



*Durban. Beach Front.*

# Durban-Rivertown

## The functional and landscape recovery of residual urban areas

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**Abstract:** The UIA congress has been the chance to reflect and to analyse the relationship between academic architecture and the reality of our society. In fact, the exercise is closely connected with socio-economic development. For this reason, a thoughtful approach to these new special need forces to a wider reflection that could be investigated by different points of view.

**Key words:** Durban, UIA congress, life strategies, revitalization, Warwick Market.

The Durban experience intended to revisit the qualitative aspects of the world around us and, in so doing, recognise that what we build is not only utilitarian but is, in fact, a humanitarian act; Architects from around the world debated their common concerns and interests through an African point of view. The debate investigated three key issues architecture in an academic environment; architecture in practice and as a catalyst for socio-economic development. The discourse of the city is an integral component of the architectural discourse. The resilience theme has been explored through developed life strategies by communities, critical interventions that contribute to poverty alleviation and the important role of government, and government investment, towards the re-configuring of the spatial economy to the benefit of all. The UIA congress was held for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa against a backdrop of a potential peak in fossil fuel energy and unpredictable climate change; economic downturn and a new appreciation for planetization as opposed to globalisation. The consideration of the 4th dimension of time in design and decision-making is perceived to be crucial to future practice of architecture. The link with global initiatives makes this of high relevance to all architects. It intends to instill new values and sense of respect through diversity. The “Student Summer School” started before the UIA-Congress with the “Call for universities” – International Students Competition Durban-Rivertown, as an international students competition with students from Università degli Studi di Genova, University Sapienza of Rome (Italy), TU-Dresden and TU-Darmstadt (Germany). In Durban joined also students from the Kwazulu Natal University (Durban, South Africa) and it worked as a platform for international collaboration, interdisciplinary exchange, and innovation in urban research and practice, specifically for young architects and planners from different parts of the world. The theme was the analysis of the Rivertown area as *laboratory* for the development of new concepts for a coherent mix of different social groups and the

need to achieve a productive coexistence in our cities. The students worked on ideas for the revitalisation, social integration and sustainable development of inner cities by introducing pedestrian oriented mixed uses and models for higher density building.

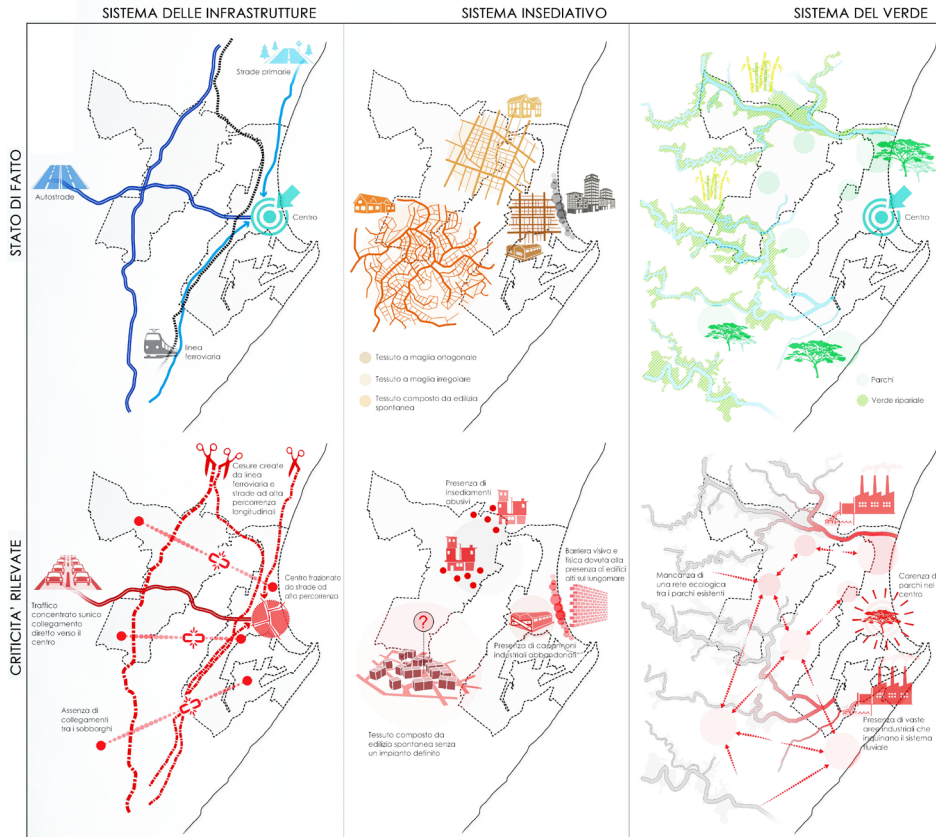
### *Urban and territorial regeneration as a development tool*

The task of the workshop develops as its central theme regeneration and urban renewal as a tool for the construction of sustainable cities. Urban regeneration understood, on a large scale, as physical and social reconnection of the territory and therefore acting on the major infrastructures that currently present themselves as ruptures. On a small scale, urban regeneration is pursued through redeveloping residual areas within the tight mesh that makes up the urban fabric of Durban, currently decayed and disused areas whose conversion could turn them into new polarities. It proceeds by redefining certain areas on the basis of their importance on a local urban and a territorial scale, both of which are strategic for triggering a widespread urban renewal process capable of becoming true urban magnets influencing the areas around them. The strategic areas, which have been examined in depth, are the following: the waterfront, an environmental system whose extension flows into the area of the Cruise Terminal, an infrastructure system consisting of the main railway line and the contiguous market, and, lastly, the abandoned industrial area of Rivertown, located between the Convention Centre and the beachfront system, which houses the historic Beer Hall building. Accessibility, border situations, permeability, connections between land and water, are the relationships with the city on which



*Rivertown Riquilification.*





Scheme and Diagrams at urban scale.

the thesis has focused its attention. Within the processes of recovery of abandoned areas and decayed fabric with new techniques of sustainability and promotion of environmental and energy recovery, special importance has been given to forms of participatory democracy and inclusive and shared decision-making.

*The Green Line System*

A territorial scale analysis of the KwaZulu-Natal area indicates that the entire territory boasts the presence of a rich, widespread hydrographic system, and it is this potential that must be exploited. The river courses, with their transverse flows with respect to land fractures caused by infrastructures, allow the areas to be reconnected or disconnected physically and socially. The project aims at mending the territory through an ecological infrastructure network that weaves through the city centre to reconnect and redevelop the urban fabric. Hence the Green Lines define a macro scale urban strategy. The green system, made up of the Green Lines, becomes the primary component of an operation for redeveloping and integrating the consolidated city, and therefore takes on the dual role of environmental and social infrastructure.

The new mobility networks fit in with the great polarities on the urban and local level and create new ones. The road, a penetration line between inside and outside, between public and private space, is also a powerful element structuring the urban morphology, an ordering void of the urban fabric, reflecting its transformations. The goal of the work is to understand how the road can interact and provide added value to the architectural design, or more generally to the urban realities it passes through. The critical interpretation of downtown Durban highlights how the urban fabric is characterized by broad, heavily trafficked streets that break it up and isolate the residential areas that fall between them. The roadways, oversized with respect to actual needs, are resized to make room for pedestrian and bicycle use and turned into green corridors that are integrated with the system of public spaces, parks and gardens, to significantly improve the climatic and environmental quality of the city. The link between the transverse system of the Green Lines and the new network system of informal spaces as parks and squares creates a dynamic, variegated landscape.

*The functional and landscape recovery of residual urban areas: The network of informal spaces*

«Mutual understanding is achieved by a fusion of horizons. The fusion that a mutual understanding requires can only come from a shared experience; and it is unthinkable to share an experience without sharing a space».<sup>1</sup> The chosen project theme is sharing as collective appropriation and its unifying role vis-à-vis the territory. The study of Durban's urban fabric has highlighted its large *urban voids*, areas that have been abandoned or used exclusively as parking lots and residual spaces, whole chunks of the city characterized physically, environmentally and socially by urban blight. A new urban project will be able to trigger a redevelopment process of *intra-spaces*, spatial voids but also *psychological* and *memory* voids, since they are empty at the level of management and functional opportunities, and so devoid of experiential possibility, waiting to be reintegrated into the social and urban fabric. The key concept is to recover spaces (often for the first time), history and quality to create new future scenarios. A successful re-designing of the public space hinges on a careful analysis of its territory, in order to bring out and enhance its potential strengths and create an active cultural lymph – within and between the public spaces – which most importantly the inhabitants can identify with but which can also involve the occasional user. It is therefore a question of reactivating the urban fabric by *recycling* these chunks of the city, namely by changing the urban landscape from its tiniest spaces on up, substantially creating a place that provides clarity, new meanings and new relationships in what previously was of scarce importance. The task is to create stimulating areas of the urban fabric, non-sterile spaces, or rather *intermediate* spaces used for social sharing, such as squares, gardens, play and entertainment areas, etc., and it is these *intermediate spaces* that make up the collective space, where collective appropriation takes place. In so doing, the city

1. BAUMAN 2005, *passim*.

becomes a place of personal experience, discussion and enrichment. The inspirational element behind the project has been the aggregation model typical of the indigenous Zulu tribes, whose basic settlement unit consisted of two concentric *kraals* enclosing huts, used as the chief's *private rooms*, while community life took place in the concentric space of the kraal, and it is precisely this residual space that identifies the system of shared spaces. Transforming the city into a terrain of play – reorganizing public neighbourhood space: The urban voids inherent in Durban's consolidated fabric are reused and converted into a public space thanks to the retrofitting of street furnishings, greenery and leisure time facilities, street-playgrounds; a pedestrian scale renewal strategy whose goal is to reinforce and vitalize the public dimension by closing roads to traffic in order to make the entire space available to daily neighbourhood life. These interventions aim at creating small local polarities capable of building identities within the undifferentiated mesh that Durban inherited from colonial times. The upgrading of its residual spaces responds to the basic needs and desires of urban dwellers: to be able to move around from day to day through pleasant places, to feel part of a fabric of local relationships, to have nature at their doorstep and common landscapes for social gathering. What was once a void is transformed into an urban resource. At the basis of the redevelopment processes there is a functional mix capable of opposing zoning and offering a certain urban complexity through the presence of new activities, services, appurtenances, and a social mix that guarantees a cultural and racial diversity that will enrich the urban social scene and avoid the ghetto situations that even today unfortunately still exist. The redevelopment project therefore interprets the public space as a creator of urban sociality and no longer just as a residual space, and transforms part of it from a public to a collective space by entrusting its care and management to the inhabitants themselves. The public spaces of the consolidated city in a state of urban blight can therefore be activated by promoting crafts and/or traditional business activities and activating the social capital linked to them the lifeblood for starting up and self-nourishing a regeneration process based not just on physical and functional redevelopment but also on socio-economic revitalization. All the interventions are geared to the goal of upgrading the existing city rather than any further expansion of it: «From this point of view the urban voids and disused spaces become opportunities for rethinking the functions of the territory by developing new synergies between the public, private and social spheres».<sup>2</sup>

#### *Redevelopment of the Warwick Market area*

The Warwick Market, which grew up spontaneously around Berea Station, with its sections dedicated to the spice trade, traditional Zulu medicine and local crafts, is the main showplace for the various ethnic groups that have settled in Durban. The market area is located close to two urban areas currently disconnected from the main railway line, which acts not only as a physical barrier, but also as a social one, so that the redevelopment of the market and the conversion of the railway

2. KCITY 2016, *passim*.

line to a linear urban park is therefore essential for promoting and reinforcing the local identity and social cohesion of the entire area. The project aims at overcoming the railway barrier through the creation of a pedestrian bridge and a well-equipped public axis that extends to the seacoast. The pedestrian bridge also connects the various markets. The redevelopment of the spontaneous market solves the housing problem of the street vendors coming from the rural areas around Durban through the insertion of housing units and child care services.

#### *Revitalization of the Waterfront and the new cruise terminal project*

Building an urban space capable of giving life to a linear driving force that can trigger a change in adjacent city areas is undoubtedly the key objective of the strategy proposed for Durban's Waterfront. The construction of a new territorial identity thus comes about through the design of a continuous, dynamic open space that generates a new territorial form, a kind of new Landscape. The project proposal seeks the right balance between environmental connotation and structures and services able to support and consolidate the area's new centrality. In order to reconnect the waterfront and harbour area, an original element of the city, with the rest of the urban fabric, currently disconnected by the railway line, the old Esplanade will be restored and converted into a linear park conceived as a gradual common avenue reinventing a dynamic urban landscape along which successive spaces and activities are grouped into three macro areas devoted to recreation and relaxation, art and culture, sports and play. At the centre of this system is the new cultural centre. The building is conceived as a continuation of the external public space thanks to its completely walkable green rooftop, from which emerge three volumes corresponding to three different functions: the museum area, the gastronomic centre and library, elements that together can represent Durban's culture. The new environmental and cultural circuit will make up Durban's new interface. The new Cruise Terminal project is part of the currently unusable industrial port. The plan is to relocate the industrial port and fit the new Cruise Terminal as a continuation of the waterfront and connect it directly to downtown Durban. The project will convert the old port railway line into a new equipped public infrastructure axis. The Masterplan is designed on three main routes: the waterfront, the Green Line and the pedestrian pathway from Downtown, which will lay out along their various arteries several new features, such as a new multi-purpose centre for service, tourist and residential activities. The Cruise Terminal building is designed as a direct continuation of the external public space thanks to its walkable roof. «We don't inherit the world from our ancestors but borrow it from our children».<sup>3</sup>

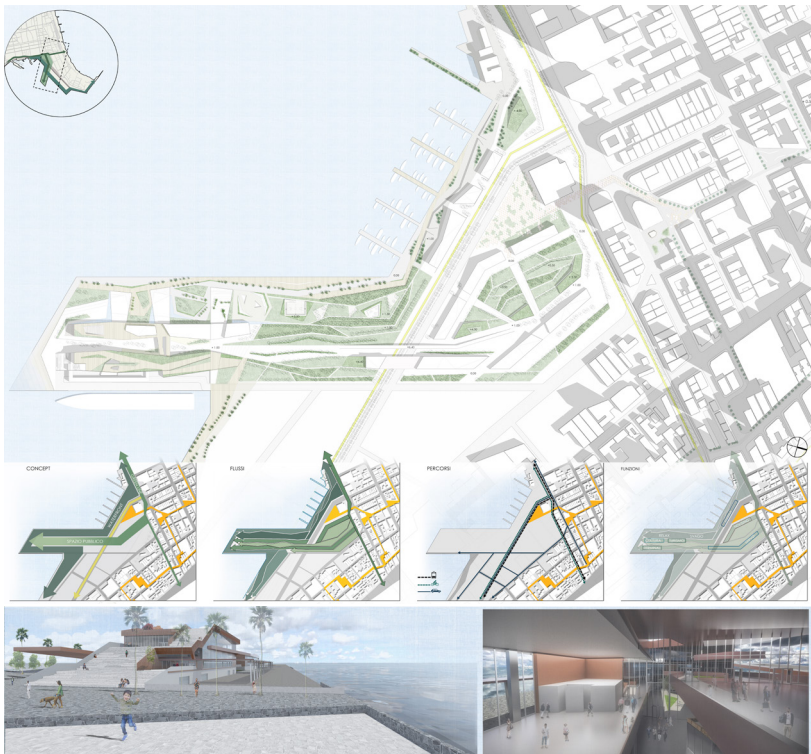
#### *River Town redevelopment*

The River Town area is characterized by an underground drainage canal and industrial buildings currently in a state of semi-abandonment. Durban's River

3. Native American proverb.



Overview plan.



Waterfront and the new cruise terminal project.





*Redevelopment of Warwick Market Area*

Town Area redevelopment project has been conceived as a broader reorganization of the entire city centre. Strategic axes of passage and connection between the main points of interest and areas to be redeveloped have been laid out. This system, which also runs along the River Town area, has been designed as a solution for the area's urban redevelopment by defining a new purpose for its reuse, designing green public spaces, informal spaces and necessary services. In particular, the new urban plan has broken up the rigid mesh of the industrial fabric in order to define new public spaces, services and recreational activities along the way, for encouraging local residents to meet and socialize. The main services are geared to culture, education and entertainment, with a multi-purpose centre, an opera house, a school, a market and a sports centre. Specifically, the theatre and the school complex were designed at a later time. Redevelopment has also affected the historical Beer Hall building, which has been turned into a new cultural centre by inserting museum spaces and conference rooms inside it.

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