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Laurent Lescop

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## LAURENT LESCOP

Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'architecture de Nantes, France

### LIVING IN A HARBOUR – NANTES (FR) FROM CRANES TO ELEPHANT

**Abstract:** In Nantes, the last shipyard closed in 1986 leaving the city in a desperate situation. The cranes, symbolizing the industrial activity, one by one stopped. Unemployment stroked. The question was between turning the page, tearing down the workshops and reinventing a new story or trying to preserve would appear to most of the population, a kind of modern bulky legacy.

In the early 2000's, the revitalization of Nantes' former industrial area, led to developing a new way thinking. Instead of designing an urban map with major spots and rows of housing, A. Chemetoff thought better to draw an urban landscape where the past could mix with the future. The industrial heritage has been then preserved in two different ways: construction halls have been reshaped preserving the original structure, everything should be reversed. The intangible heritage, meaning worker's knowledge, has been reinvested in the cultural industry. This way, the image of the city, its brand, moved from industrial to cultural, attracting a new kind of business, mainly high-tech, students, in a new: "art de Vivre" (Art of living).

**Keywords:** Cranes, heritage, the image of the city, the revitalization.

#### 1. Fiction to understand reality

For a long time, the identity of Nantes was difficult to picture. It's a harbour, but far from the sea, it's a river that everybody fears of, it's a bridge city, connecting two regions, but only develops towards the north, it was a huge urban area, with a void in its centre. Nantes is a threshold: a threshold between Brittany and France, between North and South, between the saltwater and freshwater, slate and tile. Sixty kilometres away from the sea, Nantes is the birth city of Jules Verne who was dreaming of distant adventures when looking sea boats cruising to the ocean (Photo 1).

To understand the image of a city, the ambiance, one can look at postcards, tourist guides or cinema. Cinema is a good way to see how a city is perceived from a cinematographer point of view, it often reflects what is really in the air, positive or not. Let's take Rome, for instance, after the war, it was a desperate city and films like *Roma città aperta* (Roberto Rossellini 1945) or *Ladri di biciclette* (Vittorio De Sica



Photo 1. View of the former harbour

Photo L. Lescop.

1948) show a postwar Rome of poverty and violence. In *Roman Holiday* (William Wyler 1953), the atmosphere is lighter, the sun shines, the characters ride through famous places. Woody Allen in *To Rome with Love* (2012) shows the eternal city, it's a tourist postcard, an open-air museum. France is also a beloved destination for films and often a romantic place for foreign filmmakers. If Nantes is not as famous as Paris or Nice or Marseille for filmmaking, it's about 20 films that were shot since the end of the Second World War. Famous movies like *Lola* or *une chambre en ville* by Jacques Demy, created a fictional reality that visitors wanted to experiment. "Lola" filmed in 1961 shows Nantes as a city of cranes, with a strong shipyard and a dense industrial activity. Docks are full of strong guys, ready for a fight, prostitutes and lost girls. The harbour is certainly not the place to walk the dog (Photo 2).

In 1982, Jacques Demy, who, by the way, was born in Nantes, shot *Une Chambre en Ville*. The action is set in 1955 and it shows labourers wondering about their future. But in 1982, part of this future is already known, and the iconic *Transporter Bridge*, destroyed in 1958, is recreated with a glass shot, [Aumont, Daguin 1998] a matte painting. Nantes is characterized by its cranes, the shipyard, and the workers.



Photo 2. "Lola"

Photo J. Demy 1961.

In 1986, the last shipyard closed, leaving the once affluent city, even if its wealth did come from the slave trade, in a desperate state [Barrau, Wester 1998]. The city had lost its identity, which was only boosted up once in a while with its football team. Five years later, French director Jean-Loup Hubert, filmed *La Reine Blanche* with Catherine Deneuve. The action takes place on the south bank of the river Loire, in a small village called Trentemoult. In this film, everybody can feel the profound nostalgia of a lost era when Nantes was a dominating place. This nostalgia is shown with the silhouette of distant, unreachable cranes, on the other side of the stream. Ten years after, in 2001, Pascal Thomas shows a quite different interpretation of Nantes in *Mercredi, Folle journée!* The city is active, modern, characters are using public transportation. They are moving fast from place to place. But still, cranes remain as a leitmotiv, like the skeletons of ancient monsters, rising their tusks up to the sky. Cranes appear in this film bigger than in reality, they can be seen from any place.

Since 2000, cranes and former shipyards have been little by little replaced by more contemporary scenic places with recent buildings and contemporary references. What happened meanwhile?

## 2. Urban planning vs. landscape planning

1989 saw Jean-Marc Ayrault, the newly elected mayor, set up a competition to encourage the rebuild of the city centre, but the city was still feeling very nostalgic. The winning team succeeded in bringing new ideas, including the reduction in the number of cars, dimming of street lights and converting large areas to grass and parkland.

In its past history, Nantes was divided into several islands, scattered east/west by the river Loire and split by the river Erdre coming from the north and joining the Loire in perpendicular. Little by little, the islands were merged, drawing a more linear river-bank. In the 20th century, the last branches were filled as well as the river Erdre, leaving huge empty spaces, taken by cars as roads, streets or car-parks. Little by little, cars fled the city centre. As a result, spatial divisions caused social partitions (Fig. 1).

In December 1992, architect Dominique Perrault conducted an exploratory study and drawn major principles of intervention in the city of Nantes [Perrault, Grether

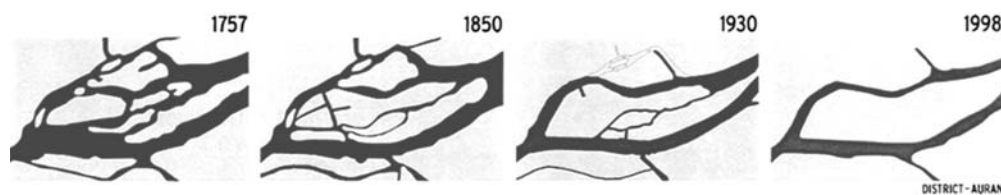


Figure 1. Transformations of the Isle of Nantes

Source: Distric AURAN, Nantes.



Photo 3. Before the filling of the Erdre

Source: „Nantes la Jolie” des Editions D’Orbestiers, coll. particulières, Jean-Claude et Annick Lemoine.

1992]. In his chapter called. “Method”, the architect considers unrealistic to establish a general plan for the development of a vast territory. Interventions must register *different and concurrent* topics without hierarchy. He suggested promoting new installations, connections, and participation. Before 2000, Nantes didn’t develop by strata, by layer, with a new sheet covering an old one. Each period had conquest a new territory developed it or abandoned it. This resulted in a very strong sectorization with virtually sealed borders and striking contrasts of scale. As a consequence, industrial sites, located in the inner centre of the island of Nantes, turned to lost areas, dangerous zones. It was a dead spot in the very centre of the city (Photos 3-5).

Let’s understand the situation. In the western part of the island, huge industries left big empty spaces. In the centre part, old housing was held by poor families and in the eastern part, new housing seemed so desperate that the only wish there, was to leave as soon as possible. The island was cut into three parts by a large and fast motorway that brought people living in the south part of the city directly in the centre. Perrault’s answer was too vague about what to do with this bulky industrial past and out of date Urbanism. We’ve seen that cinema showed Nantes as a city of cranes. For the inhabitants, the image



Photo 4. Before the renovation, the flow of cars

Source: Nantes Passion, Ville de Nantes (Photos 4 and 5).



Photo 5. Today’s situation

of their own city was more blurry. A large investigation has been made in order to determine the way to the Island of Nantes was perceived [TMO-*Régions* 1998]. As a matter of surprise, a great majority didn't know that the Island is *one* island. A lot of people thought that it was still a collection of small islands as Neighborhoods' names suggest it. In the surveys, somebody said that he cannot walk the dog around the island, so it can't be true. The eastern part of the Island is called Beaulieu. It's an important dwelling area. For three-quarters of the inhabitants, it was a transitory place and 70 % of them were moving away within a period of six months. As often advocate architects, offices were mixed with a housing as a result of a feeling of not being in a private area.

### 3. A great upturn

But in the 1990's saw a great upturn in Nantes. It didn't with standard solutions in the economy, but from the world of the art. Between 1990 and 1995 the artist group "Les Allumés" annually lit up the city's nights [Saranga 1993], with the first event running from 15th to 20th October 1990. Dreamt up by Jean Blaise, this free, open-air, the theatrical festival was designed to "invite" a foreign city to Nantes, that first year being Barcelona. Storytelling, concerts and plays, were performed all over the city turning Nantes into an exhilarating place. The following years saw Saint Petersburg, Buenos Aires, Napoli and Cairo on the guest list. Great artists also joined the festival, exhibiting all over the city in venues ranging from large hall to small bars, in the open air and in private houses. The classical music festival "La Folle Journée" was also organized in the same manner, and brought top quality concerts to large audiences.

The idea of promoting street theatre as a way to get people of different ages, interests and education levels together then followed. The theatrical company "Royal de Luxe" established in 1978 in the south of France took, in 1990, Nantes by storm with a thunderous parade of the "History of France". Dozens of actors in costumes paraded through the city on large carnival floats, with huge mechanical sets, blasting objects, creating smoke in the streets, shouting and cheering. The success of the parade was considerable and there was no question that the company was now part of the renewal of the city, and the residents gladly took ownership of it all.

In 2007, Jean Blaise remembers those years and says: "A few cities have used, as Nantes did, culture as a lever for economic development. It's a real challenge that is today a success. We bet on the international and the unusual, with symptomatic events symbolizing the mutation of the city like "Les Allumés". The National press followed with enthusiasm. Within a year, the image of the town as radically changed. Major artists like "Royal de Luxe", choreographer like Claude Brumachon, have arrived. "Play it like in Nantes" means that demanding and singular artistic forms are shown, but always, with the idea to please the public. For instance, we gave the opportunity to provide in Nantes, many occasions to rediscover their industrial heritage, but also new settlements

like the “Ile de Nantes”. Culture as well as economic development and social binding, but also a way to conquer unexpected places. In the “Lieu unique”, we welcome no less than 490,000 visitors every year, without the great festival, just with a collection of tiny events. We also shelter artists. With the Biennale “Estuaire 2007”, we want to achieve a territorial project, creating a large single entity from Nantes to Saint-Nazaire. This territory is already an economic reality. However, the inhabitants not yet appropriated the banks of the Loire. The estuary, home place of major industries that have contributed to the economic development, will now be given to pedestrians<sup>1</sup>”.

As we can see, at the dawn of 2000, Nantes was dealing with a serious urban problem. As we saw in the corpus of films, the main cultural heritage was an industrial site: the harbour, which was, at that moment, closed. The knowledge, the identity, even the landscape of cranes, ships and workshops was lost, wiped away by the mid-eighties crisis. In 1999, the city of Nantes launched another huge competition to rethink the former harbour area and all districts now known as the “Ile de Nantes”. Despite recommendations from economists urging to follow the Bilbao example, the chosen solution preserved a “low profile” approach with slow improvements rather than building a huge complex to be a symbol of the city. The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, designed by Canadian-American architect Frank Gehry was inaugurated on October 1997. Since then, industrial reconversion, cultural developments bound with economic improvements seemed to have a magic recipe: a huge, spectacular building, a nice area around to spend money and great names from the world of art and creation. This way of thinking has been rejected in Nantes, for philosophical reasons, but also for economic considerations: the risk of paying an expensive building with no certainty on economic sustainability was unacceptable in the context of job loss. The winning team, led by Alexandre Chemetoff, suggested, in a first draft, that he would work as an archaeologist searching for hidden tracks of the recent past. His design preserved the ancient industrial buildings as well as local knowledge.

#### 4. The Island

For this competition, three teams of architects were selected: Labfac, Bruno Fortier and Chemetoff. Labfac designed a green sinusoid and Bruno Fortier a green promenade. *We must give to the Isle of Nantes a strong image, a contemporary image, at the metropolitan level*, said Fortier. He thought of building a vast museum, reflecting what was done in Bilbao, giving the city a major attraction centre within a green area.

A. Chemetoff went a totally different way. In this project, the island is divided between public and private spaces and shared between the “River Island” and the “Sea Island” areas. Chemetoff submitted as “game rule” through a “Plan-Guide” that will allow stakeholders, public or private, understand and appropriating the overall

<sup>1</sup> Jean Blaise, l’« allumé » nantais, Lesechos.fr • Le 14 mars 2007.

project. The main problem in Nantes, and especially in this area is that the historical value of the urban spaces and buildings are not obvious (Fig. 2).

No specific architecture, no spectacular constructions that would need to be preserved. Long discussions were held between the architect and local associations on what to keep and what to transform. In the end, everybody went to the conclusion to see in this area the ground of *intangible heritage* composed of knowledge, small histories and a specific way of life. The challenge was to convert it into urban design. First, A. Chemetoff worked on the visual aspect of his drawings. He took the look and feel of city maps that everybody can find at the tourist office. By this, one can have the belief that the project is already done. Then, his main concept was a division of spaces. The industrial area is characterized by vast plots that are not urban scaled. He redrew streets, places, esplanades. For him, no matter those spaces would become, it's just a question of the private/public area. Chemetoff then worked as an archaeologist, tracking all tangible remains of the recent past, to preserve them. He, of course, also protected the cranes as symbolic landmarks of the former harbour. Some industrial buildings are chosen to be renovated. The structure is preserved, the rest is destroyed. New parts are designed to be easily removed. Nothing should last.

The first idea was to develop a kind of business incubators for biotech. The concept was in the air and even if it wasn't rooted to anything in this area, it sounded nice for reborn of the industry. The problem was the loss of the intangible heritage and cutting the roots from the previous activities. Meanwhile, the great popular success from the big parades of the giants led Chemetoff to think of a new kind of continuity. Workers from the harbour could carry on working, in the same workshops, doing the same kind of activities but on a completely different purpose. Instead of building ships, they could construct a giant elephant.



Figure 2. Plan-guide  
Source: [Chemetoff 2010].



## 5. A Giant wooden Elephant and Giant Little Girl

In 2005 the most impressive image of all was created with the arrival of the giant puppets: the Little Girl and the sultan Prince and his Elephant. It is difficult to imagine how the most amazing feeling could be conjured up by a giant puppet, but seeing an Elephant, as tall as the tallest building in the city, walk through the narrow streets amongst stunned crowds is something that cannot be forgotten. Its success was so immense, the love of the city residents so deep for these puppets and their creators, that has completely rejuvenated the city.

Following the regeneration of Bilbao, with its iconic museum, it was possible to imagine that culture could add value to a city looking for a second wind. In the early years of the new century, the growing use of the internet and computers have brought prosperity and economic growth to the city of Nantes. But it also turned out that street theatre, and particularly the wooden Elephant, has encouraged more people to visit Nantes, some even to stay, and the residents to love their city. This, in turn, has improved the economy with the influx of new talents (Photo 6).

During the mid-2000's, the theatrical production company *La Machine*, split from the *Royal de Luxe* and built a new Elephant which became the emblem of Nantes. This Elephant, designed not as a piece of art, but as a walking building, totally changed the way of urban thinking. In a way, the Bilbao effect came not from a huge iconic museum, but from a giant wooden Elephant, dragging tourists and residents to a part of Nantes that was, not long ago, seen as a "no-go" area. After the elephant, artist and designer François Delarozière conceived many mechanical creatures, some for Nantes, some for parades, and some for other cities.



Photo 6. The first elephant

Photo: Mairie de Nantes.

It's always surprising, to see such an urban project and believe that cultural and industrial heritage could be worked that way. Heritage can be seen as buildings, and Nantes kept the main landmarks to recall the past history. Heritage is also intangible like folk traditions, food and so on. In Nantes, heritage, finally, is not the exact preservation of what was there, but how it makes possible to write a new story, without destroying what was there before, but by overcoming the old ways. The success created perplexity and interrogations. One spoke about *the Nantes process*, and studies were launched to dissect this process. But nothing was written or formalized before. What is being implemented at the urban level, is also at the architectural level, from sketch to completion, each small box comes to take his place on the layout. Chemetoff said he left a blur document on which he gradually focusses. The more the image is sharp, the more one sees details, better understands the nuances. It is a powerful concept, that of 'living logic'. Chemetoff said: *all work on the city requires you to accept a part in uncertainty, it's the same when you plant a tree. You choose a location, you choose an essence, but you don't know exactly how it will grow. A city is a tree, it is alive.*

In ten years, the city of Nantes has radically changed its image. To achieve that, it needed a lot of new images to be created. In the early 21st century, the new paradigm for a city is to be able to generate a tremendous amount of visuals that would be spread through the web. When Jean-Marc Ayrault has been elected as Mayor of Nantes, the city was covering from its past that was well identified by cinema: a skyline of motionless cranes, still as the city was. But then came to the street theatre pushing people outside their home, bringing them new dreams, new visions. By opening a competition on this wide urban wasteland, Jean-Marc Ayrault understood that a link could be made between urban design and street theatre, a new direction could be followed.

The inhabitants of Nantes become familiar with bold shapes, modern architectures and even adopt a wooden elephant around which they flock in mass on Sundays and public holidays. Have we forgotten the cranes, certainly a bit, they are heritage, they denote the harbour from the past or a Steampunk image accompanying the mechanical creatures? The island of Nantes took its autonomy and is no longer the bulky part of the city, but rather the opposite, it becomes its motor, its inspiration. Ten years and one struggles to imagine that this place could be otherwise, old images become blurred, fade, one could hardly remember what was there before the elephant station, before the renewal. The city of cranes, Nantes became a city of the elephant, before the industrial city, it became a city of culture.

## 6. Transposition?

Is this experience suitable for other cities? Can it be applied elsewhere in France, Europe or China? Bordeaux, Nantes' great rival, moved in the same way, developing what we could now call a *narrative urban design*. Close to Nantes, La Roche Sur Yon



Photo 7. The new elephant

Photo: L. Lescop.

called Chemetoff to repeat his “method” on a very controversial site. Chemetoff asked François Delarozière, the creator of the elephant to imagine a story that would be told all along the works. Delarozière designed mechanical creatures, just like the elephant that the public can operate. This fantastic world of mechanical animals travels around the world. It started with a giant spider in Liverpool in 2008, the Aeroflorale in 2010, in Dessau and last year, Long Ma Jing Shen – the spirit of the Horse-Dragon, in Beijing, China. We can imagine that those fantastic creatures, as they did in Nantes, could help to connect past history, heritage issues and contemporary questions on development, sustainability and well-being (Phots. 7 and 8).

As a matter of fact, the main question becomes “what is heritage?” In Europe, the main answer has been to freeze things and turn them into a dead object state. An-



Photo 8. Long Ma Jing Shen – the spirit of the Horse-Dragon, in Beijing, China

Photo: Emmanuel Bourgeau/Ambassade de France en Chine.

cient cities transformed into open-air museums as well as former industrial sites. This model has been massively exported to the rest of the world. Problem is, in many countries, this excluded people from places they used to live. The next idea was also to protect the intangible. Now, UNESCO/ICOMOS is looking for new ways to bringing back life, art, creation, inventiveness into places that have to be protected for what they hold, but also for what they represent and for the feeling of wellness everyone can have when visiting them.

Art has become a consideration in city development. Just like Montreal, the beating heart of the city of Nantes is now the *Quartier de la Création*, meaning the *Area of Creativity*. Schools of art, architecture, design, fashion, dance and cinema, located there, attract engineers, scientists of all kinds, philosophers. The word “Quartier” can also be understood as “village”. The western part of the Island of Nantes would be a village dedicated to creation. That’s a very interesting way to rebuild a story on the remains of the past, to start a new era.

The last question is: what remains of the former harbour in Nantes? As a matter of fact, as no real naval activities are held in the city itself. The city has been reshaped by cultural and high-valued industries and the shipyards have completely moved to Saint-Nazaire on the estuary end. It’s in a way a clean cut between white and blue collars also witnessing a new territorial segregation.

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## LOUIS DU PLESSIS

Durban University of Technology,  
Republic of South Africa

### DURBAN'S WATERFRONT EDGE – A COMMENTARY ON ITS 'SENSE OF PLACE'

**Abstract:** The water's edge is the most iconic and identifiable image related to the city of Durban and in seeking an 'authenticity' that typifies the built fabric of the city, the image that this place creates is arguably the answer. Since its formal establishment as a settlement in 1824, this edge has been a primary element in the urban fabric. Development of the space has been fairly incremental over the last two centuries, starting with colonial influenced built interventions, but much of what is there currently stems from the 1930's onwards, leading to a Modernist and later Contemporary sense of place that is moderated by regionalist influences, lending itself to creating a somewhat contextually relevant image. This 'international yet local' sense of place is however under threat from the increasingly prominent 'global' image of a-contextual glass high-rise towers placed along a non-descript public realm typical of global capital interests that is a hallmark of the turnkey project trends by developers from the East currently sweeping the African continent.

**Keywords:** Authenticity of image, city image, Durban Waterfront, sense of place.

#### Introduction

The seven kilometre long stretch of beach adjacent to the Central Business District (CBD), known as the *Golden Mile*, has seen much infrastructural and development investment over its history since it was the site of the original small trading settlement established in 1824. From this settlement based on the waterfront edge, the city itself has now grown into a metropolitan city of 3.5 million inhabitants that encompasses approximately 2300 square kilometres. Unlike numerous 'historic' cities across the globe, Durban's founding in 1824 means that the development has been shaped overwhelmingly by the initial Colonial and Industrialisation influences, then modernist and post-modernist influences and now seems set to be influenced by global capital influences.

With the city classified as having a humid subtropical climate, the hot and humid summers in conjunction with the mild winters makes the *Golden Mile* one of South

Africa's most popular year-round seaside attractions. It is Durban's most recognised urban feature and arguably one of the most prominent aspects that defines the character of the city. This paper examines the urban edge to the ocean of Durban, South Africa and highlights the aspect of urban 'character' and 'sense of place' as it relates to distinctive nodes along this area and also discusses this in terms of development through time.

The structure of the paper will briefly look at the historical development of the city, then of two distinctive areas of development of this waterfront edge, namely the Point district and the Beachfront. It will then move on to discussing recent development proposals in the area. Following that, it will give a general synopsis on the notion of character and sense of place. This will then be followed by commentary of each node in light of the discussion on character and sense of place.

The separation of the discussion between the two distinctive areas is a result of the Point district being developmentally different from the Beachfront as it is currently in the control of a development company that the city owns 50% shareholding

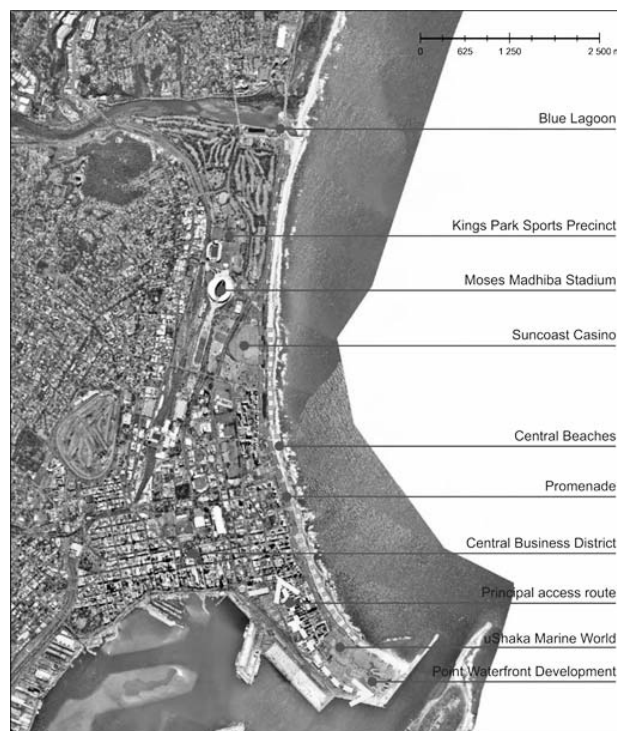


Figure 1. Aerial photograph indicating the 7 kilometre long waterfront edge to the ocean associated with the central part of Durban. Suncoast Casino in the north and uShaka Marine World to the south 'bookend' the central beaches portion of the promenade. This section is mostly referenced in terms of the 'image' of Durban as a city by the sea. Also to note is the topographical spur on which the Point

Waterfront Development is located, having ostensibly only one route of access

Source: Drawn from [Corporate GIS Department 2018].

in and historically due to the predominance of port related activity land ownership of the area. Though both privately developed, the discussion of the Beachfront area will incorporate uShaka Marine World and Suncoast Casino node, as these are specific site based developments and not area based (Fig. 1).

## 1. Background to planning in Durban

Historically, the growth of the city has been concentrated around the port due to this intrinsic link with the port activities and trading. In subsequent years, the infrastructure networks grew outwards with a bias towards the two national roads, namely the N2 running parallel to the coast linking south to north and the N3 running perpendicular to the city centre, linking Durban to the Gauteng province, the major economic hub of South Africa [Breetzke 2009: 5]. Passenger and freight rail does exist, but this is not as developed and reliable, so there is a dependence on vehicles and this is the primary generator of development based on transport.

There are distinctive spatial planning issues based on the racially based laws of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century of the minority government. This has resulted planning processes that are not integrated – non-white population groups were shifted to the urban periphery. The area was therefore reserved for the exclusive use of whites only until the scrapping of the ‘Reservation of Separate Amenities Act’ in 1990. This practically has meant that the beachfront now has far more visitors that it has to cater for after 1990 as it now is a popular destination for all socio-economic groups [Soundspacedesign... 2006: 1].

## 2. Point district

In 1824 European settlers arrived from the Cape and established themselves on a spit of land granted them by the Zulu King Shaka. Notable early developments here include the 1860 opening of South Africa’s first railway line and the erecting of an electric power station for street lighting purposes in 1891. The strategic use of the harbour was further realised through construction of piers and the design and use of a bucket dredger in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The area suffered from urban decay in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a vast quantity of land on the Point was in public (state) ownership and issues of abandonment of space and loss of a sense of ownership that typifies the discussion by Trancik of *Lost Space*. Private enterprise was limited due to the lack of available land, and this resulted in the area containing seemingly sterile and abandoned land due to much of it being in the hands of state entities and being underutilised. This led to the overall stagnation of development in the area. The land in private ownership was used for the proliferation of ‘rooming houses’, hotels and night-spots associated with seafarers. This particular mix of land use for related har-

bour activities led to the Point developing a sordid reputation. Added to this, a single major vehicle traffic arterial linking the area to the CBD frustrates linkages of the area back to the rest of the city (Photo 1).

The need for an urban intervention into the Point Precinct has been well known for decades and various schemes have been presented. In 1965, it was the subject of a dedicated Winter School programme hosted by the then University of Natal. The participants included a panel of regional and international experts in addition to the staff and students. Again, in 1986, a further concerted effort was undertaken by a consortium of architects, urban designers and town planners under appointment from the City Engineer of Durban. During the late 1990s, the city started selling off land in the area in a deliberate attempt to attract private investment and in so doing, regenerate the area. The turnkey project for the node has been the construction of the uShaka Marine World, the 5<sup>th</sup> largest aquarium in the world. It was seen as a development from which the rest of the precinct should develop and was completed in 2004. The developers of the marine park, Moreland Developments, from the outset urged for the context of the whole of the Point to be considered. Though the topography naturally lends itself to the point being treated as a cul-de-sac, the development framework was focussed on the fact that the Point Precinct is an *integral part of the city and its separateness should not be accentuated* [Peters 2008: 3]. The approach was that the precinct should be developed as an urban place.

The area has a mixture of commercial and mixed use functions, but there has been considerable construction of residential properties. Though there has been much uptake of the residential properties, it appears to be mainly speculative in nature. Gross residential density indicates a decline between 2001 and 2011 in the district [Royal... 2013: 16]. This has resulted in a fairly well developed, but fairly sparsely



Photo 1. Circa 1950's historic aerial photograph indicating a large portion of the southern extent of the 7 kilometre long waterfront edge to the ocean associated with the central part of Durban. The Point district with its spatial use being dominated by port activity is in the foreground

Source: [Anon 2009].





Figure 2. Urban plan for the Point Waterfront Development on which much of the early 2000 development is based. The small craft harbour was rather contentious and is yet to be implemented. Current 2017 development images in the public domain do not include this

Source: [Naidoo 2009].

inhabited precinct. The vibrant precinct that was envisaged is yet to materialise due to a lack of inhabitants actually living and utilising the facilities there. In addition, cash flow problems have led to municipal rates being deferred for 10 years initially and again in 2015 for 5 years to enable the development company (of which it is a 50% shareholder) to focus on developing the area [Khoza 2015] (Fig. 2).

### 3. Beachfront development

In the early years of the settlement, ocean bathing and the related functions to that was located within the harbour boundaries but in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this activity relocated to the ocean facing area now occupied by the *Golden Mile*. Notable developments of this ocean facing recreation node include the construction of the Sunken Gardens in 1932, designed by City Engineer's department – this has been retained with the recent upgrades to the area and the 1930's lifesavers tower and semi-circular beach services complex. In the 1940's, there was the construction of the Rachel Finlayson Pool, incorporating a grandstand and lifesavers' pavilion in addition to the Spanish Revival style deck chair storage building at Dairy beach node at the same time. 1950's saw the construction of a soccer stadium, demolished in 2006 to be replaced by the multi-functional 70 000 seater Moses Mabhida Stadium (Fig. 3).

Much of the development of the adjacent high-rise buildings along this edge is influenced by the regional variations of the Modernist approach to building design embraced in South Africa at the time of development. This is in addition to the strong art deco heritage and some union period influences.



Figure 3. View of a section of ocean frontage that was to become the promenade, circa 1932. The sunken gardens are central with lower Marine Parade clearly visible as a vehicular route along the ocean edge

Source: [Hoosen n.d.].

In 1983, the Beachfront underwent major upgrades with Revel Fox & Partners, a Cape Town based firm, acting as planning consultants. The most notable feature is the downgrading of lower Marine Parade Drive from a vehicle roadway to a pedestrian promenade [Peters 2010]. Other particular, yet smaller interventions include the Paddling Pools at Dairy Beach node by Stafford Associated Architects 1985-1987 and the North Beach node by Hallen Theron & Partners in 1981 (Photo 2, Fig. 4).



Photo 2. View of a section of ocean frontage that was to become the promenade, prior to the 1980's major upgrades. The sunken gardens and lower Marine Parade still exist with additional amenities appearing from the time of the 1930's development

Source: [Zigzag 2014].



Figure 4. The 1983 upgrades implemented. The Architectural language of the implemented upgrades and the predominance of the built form of the city behind it is regionally contextualised Modernism

Source: [Revel Fox & Partners 2017].

Subsequent to 1983 upgrades, the beachfront underwent a period of slow decay – this manifested in growing public security concerns, a proliferation of unwanted structures, and a lack of maintenance to existing facilities. Two major phases of development at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were instrumental in revitalising the area, namely the construction of the uShaka Marine World and Suncoast casino from 2000-2004 and the construction of the new Moses Mabhida soccer stadium and promenade upgrades in preparation for the Soccer World Cup in 2010.

In implementing the development plans of the uShaka Marine World (though completed in 2004), which in itself was seen as a turnkey project to the redevelopment of the Point, an additional major entertainment node was also created along the promenade approx. 5 kilometres to the north. Suncoast Casino was constructed between the years 2000-2003, and formed a ‘bookend’ to the promenade. This encouraged patrons to walk between these two major attractions. This bookend approach was later extended with the development of the soccer stadium and surrounding landscaping intervention approximately 1 kilometre further north. Suncoast Casino is based on theme architecture and includes United States based concept architects as part of the team of professionals. It exploits the rich Art Deco Heritage of Durban, albeit in a rather post-modern approach. The Development of the casino complex links a node of major commercial activities with the beachfront in a rather direct fashion with the primary internal commercial spine terminating directly onto the promenade and a dedicated beach [Anon 2003: 12] (Photo 3).

With the awarding of the 2010 Soccer World Cup to South Africa, the construction of the new Moses Mabhida Stadium and associated upgrading of the Beachfront facilities, but this led to the demolition of significant building (such as the old Aquarium, now incorporated into uShaka Marine world, the Ocean Sports Centre, the Lido). The stadium is the central feature of the King’s Park Sports and Recrea-



Photo 3. Aerial view of Suncoast Casino complex with central beaches in background. This ‘theme based’ complex plays the role of a ‘bookend’ to the central beaches portion of the promenade. Clearly visible is the façade design approach that articulates ‘multiple buildings’ along this singular structure

Source: [Sunday Times 2018].

tion Precinct at the northern end of the main beaches of Durban. The Stadium itself includes a popular general recreational space to the immediate south of it as well as staging areas and practice fields. Other facilities in the precinct include the Kings Park Rugby stadium, athletics fields and Swimming pool complex and a commuter rail station to the immediate west. The rail station is conveniently located on a main north-south link, but the dominance of private vehicular use in South Africa necessitated the allocation of extensive amounts of parking. This precinct is the subject of ongoing plans for redevelopment to consolidate, upgrade and extend the existing amenities. The stadium is successfully linked to the beachfront promenade through the inclusion of a pedestrian boulevard and underpass (Photo 4).



Photo 4. A portion of the promenade with newly constructed amenities. The restrained contemporary and contextual approach, palette of materials, and integrated site approach lends itself towards a more successful enhancement of sense of place

Source: [Peters 2010].

The promenade upgrades were done in tandem with the construction of the new stadium in preparation for the Soccer World Cup. According to the lead architectural consulting firm on the project, Michael Todd Architects, the primary developmental objectives of this upgrade was to:

- integrate the central beaches with the entire length of the beachfront
- maximize public access to all the beaches
- promote safety through environmental design
- incorporate strategic dune rehabilitation zones
- promote a healthy lifestyle for the people of Durban [*Michael Tod Architect 2010*].

Concerns that previous beachfront upgrades prior to 2010 allowed vibrant use of the space for special events but did not address the everyday special use have subsequently been addressed by the incorporation of small-scale retailing in the build-up to the 2010 Soccer World Cup hosting. This principally has been through the incorporation of nodes along main beach promenade approx. every 300m, opening up views through appropriate landscaping, removing redundant buildings and encouraging as little solid building mass (aesthetic and for security too). This also took into account the much prized existing views for the buildings located on the CBD side of Marine Parade Drive. The practical design strategies included restricting overall building height along the promenade to below the road level of Marine Parade Drive, orienting them to be perpendicular to promenade, and to incorporate much glass. Landscaping was also planted to keep busy areas as open as possible and provide lawns close to the main swimming beaches.

7 distinctive nodes along the promenade were identified for specific interventions (including node landscaping planning) and were undertaken by different local architects with the overall promenade design by Michael Tod Architects. Specific interventions included:

- Decluttering of street furniture and redundant structures which included the thatched trading stalls. These were replaced with open traders stalls.
- Widening of promenade to 15-20 meters.
- The inclusion of a mixture of public ablutions, municipal services, entertainment such as clubs, storage for ocean sporting equipment, restaurants, skate park and the like, and zones for outdoor gatherings.

Overall urban strategies include emphasizing links back into the Central Business District, which is critical to pedestrian movement and specific design details to increase the friendliness thereof. This is also augmented by the pedestrian linkages between OR Thambo Parade and the promenade being prioritised. There was also the need to cater for large portions of parking along the road frontage – as with the 1980's approach by Hallen and Theron, discrete pockets of parking are located along the parade, the vehicle route on the western edge of the promenade zone. Allowance for the hosting of large events (such as the fan park for the 2010 World cup) needed to be incorporated to cater for approximately 25 000 visitors.



Photo 5. Aerial view of the promenade showing the sunken gardens bottom left, widened promenade paving, dune restoration between the beach and promenade and the Moses Mabhida Stadium in the background

Source: [Tsogo Sun 2017].

Dune rehabilitation was also an intrinsic design consideration in the strategy to prevent sand, wind and tidal erosion, while also increasing the bio-diversity of the area and to visually soften the edges where they are found. The decision was taken to recreate the primary and secondary dunes where appropriate and to link these areas up with established dunes.

Further to this upgrade, phase 2 was completed in 2013 and extends the promenade to a 7 kilometre stretch, now from uShaka Marine World close to the harbour entrance up to Blue Lagoon at the Umgeni River Mouth.

Piers serve as structures to protect the beaches and deliver stormwater into the Ocean, but also are popular for anglers and general sightseers. Particular pier intervention includes uShaka Pier, constructed to service the well points that supply uShaka Marine World with their required sea water supply. The opportunity offered with the construction of this pier was leveraged to include construction of Moyo Restaurant on the Pier. This offers an elevated and 360 degree viewing opportunity over the ocean (Photo 5).

#### 4. Recent development proposals

A substantial investment of an anticipated R6 billion (approx. US\$ 450 million) is currently mooted to build a total of 750 000 square meters of additional buildings within the Point precinct in preparation for the 2022 Commonwealth Games [Business Tech 2016]. The development includes the upgrading of the section of promenade adjacent the ocean edge in the precinct, extending the promenade from the marine park right through to the harbour mouth, but will mean that some popular existing entertainment

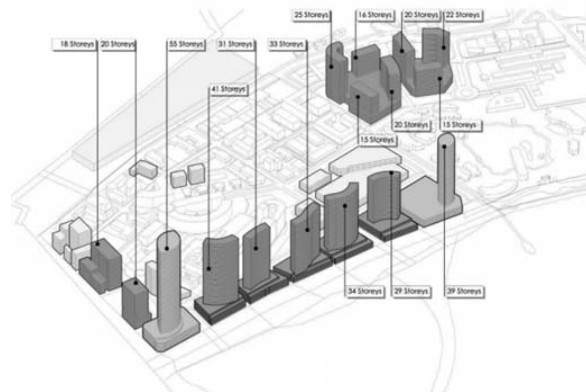


Figure 5. Current design proposal mooted for the Point Waterfront Development. The modest height and previously acknowledged access to ocean views of the 2000 development is overshadowed by the current proposal

Source: [Business Tech 2016].



Photo 6. Overall view and streetscape of the current design proposal mooted for the Point Waterfront Development. The architectural language is rather a-contextual and could be representative of any number of 'global' cities

Source: [Naidoo 2017].

facilities will be rehoused. The concerns raised include the scale of the projects in a precinct that currently has a fairly restrained building height along its perimeter – the early 2000s developments now potentially will be dwarfed by the skyscrapers proposed in addition to having their ocean views obstructed. Local users of the water-based clubs that will be effected are concerned that the proposals currently on the table for the accommodation of the facilities effected will no longer contain storage facilities for their ski's, kayaks, surfboards and the like. This development proposal certainly has the potential to increase the human activity that the precinct currently lacks, but does not seem well integrated into the previous development framework established (Fig. 5, Photo 6).

## 5. Notion of ‘Character’ and ‘Sense of Place’

In their 2003 article *Sense of Place, Authenticity and Character: A Commentary*, Jivén and Larkham review the notion of ‘character’ and ‘sense of place’ with the intent on distilling the contemporary understanding and appropriate use of these terms. Their primary focus is to relate their discussion to the work of Christian Norberg-Schulz and M.R.G. Conzen, but this is tempered by numerous other sources and commentary. The discussion inevitably includes the concept of *Genius Loci* and describes it as ...*representing the sense people have of a place, understood as the sum of all physical as well as symbolic values in nature and the human environment* [Jivén, Larkham 2003: 70]. They further relate ‘character’ as a outworking of individuals and society that integrate topography, natural conditions and variations, and symbolic meaning through their value systems to form a sense of place.

There is also discussion on the notion of ‘image’ versus ‘place making’, referencing A.M.S. Ouf’s work, which has particular bearing on Suncoast Casino and uShaka Marine World, both being prominent nodes in the *Golden Mile*. Though Ouf’s primary focus is on authenticity and how it relates to conservation, it is relevant in these two nodes around their design approach to character.

What is also of primary interest to this paper is the notion of the issues of character being dynamic and that the values and the views of people occupying or using places are important in the determination of the sense of place [Jivén & Larkham 2003: 74-75, 79]. ‘Sense of place’ is determined by the individual’s experience of the space and is influenced by their personal circumstances. As different people (or even the same people with different experiences) interact with space, their conception of the space changes. Elie Haddad in his paper *Christian Norberg-Schulz’s Phenomenological Project in Architecture* highlights Norberg-Schulz’s progression on thinking from a Structuralist to an Existential approach to the notion of sense of place. He also highlights the problem of many contemporary buildings lacking a figural quality, developments that do not seem to be designed to be particularly contextualised or place specific [Haddad 2010: 96].

In their 2004 paper *The Image of the Waterfront in Rio de Janeiro – Urbanism and Social Representation of Reality*, Nara Iwata & Vicente del Rio discuss notions of the image of the city and how this is linked to the natural landscape, but that sectoral and embellishment projects that were implemented in Rio de Janeiro on occasion missed the role that the development had to play in the construction of a social reality there [Iwata, del Rio 2014: 172]. The global trend of an increase in the commodification of aspects of daily life pointing towards the prevalence of the ‘image’ over the ‘object’ in light of the globalization of the economy [*ibidem*: 172]. They note the tension between the global and local aspects in developments are always at play but note that those that were once called citizens during a time when institutions were trying to foster *citizenship* have now become stakeholders. They also note the interdependent, never ending



process of transformation between man as the producer and the social world as the product of man [*ibidem*: 173]. The notion of private capital is not new, but it has taken on a new dimension of late. *In modernism, the city had already looked for inspiration in the private enterprise, and the urban prototype resulted from the appropriation of ideas from taylorism: rationality, functionality, regularity, and standardization. Now, however, the transposed values are productivity, competitiveness, and above all, subordination to the logic of the global market* [*ibidem*: 173]. This clearly manifests itself, according to Vanessa Watson, in the latest global trend targeting Africa in particular is the trend to ‘modernize’ cities based on models and imagery of Eastern ‘smart’ cities such as Singapore or Dubai based on global capital [Watson 2013].

## 6. ‘Sense of Place’ at the point

The initial predominance of public/state owned land and port functions in the area resulted in the area having a poor sense of place by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century interventions. The radical transformation of the area has led to an imposition of character as the canal identity is somewhat foreign to the city and to South Africa as a whole. The development is quite distinct from the surrounding area with a very contemporary morphology and articulation to the larger buildings, though smaller buildings do acknowledge the pitched roof tradition that existed there before in addition to the retention of some small scale structures. This has resulted in a fairly well developed, but fairly sparsely inhabited precinct due to the isolated location of the development as a result of lack of connectivity to the greater city. The vibrant precinct that was envisaged is yet to materialise due to a lack of inhabitants actually living and utilising the facilities there. The lack of actual people moving through and occupying the space has had a profound influence of the sense of place – it is designed to have an abundance of activity and the current lack of activity leaves one with a sense of sterility and detachment for the place, the notion of ‘dwelling’ that is intrinsically linked to Norberg-Schultz’s theories on sense of place is severely compromised. This development phase is yet to be fully realised and occupied, but a restrained and more appropriate overall height of development in addition to a variety of local architects executing individual buildings has resulted in a more contextually appropriate response, which in a structuralist approach to sense of place will most likely have a more positive influence on the people’s perceptions of the space. A major drawback in the entire development is the lack of accommodation of the range of housing that responds to diverse socio-economic conditions. The development is noted for its “meeting”, “iconic” and significant tourism role in the city’s spatial development plans [*eThekweni...* 2015], but the housing provision in the area is focussed on upper income earners. Also, the focus is on residential and smaller commercial enterprises aside from the recreational attractions of uShaka and Durban Underwater Club, there is not a significant provision and uptake of retail and corporate

space, so potential residents have to commute outside of the precinct. This does not lead itself to creating an authentic, historic and vibrant sense of place.

The influence of authorities to embrace the notion of globalization of place is quite evident in the Point. In the city's desire to attract international capital through construction development, they have done what many other African countries have done, partnered with international developers to radically transform an entire district based on an image and pattern inherent to Eastern 'smart' cities. This image, according to Watson [2014], in an embellished rhetoric of urban regeneration strategies that does not take context into account. Quite telling in the seductive imagery produced for the current development of high-rise buildings by a Malaysian firm is the lack of context shown beyond the very prominent Bluff landscape in the background. The fairly carefully planned initial Point Waterfront Development on the 2000's with its restrained overall building heights and massing has seemingly been abandoned and disregarded, the more locally contextual morphology, typology and materiality sidelined in favour of a global image. The major rhetoric by city officials to this development is that of drawing in foreign capital and on provision of employment.

## 7. 'Sense of Place' along the promenade

The Golden Mile is the most recognised tourism destination in Durban [*eThek-wini Municipality* 2014: 15]. The idea of the promenade is therefore intrinsically linked with the local, national and international image of the city, Durban is synonymous with the beach, and the central beaches are the most popular of the beaches. The annual projected visitors to the beachfront is 1.2 million visitors in 2016, with the peak period concentrated between Christmas and New Year, where approximately 20 000-30 000 visitors a day are typical. [Magubane 2016].

The promenade itself has gone through numerous upgrades over the last century of its existence and its image to locals specifically have waxed and waned with periods of upgrades and subsequent decay. Substantial development occurred after the Second World War where the Nationalist government came to power and pursued a Modernist identity with regionalist adaptations. This did result in an image that was both global, but with local adaptation. The current upgrades have followed a contemporary image, but again with regionalist adaptations. The engagement of local practitioners and fairly contextual design parameters being set means that a greater regard for a sense of place is evident in the development. The incorporation of deliberate rehabilitation and reestablishment of the coastal dunes adds to the natural landscape aspect of sense of place being addressed.

The development of two major entertainment facilities, namely Suncoast Casino and uShaka Marine World, has added amenity available to users of the area, but their contribution to the sense of place in the way of a contextual image is compro-



Photo 7. A view of one of the main access points to uShaka Marine World. The extensive use of thatched roofs and the inclusion of motifs derived from the isiZulu culture is applied in a rather post-modern way. Some of the components speak more of a tropical island image as there is no direct vernacular construction to accommodate the programmatic function required

Source: [Expedia n.d.].

mised. Suncoast Casino speaks to a strong Art Deco heritage that exists in Durban, but it based on post-modern eclecticism and theme design – the singular structure is articulated on the façade as a series of stylized Art Deco buildings. Similarly, uShaka Marine World is based on a stylized thematic language attributed to the isiZulu culture. Shapes, such as the dome, and materials, such as thatch, that typify vernacular isiZulu construction are used, but prior to the arrival of European colonists, the overall extent of traditional construction for the Zulu people was the homestead or kraal, known in the vernacular as *umuzi*, which consisted of a series of domes huts in a particular circular arrangement. The number of huts in an *umuzi* could range from a handful for a small family kraal to over one thousand in the King’s kraal. The complexity for the designers of uShaka Marine World (and numerous other attempting to draw on this particular vernacular tradition) is that there was no fundamentally constructed gathering or trading space established in the building tradition prior to colonisation – large gatherings would usually take place in the shade of a tree. Large span construction was also not developed, huts were merely scalable. The designers of the marine park seem to rely on the visual materiality and the application of abstracted form attributed to isiZulu culture and endemic animals. This type of lack of ‘authenticity’ is discussed by Jivén and Larkham [2003], commenting that often the authenticity or morality of spaces is of little concern to many users. This is clearly typified with these two entertainment facilities as they are popular with users while not being particularly authentic in their attempt at creating image. The popularity and vibrancy of these spaces is however undeniable, but one would argue if this is about amenity rather than authenticity (Photo 7).

## Conclusion

The beachfront is the most iconic aspect of the city of Durban. The development over time had resulted in a rather peace-meal approach to the formation of space in the past and current proposed development threatens to decontextualize certain parts in favour of a global image. Noted interventions of the 1930s and 1980s certainly added amenity to cater for the ever growing demand, but the slow creep of clutter and decay was endemic up until the early 2000s interventions and more specifically the preparations for the 2010 Soccer World Cup. At the macro scale, development of this intrinsically associated image of what Durban is as a place is commendable. The successes thereof are mixed, as the Point Development currently is sterile with a lack of people dwelling in the area, the major entertainment developments of the casino and marine park attracting numerous visitors but being compromised in terms of their image creation and authenticity of language. The recent promenade upgrades seem more successful as a cohesive approach to this valuable urban entity was implemented, relying on contextualisation of interventions and localisation of skills used. The bigger question is though, due to the ‘cosmic landscape’ concept that Norberg-Schultz addresses as found in the vast landscape of the ocean extending to the horizon, what influence this has had on the importance of the image of the adjoining developed sections? It would seem that safety, amenity and locality in relation to the sea rather than sense of place of the developments leads to a positive association with those ‘dwelling’ in the place. Local, contextual and incremental design interventions, though, seem to be more successful in creating an appropriate sense of place in a more academic and ephemeral sense may just be pushed aside in future developments as global capital interests receive prominence in local authority plans.

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