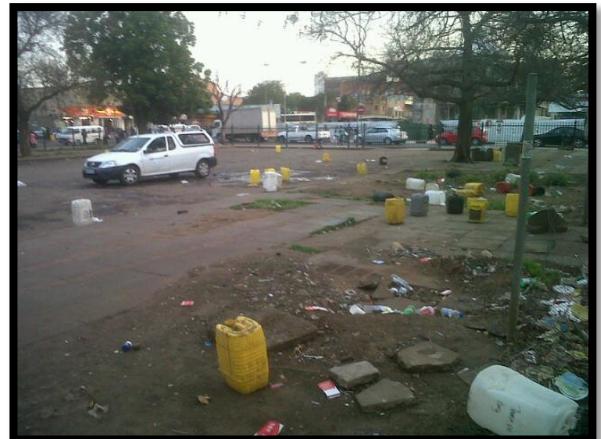


Figure 7: Taxi washing and the resultant mess (Source: Author).

A couple chatting casually in the Freedom Square Park also shared this sentiment when they had this to say about how the park had changed

“(NM) It never used to be like this in this park.

(AM)The dirt in this place is caused by the people who come and hang out here only to find that they are smoking or doing other unsavoury things and no one is watching them so they throw everything on the floor.

(NM) The other people have turned it into a place to drink alcohol and they leave bottles here and contribute to the mess”

From this it is evident that people are discouraged by socially unacceptable behaviour and a dirty environment. This also have an influence on the use of the space. The next subsection documents the transformation of the park outside the town library.

5.1.2 Library Park

The park outside the Town library also changed. Its landscaping was improved, trees and shrubs were planted, public furniture and a water feature were installed and it was fenced off. It is now closed to members of the public after 17:00 on weekdays and all day on weekends. Some people would still like to use it even then as a user exclaims

“Sometimes they close this place up so we can’t always use it. I didn’t know this place until recently. I knew the other one. (*points to Carbineer Gardens*).”

Therefore, although the time of use is restricted and controlled, the revitalised space provides an array of activities and opportunities for interaction (Figure 8) that were not available before



Sitting



Resting



Walking



Studying

Figure 8: Uses of the park (Source: Author).

This park has become better managed and maintained thus making it more popular and attractive for a variety of park users. The next sub-section addresses the changes in what will be the new Tourism Hub

5.1.3 Tourism Hub

The Tourism Hub was under construction during the time that the study was done. The plot where the Hub will be located used to be a bus stop where commuters would wait for metered taxis, buses and kombis. It has now been transformed to create a three-storey Tourism Hub to serve PMB and extended KZN Midlands (Figure 9-10). Essentially, the vision of the project is to create a bus stop with facilities for agents and tour operating companies. A fully fledged Information Centre for Pietermaritzburg as a whole and regional Tourism Offices.

These changes have made some metered taxi drivers nervous because the green benches located in this area were the prime spot for any person who wanted to get a metered taxi to anywhere in Pietermaritzburg as demonstrated below:

Cab / metered taxi driver:

“CD) that’s not good. When people stayed there and relaxed and took a break and hid under the shelter when it’s hot or raining, they also used to wait for us. Business has gone down drastically.”

The impact on the changes on the use of space is predicted to undermine business for the metered fare taxi drivers. Their customer base was predominantly made up from members of the public that used the benches meet, sit and wait. The last public open space to be documented is the Carbineers Garden.



Figure 9: Metered taxis and people wait at the bus stop November 2012 (Google Earth: 2013)



Figure 10: Tourism Hub under construction August 2013 (Google Earth: 2013)

5.1.4 Carbineers Memorial Garden of Peace

The Carbineers Memorial Garden of Peace was upgraded to celebrate different religions and the ideals of democracy as captured by the foundation stone (figure 11) found in the park

“The Carbineer’s GARDEN OF PEACE This foundation stone was unveiled on the tenth anniversary of South Africa’s democracy 27 April 2004 by His Worship the Mayor of the Msunduzi Municipality, Councillor G.H.Zondi, to honour the sacrifices made in striving for equality and liberty, and the attainment of peace in our country.”



Figure 11: Foundation stone in Carbineers Garden of Peace (Source: Author)

This park has had extensive renovation including two new plaques, new street furniture and landscaping. The gardens have subsequently been closed due to misconduct as summarised by the Strategic Manager for Economic Development and Growth:

“We had a control issue there and we’re trying to sort things out. All these young people are coming there and it’s becoming a booze area and it’s not nice near the City Hall and bottles and paper all over the place so there is a management issue that we’re trying to sort out”

This reflects the discomfort with the use of the space and the perception that increased management and control is needed to regulate the use of the area. These changes have various implications for planning and design in terms of enabling greater diversity and access to opportunities.

5.2 The implications are for urban planning and design in the city in terms of the promotion of greater diversity and access to opportunities for all urban residents

The transformations of all five of the public open spaces that are explored by this report have benefited from the renewal of the Central Business District of Pietermaritzburg. They are smaller scale projects that make up the city’s overall drive to visually reclaim its capital status. Freedom square is the centrepiece where it all comes together.

The Taxi Rank has become a melting pot of cultures. It is place where a place where; young professionals meet informal traders, teenage taxi conductor talk to the passengers that are middle-aged mothers and the high school pupil takes a taxi with a pensioner. Even though access to it is open to anyone during the day, its shuts down at 19:00. The gates are locked and the lights are turned off. No one can enter. This is in contrast with its past when anyone could go there freely whenever they wanted to when it was Administration Avenue. On the one hand it has created opportunities for the informal traders who made it into the sheltered stalls whilst simultaneously excluding those who did

not. The traders who were formerly operating from Freedom Square Park have also faced forced removals that have benefited those who were moved into the taxi rank and devastated those that had nowhere to turn

The Freedom Square Park was originally an open space from where informal traders used to sell their goods. It was initially open to the public at any time of the day. When the revitalisation project was initiated, it became fenced off to allow it to vegetate. The informal traders were moved inside an area in the taxi rank to control where they traded from and clear up the Freedom Square Park. The informal traders cannot trade as they please because the taxi rank opens and closes at specific times of the day. Their clientele are not only people that come to town but mostly those that use the public transport housed within the Taxi Rank. It has shrunk. This is detrimental to business because Sherer, (2006:19) is of the opinion that the pedestrian traffic from well-developed, properly managed public open spaces is what draws traders (formal and informal). The Piazza that is planned is specifically designed for tourists. So a more diverse group of urban users is anticipated. They are expected to be varied by their nationality, race, age, gender, and so forth. This would enhance the opportunities for business that are around this area. This is unlike the Library which is one of the most diverse open spaces within the Study Area

Library Park is only open during the week. It is serene and well managed. It is frequented on weekdays during lunchtimes. It is only open during business hours (8:00 to 5:00) after which its gate is locked. This denies the public their Constitutional right to public open spaces stipulated by the conditions of section 24. It has a very diverse age group range and FET students, working population, lower income contractors and informal traders. It is planned and designed to accommodate the younger age group because it is located next to the library. Its engaging design draws people in even though its access is limited to business hours during the week. This would probably also be the case once the Tourism Hub is opened.

The Tourism Hub was once a public open space that was used by people to wait for buses, taxis, metered taxis and each other. Informal traders also frequented it because there was a wide customer base. It had unrestricted access for anyone at any time. The typology of Public open spaces created by CSIR, (2005:2) identifies public transport stops/station as a place for those waiting for buses and taxi which can also become informal trade areas and places for people to meet. The proposed Tourism Hub will be open only during normal business hours. It has been planned specifically for those who can afford the facilities that will be housed within it. It will exclude people through governance (rules and times) and physical measures (fees, and barriers to entry), identified by Spocter, (2005:10) as common way to privatise spaces. The opportunities for informal traders and metered cab drivers have been severely restricted and will be transferred into the hands of those who own and operate the Tourism Hub. There is no doubt about who will benefit from the Tourism Hub and who will not. It has been planned specifically for those who can afford the facilities that will be housed within it and thus limiting the access to the general public by reducing the diverse group of users that frequented the bus stop. The future of the Carbineers Memorial Gardens of Peace on the other hand, is still uncertain

Carbineers Memorial Garden of Peace had many great intentions behind its creation. The Municipality has closed it unofficially with restricting tape until further notice. It became a place where high school pupils would go to drink, drugs were sold, littering and public indecency occurred. The Municipality had problems controlling the area and its users. Its access has been limited now even though previously it was created for the leisure of the citizens of Pietermaritzburg. There can be no access or opportunities afforded to urban residents while this is the case.

As each of these spaces are being privatised at varying degrees, their accessibility is becoming limited only to certain groups. The altering of the nature and function of the selected Public Open Spaces has

various implications for the promotion of greater diversity and access to opportunities for all urban residents.

Planning for public open spaces needs to respond to the needs of the people that use them. It is no mean task to ascertain how diverse user groups will engage with the spaces provided for them. One of the most important lessons that can be learnt from observations in these particular spaces is that monitoring is essential. The spaces that have limited access are the most pleasant and receive positive feedback from users and managers (taxi rank and library park public open space). On the other hand, those spaces where the public can roam freely any time have become derelict and have resulted with some (Carbineers Memorial Garden) even eventually being shut down. Even though the public have a right to these public open spaces, they tend to abuse the right of others to enjoy them through vandalism. Providing the well-developed and maintained spaces is not enough and for the sake of ensuring the environmental rights of users, urban planning and design should make amends to reach a middle ground.

6. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

Other authors have looked at the importance of public open spaces for cultural and social expressions and how accessibility is pivotal for the rate of inception of democracy (Shackleton & Blair, 2013; Williams, 2000;), fear, anxiety and reactions to urban spatial change created by increase in urban street traders (Popke & Ballard, 2004); privatisation of neighbourhoods through closures (Spoceter, 2005), and comparison of the provision of public green space in suburbs categorised by wealth and race (McConnachie, Shackleton, 2010). Even though these studies provide a meaningful contribution to understanding dynamics between democracy and public open spaces in a South African context, none have documented the specific transformation of public open spaces in the Central Business District of a smaller city or specifically investigated the implications for future urban planning and design in terms of the promotion of greater diversity and access to opportunities for all urban residents.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As mentioned in the introduction, great places develop over time and go through many changes that influence its use and meaning. This has also been evident from the discussion of the central spaces in Pietermaritzburg around Freedom Square Park. The Freedom Square Park was originally a free market. In modern times it became a park that is open to informal traders, and the public at large. Recently it was fenced off and the taxis and informal traders were relocated inside the new taxi rank. Park users found their way back into the park. This has resulted in the rundown state of the park because there is no supervision. The new taxi rank is on the site of the Administrators Walk/Avenue. This was one of the borders of Freedom Square Park and a thoroughfare connecting Church and Langalibalele Streets. The Library Park generally had positive feedback. The only shortcomings pointed out were the lack of shelter and its closure on weekends. This space had been extensively transformed via landscaping, fencing and street furniture. The Tourism Hub has replaced the bus stop and there are suspicions that it will undermine the metered fare taxis because it is located where they got most of their business. The Carbineers Memorial Gardens of Peace was upgraded to celebrate various elements of the diversity within South Africa (ethnicity, religion) but soon became derelict.

From this it is evident that there have been many positive physical changes in the various spaces that contributed to the changing nature of these spaces. In addition the uses within these spaces also changed, for example the relocation of taxis and informal traders and finally, the users also changed based on the changing nature of the facilities such as the removal of benches and the erection of a new building. These actions have a number of implications for planning and development in terms of promoting greater diversity and increased opportunities for all urban residents. On the one hand the findings indicated that the use of a specific space in a certain way by specific users, for example in Freedom Park, can lead to a lack of ownership of the park and general dereliction. This, combined with under-management and the

perception of no control, can become a concern for other users seeking order and a well-maintained environment. Eventually, this can give rise to many people choosing not to use these spaces anymore and thus limit the diversity within the space. On the other hand, over-management and excessive control can lead to the partial privatisation of public open spaces and restricted use, for example the Library Park and the Carbineers Memorial Gardens of Peace. As a result, these spaces are not completely free to use anytime of the day anymore, which may be of a concern to some users as indicated in the discussion. Ironically, however, these spaces are pleasant, well-maintained and provide a high quality of space.

It therefore raises a dilemma for future planning and the management of spaces in the city in terms of the extent to which spaces should be regulated and controlled, as well as how to facilitate the transformation or modification of space. There is a need for open, accessible public spaces that should facilitate democratic activity and allow for greater diversity and opportunities in the city. This may however, discourage some members of society to use these spaces if they are not maintained regularly, leading to neglected or lost spaces, which does not foster diversity in any case. At the other extreme is the privatisation of public space through control and regulation which restrict access at certain times and hence the constitutional right of people to open space at all times. This is not only a concern in South Africa, but also internationally. It therefore calls for planners and designers to try and find a middle path where all people would still be welcome at different times, but with a clear understanding by users that greater tolerance also means respect for the space and other users in terms of activities. This needs to be combined by regular maintenance and a presence of guardians of spaces to encourage general good behaviour. In the meantime, as public spaces in South Africa and specifically these historically meaningful spaces in Pietermaritzburg are still looking for a balance between under- and over controlled spaces, the aim of greater diversity across a wide spectrum of users may remain elusive for some time to come. Therefore, while at some level they can be considered to be great spaces, a few challenges remain regarding greater social inclusion and tolerance.

8. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Even though the study was limited by the unwillingness of some people to participate, time constraints and lack of access to key documents, some interesting findings were made.

9. FURTHER RESEARCH

This study indicated that there is a need for planners and designers to try and find a middle path in terms of management and regulation in order to avoid the decline and dereliction and thus retreat from many people from these lost spaces and on the other hand to avoid the excessive privatisation of public spaces that would ultimately restrict free use at all times and exclude some parts of society. Future research should investigate what such a middle path would mean in terms of specific planning approaches and measures of regulation.

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