

UNESCO FIELD STUDIO 2014 IN DURBAN



Durban Beach Front. (Photo: Anna Irene Del Monaco)

The KEY to the Durban door

From the Warwick Junction to the Waterfront

UNESCO workshop 2014

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Abstract: The author participated as a jury member in the final evaluation of the Workshop held in the opportunity of the 2014 UIA Congress in the city of Durban. Author positively evaluates the contribution of the workshop to the future evolution of the city.

It was an extraordinary workshop, where great minds from Africa, Asia and Europe came together under the leadership of the UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Urban Quality and Culture, to produce in a very brief temporal span, a deeply conceptual contribution to a subject that is a key issue in the urban history, past and present of the South African city of Durban. Warwick Junction obtains its name from the train system, but it is indeed a junction between cultures and economies, the native and the colonial, the formal and the informal. It is only traversed unilaterally, from the territory to the city center and back, by the African population, a population that doesn't historically appropriate the public space of the formal city center, and that has been cut off from the Bay of Natal by public works and Government plans. In the plans of the original settlements of the Bay, shown by Yashaen Luckan¹ in the Chart of Port Natal 1822, the villages bordered the bay and settled along its contributing rivers. As in many cities in Europe and America, modern communication systems, railways, roads and port infrastructure occupied in the early decades of the XX century the territories of the margins of the waterways effectively severing the contact between them and the urbanized areas, to a great loss of urban quality. Durban is no exception. The primary success of this workshop is to recognize the double nature of the problem, on one hand the social and spatial segmentation between the population groups that articulate the Junction, its harsh landscapes, (Fig. 1) and in the other the disconnection of the central areas, and in particular the African precincts, with the waterfront, at the Bay and at the seafront.

The workshop addresses both issues simultaneously, proposing a KEY that will unlock the urban door for a more integrated future of the city. A KEY that enables a new connectivity not only between the two sides of the juncture, already partially addressed by recent bridges (2) but with a radical creation of public spaces of multiple nature, that recreates and reconstructs a qualitatively different relationship between the city center and the Bay and even the access to the seafront. The response then is double edged, as the two facets of the identified problem.



Fig. 1. Warwick Junction 2014. (Photo: Martha Kohen)

The Workshop projects provide a vision of a Durban that could find itself socially, spatially, and geographically integrated, reconquering the necessary connection between the urban inhabitants, the horizons and the water territories that signify the connection with the world beyond, reversing a landlocked impasse of forced isolation. We can say that this is the true poetic dimension of the project. (Fig. 2) The role of Academia, in this case multiple Universities, in creating a vision that cannot be produced by consultants, Government Agencies, or Local Governments, is another underlying factor of the success of the Workshop. Academia offers the freshness of the young minds, and lacks the limitations of the budgetary and political constraints, to be able to create unparalleled visions to enhance the urban quality of the human settlement. After that, only political actions and policies will be able to discuss them and implement them. The process of urban evolution as analyzed by Lucio Barbera (Barbera, 2014) and Anna Irene Del Monaco (Del Monaco, 2014), slow but in constant motion, will testify how influential these provocative ideas, generated at the workshop, will become for the future of Durban.



Fig. 2. Mozambique 2010. (Photo: Michel Cohen)

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