

D'Urban Resilience - The Warwick Junction Precinct

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Abstract: Durban, a city situated on the South-Eastern end of Africa, cannot be stamped with any one particular identity. While the colonial city was planned, the Warwick Junction Precinct evolved around the needs and aspirations of people in time. This however, was never planned, nor ever meant to be as it was the sheer resilience of marginalised people that built this “parallel definition” which makes Durban so unique. In order to understand how this came about it is necessary to trace the historical evolution of Durban. Three major periods define its evolution: the British Union Period, the Boer Republic and the Post-apartheid period. While planning principles and legislation defined the development and character of the historically “white” CBD, resilience and adaptation over time defines the character of the Warwick Junction Precinct as a complex and unique place in Durban.

Keywords: colonial planning, resilience, adaptation, Durban city history.

Durban, a city situated on the South-Eastern end of Africa (Fig.1), cannot be stamped with any one particular identity. Johannesburg has a definite identity as the “economic capital” of Africa while Cape Town is widely known as a tourist city, sitting in a picturesque position between mountain and bay. Durban, on the other hand, is somewhat an “in-between city”; one where a definite identity cannot be determined. Rosenberg² refer to the new urban phenomenon that described Durban as an embryonic town where east meets west, in Africa. The image of the city, as such, comprises a mix of diversely different expressions of urbanism. It is not a lack of identity that defines Durban, rather multiple identities coexist in an eco-systemic way which defines the vitality of this city. Durban has been described as a “city that cares”; a place where informality exists besides formality in synergistic harmony; where east meets west. Indeed, multiculturalism could be the only definition that

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2. ROSENBERG *et al.* 2013, p. 12.



Fig.1. The location of Durban in Africa (Author, adapted from Google Images)

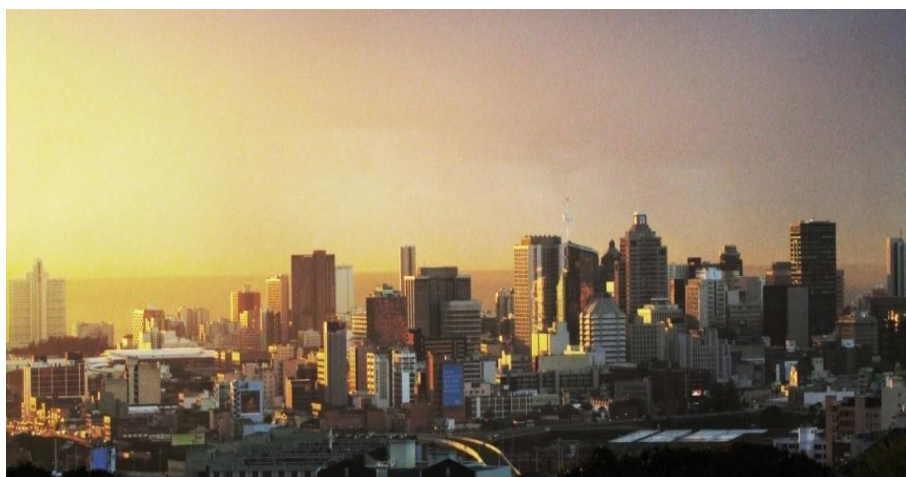


Illustration Adapted from Dobrev, 2013

may be attributed to this complex and dynamic city.

While the colonial city was planned, the Warwick Junction Precinct evolved around the needs and aspirations of people in time. The development of this precinct is akin to what Alexander³ describes as a semi-lattice structure, defined by incidental vitality and indeterminism. This however, was never planned, nor ever meant to be as it was the sheer resilience of marginalised people that built this “parallel definition” which makes Durban so unique. In order to understand how this came about it is necessary to trace the historical evolution of Durban. Three major periods define its evolution: the British Union Period, the Boer Republic and the Post-apartheid period.

3. ALEXANDER 1966.

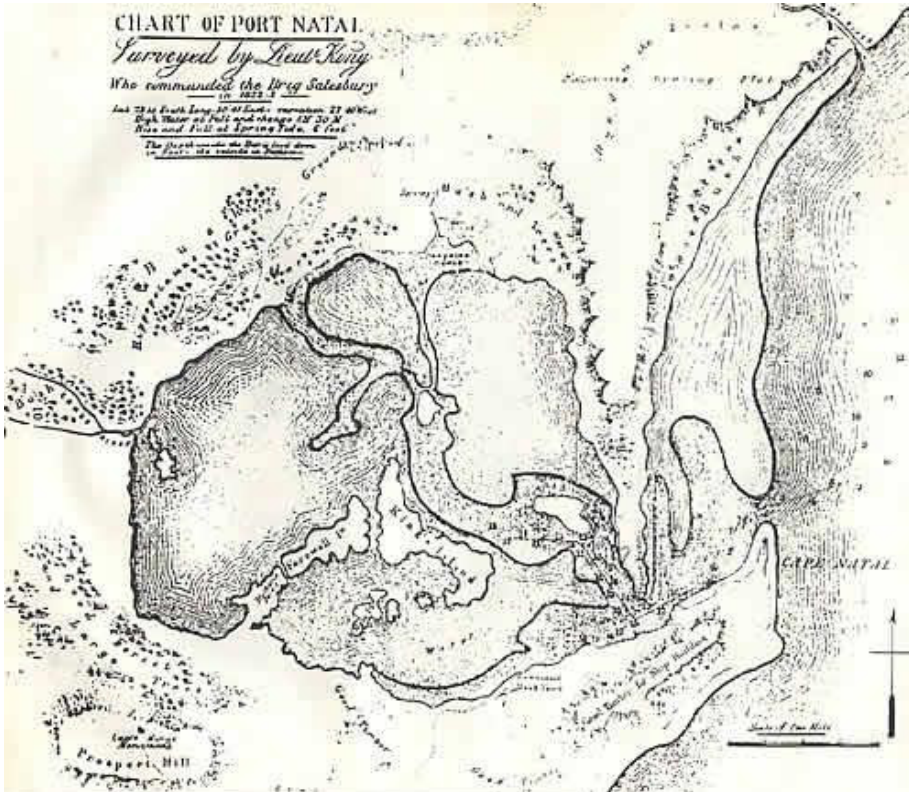


Fig. 2. Chart of Port Natal 1822 by Capt. James Saunders King a www.kznnorthhappenings.co.za

The British had the most significant impact on the colonial identity of Durban when they settled around the Port of Natal. Figure 2 illustrates an early map of Port Natal, now known as the Bay of Durban, just after the arrival of the 1820 settlers from Europe. This is one of the earliest recorded illustrations of Port Natal, surveyed and drawn by Captain James Saunders King, who was one of its founders. The map indicates a randomly dispersed indigenous settlement in the natural landscape.

Lieutenant Francis Farewell, Lieutenant James Saunders King and Henry Francis Fynn were the first group of “colonisers” of Port Natal, as they saw opportunity for trade, especially in ivory. These British settlers set camp and established their settlement, in 1824, among the indigenous people and the Boer people that were already resident along the edge of the bay (Fig.3). The Farewell settlement located on the Northern Shore of the bay is still known today as Farewell Square, and

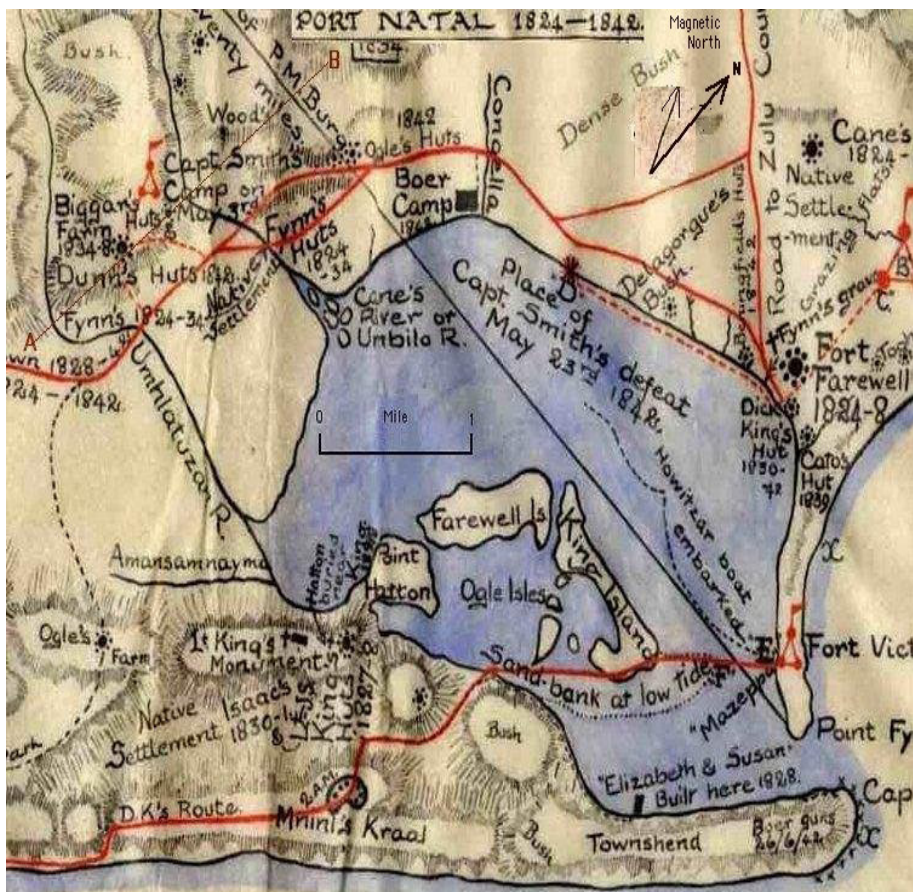


Fig. 3. Map of Port Natal 1824-1842. This map shows the Port Natal Bay and surrounds (www.salbu.co.za)

defines the historical city centre. Port Natal was renamed in 1835 after the governor of the Cape Colony Sir Benjamin D'Urban. A nodal settlement pattern emerged with the British camp centred among clusters of primitive dwellings among the bush in the landscape (Fig.4-5). This settlement pattern was largely determined by the terrain and topography of the landscape. The first planned town (Fig.6), which was drawn in 1885, has been attributed to the Boer trekkers who settled in Natal in 1838. Durban became the main port for the limited overseas contacts of the Boer republic of Natalia and the Colony of Natal after the British annexation in 1844. Although the long narrow proportion of the sites as well as the access to water of each site, indicated that this was typical of Boer town planning, the central square, namely Francis Farewell

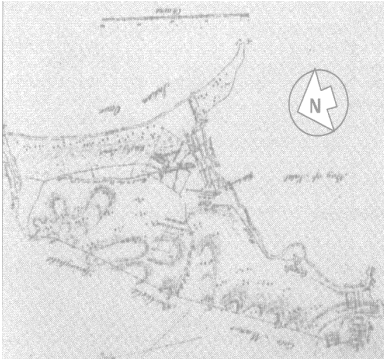


Fig. 4. Thomas Oakes Drawing of Durban 1846 (Rosenberg et al. 2013)



Fig. 5. A view of the town and the Bluff from the Berea - circa 1850 (www.warthog.co.za)

Square, and the streets that were named after British governors gave the town-centre a British character which is still evident today. Smith Street, West Street and Pine Street were the three main streets for trade and residence of the colonial settlers in Durban. This precinct defined

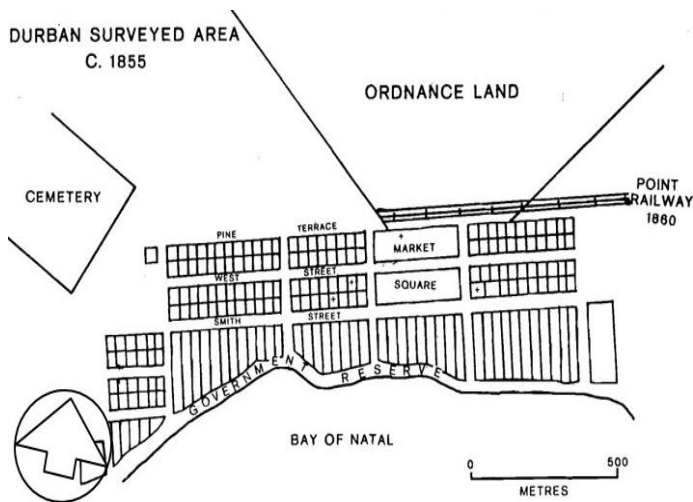


Fig. 6. Boer Plan of Durban 1885 (Rosenberg et al. 2013)

the first business district of Durban and constituted the geographic extent of the historical town-centre. The traders were mainly of European and British descent.

In 1860, however, the colonial town was to be forever redefined and reshaped during the most significant watershed moment in the history of Durban; that of the arrival of the 1860 Indian settlers (Fig.7&8).

Indian settlers were brought to Durban as labourers to work in the cane fields and mines, under the indenture system. These Indians were referred akin to slaves (Fig.8), and consisted of both men and women labourers (Fig.9) who worked mainly in the sugar cane plantations owned by British barons. These labourers brought special skills in the cultivation of sugar cane. Under the indenture system, however, labourers were not quite slaves as after a period of indenture, they were allowed to become free to return to India, or otherwise remain and be able to own land in Durban. This, over a fairly short period of time, resulted in the



Fig. 7. Arrival of the first Indians in Durban, 1860 (www.ulwazi.org)

development and proliferation of the Durban Indian community. Some of these former labourers would start market gardening and other small businesses. The establishment of Indian settlement due to the indenture system, was soon followed by the arrival of “passenger” Indians, who were established businessmen trading in India and abroad. Business was lucrative as there was a demand for Indian goods by the established Indian community, as well as other communities in Durban.⁴ Figure 10 shows the town of Durban during the 1870s, a decade after the arrival

4. ROSENBERG *et al.* 2013.



Fig. 8. Indian "slave" labour



Fig. 9. Indian women labourers (www.thehindu.com)

of the indentured Indians. Note that Indians settled on the edge of the established colonial town as well as at the Point barracks. The Eastern and Western Vleis would become important determinants of the development of a dual city, to be discussed hereunder.

Figure 10 further shows the position of some important landmarks and infrastructure that determined the structure of the later city of Durban. The position of the Botanic Gardens, the railway track and, the roads to the South, North and Interior, are all existent to date, and which have to a significant extent, determined the structural order and growth of the city.

The town continued to develop at a rapid rate, in the decades to follow. However, it was during this mid-19th century period that divisive laws and policies started to influence the development and character of the city. Colonial authorities became concerned by the proliferation of "black" businesses in the city centre, which they started to refer to as the "Indian menace". Such negative perception was based on a racial attitude toward black business, which was considered to pose health risks among other presumptions. During this period, the colonial government instituted new licensing laws and regulations on the Indian traders, who would subsequently not be allowed to trade in the three main streets of Durban. The Indian trade district was relocated in the western vlei and this was what sparked the beginning of the development of the Warwick Junction Precinct. By 1903, Durban had developed a structural order that defined the city along racial lines (Fig.12). The original historic centre of the city remained the Farewell Square precinct, as the "white" CBD while, alternately, a "black" CBD started

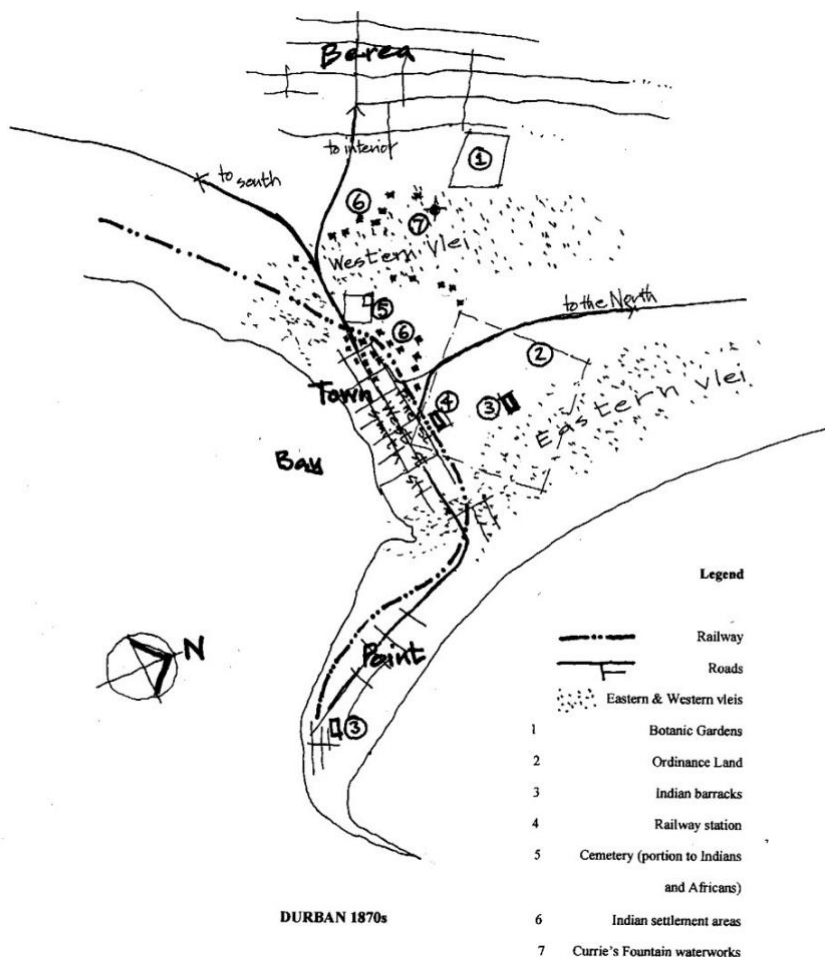


Fig. 10. The town of Durban, 1870s (Rosenberg et al. 2013)

to emerge in the former Western Vlei. Despite all the restrictive and constrictive legislation against black business, the Warwick Junction Precinct continued to develop through the sheer resilience of traders and residents of the marginalized communities, mainly of Indian descent. This precinct developed very distinct landmarks, such as the “Squatters” Market, the Grey Street Mosque and the Berea station (formerly known as the West End Station). The relatively small scale of the buildings was largely due to the limited financial resources of the traders. The most dominant landmark of the Grey Street area remains the Grey Street Mosque, which was built in the 1880s (Figs13-16). The

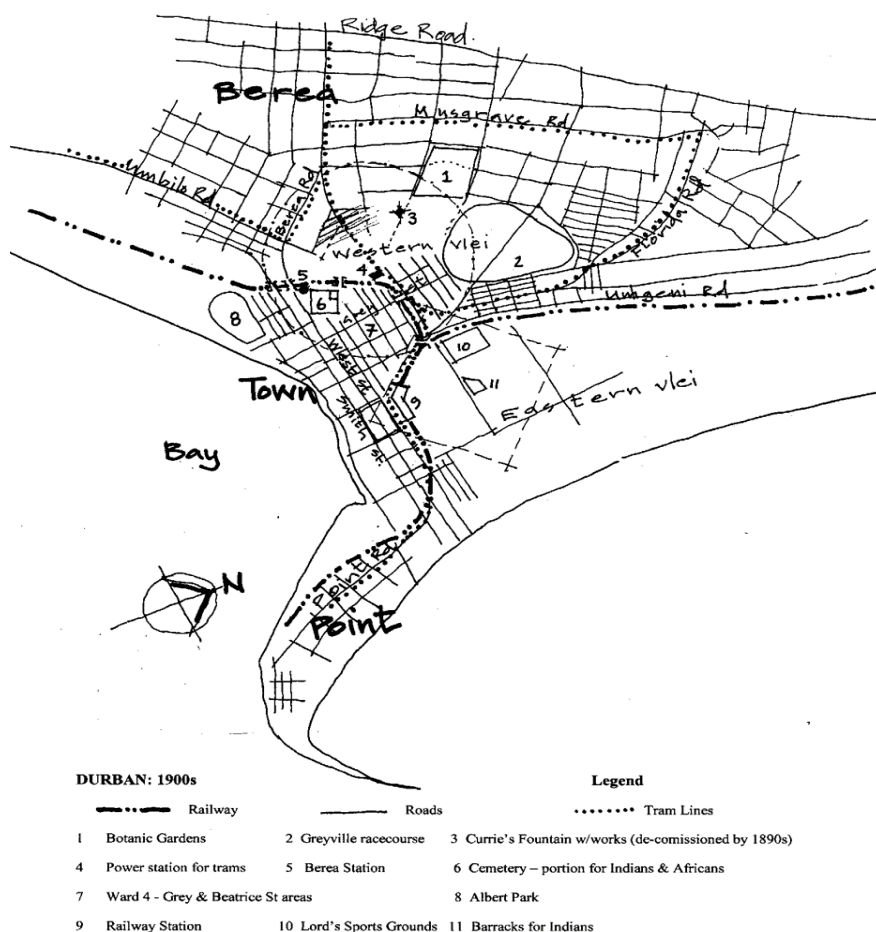


Fig. 11. The growth of Durban, 1870s to 1900s (Rosenberg et al. 2013)

passenger Indians that settled in Durban consisted largely of Muslim traders and therefore the monumental Grey Street Mosque could be built as early as the 1880s. Indian owned businesses, mainly in the form of retail shops started to develop in the street-front arcades of the Mosque and spread across to the adjoining and adjacent streets in the precinct. The layout of sites, were reflective of the grid pattern of the historical colonial city. What continued to develop beyond is an interesting hybrid of Art Deco architecture which is known as the “Durban Art Deco”, as this style of architecture is unique to the city. This discussion will be picked up later in the paper. The Grey Street Mosque also

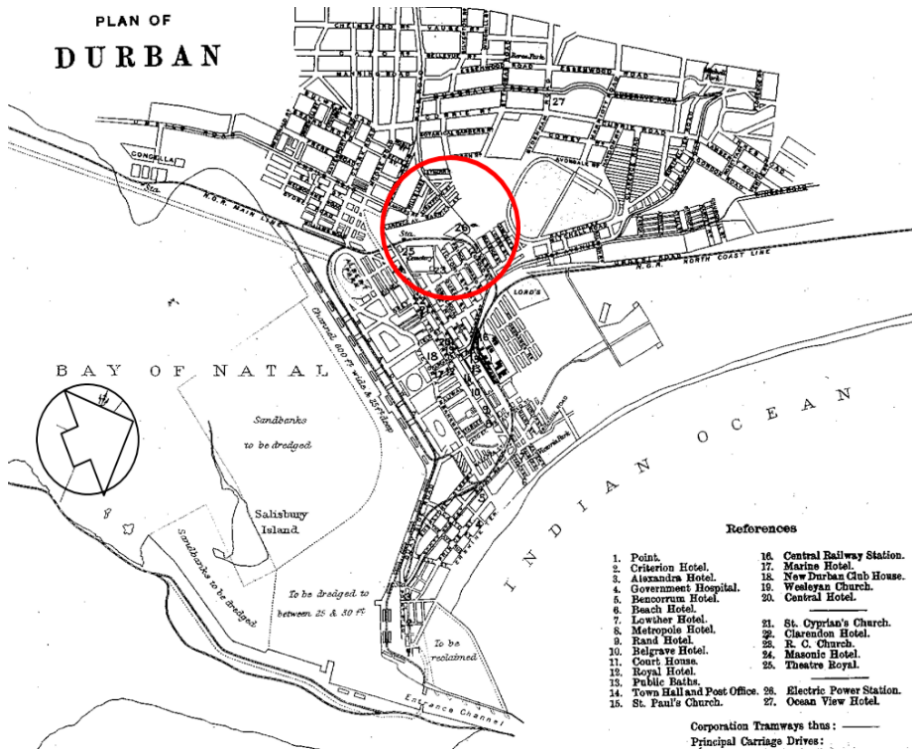


Fig. 12. Map of Durban in 1903 (Harrison:1903 in Rosenberg et al. 2013) WJP circled



Fig. 13. Early Photo illustration of Grey Street Mosque - undated (Rosenberg et al. 2013)



Fig. 14. Early Photo illustration of Grey Street Mosque - undated (Rosenberg et al. 2013)



Fig. 15. Early Photo illustration of Grey Street Mosque – 1880s (Rosenberg et al. 2013)



Fig. 16. The proliferation of business around Grey Street Mosque (www.fad.co.za)

defined the market square of the “black” CBD. The “Squatters” Market (Fig.17) originated in the courtyard of the Grey Street Mosque, and after some time, due to concerns of hygiene and space, it was relocated to Victoria Street. The Victoria Street Indian Market was vibrant and traders’ livelihoods depended on the demand for their produce from customers. This was a place that determined the lifestyle of the traders. However, this all changed when the building was mysteriously gutted by an overnight fire in 1973.⁵ The market was eventually built in Warwick Avenue, in 1934, and was named the Early Morning Market (Fig.18). This market exists to date, under the same name and is an important landmark of the Warwick Junction Precinct. On the other side of the railway, the retail shops that developed along the streets in the Grey Street area, have become “mini” landmarks, as many of these shops

5. ROSENBERG *et al.* 2013.



Fig. 17. The "Squatters" Market (Rosenberg et al. 2013)

(Fig.19) still trade under the same name and owned by the same families, until this day. The sustainability of these businesses was achieved by adaptability and resilience despite various political and structural changes in the city. The following section traces the historical development of the Warwick Junction Precinct (WJP), by using the two most dominant landmarks, namely, the Grey Street Mosque and the Indian Market at Victoria Street as the initial points of spatial reference. Figures 20 and 21 illustrate the evolution of the WJP during the pre-apartheid, colonial period of 1930s-1950s and 1950s to 1970s, respectively. Note in Figure 20, the two landmarks toward the South-East corner of the figure – the triangular shaded site indicates the Victoria Street "Indian" Market, listed under item 21, in the figure. To the lower East, the shaded polygon indicates the site of the Grey Street Mosque. During this same period the Early Morning Market, labelled 13, was also in operation on Warwick Avenue. The mix of uses during this period reveals a socio-cultural character of this alternate CBD that was non-existent in the historically "white" CBD. Buildings ranged from commercial to residential to educational to religious and leisure, amongst others. The approximate extent of the WJP is indicated by the dotted circle.

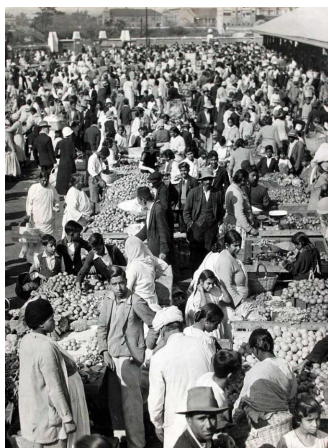
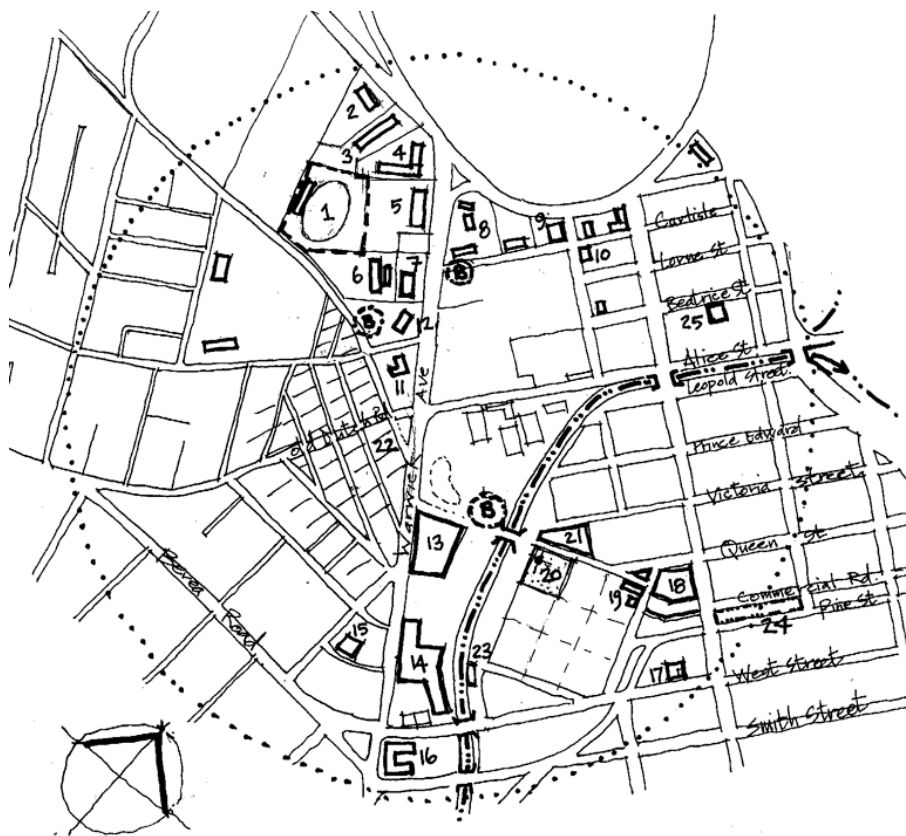


Fig. 18. The Early Morning Market (Rosenberg et al. 2013)



Fig. 19. Early photograph of retail business in the Grey Street Area (www.ulwazi.org.za)

Figure 21 illustrates a marginal increase in development of the WJP and the definition of some of the districts that define WJP, such as the Curries Fountain District which comprises a sports field surrounded by educational buildings. The retail businesses in the Grey Street Area as well as the Markets continued to thrive. The Victoria Street Market, however, burnt down during this period, which left only a scar of memory on the site, and without any relics or remnants of its once vibrant past. Ironically, it was during the apartheid era, post 1972 that the WJP started to develop at a more rapid pace. In addition to the districts outlined in the discussion of Figure 21, more cultural and religious buildings started to integrate into the already rich mix of uses. This all started to express the character of a rich multi-cultural urban fabric of complexity that could never be achieved in the planned colonial city centre. Here lies the paradox; that against the intentions of divisive and restrictive policies and legislation, a new CBD evolved through the resilience of marginalised people – a CBD that would become more vibrant than could never have been imagined. The WJP consisted of two distinct precincts, the Warwick Avenue District and the Grey Street District, due to the railway line that formed an edge between the two. The complexity of the WJP increased multi-fold, in the 1970s-1980s, with the construction of the Berea Station (indicated by the shaded L-shape) and the “new” Victoria street Market, respectively (Fig.22), which were linked



Warwick Junction Precinct: 1950s



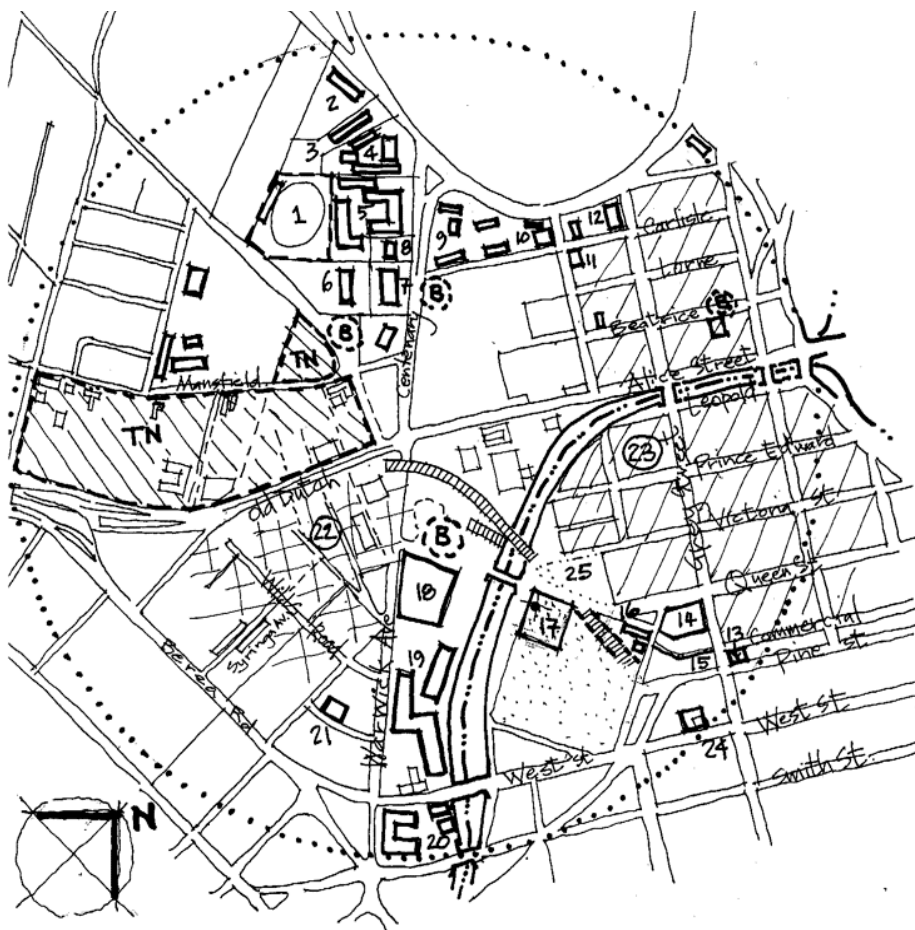
Bus Ranks

— · · — Railway line

Legend

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Reduced Currie's Fountain grounds | 2 St Augustine's school | 3 Kathiawad Schools |
| 4 Orient Islamic School | 5 M L Sultan Tech College | 6 Sastri College |
| 7 St Aidan's hospital | 8 St Anthony's School | 9 Indian Girls' High |
| 10 Hindu Tamil Institute | 11 Ha'Penny School | 12 Fire Station |
| 13 Early Morning Market | 14 English Market | |
| 15 Oldham House 'university' for non whites | 16 Technical College | 17 West St Mosque |
| 18 Grey St Mosque | 19 Emmanuel Cathedral | 20 Cemetery & Badsha Pir |
| 21 Indian Market | 22 'Duchene' residential area | 23 Berea Station |
| 24 Red Square | 25 'Bantu' Social Centre | |

Fig. 20. Evolution of the facilities and institutions in the Warwick (WJP): pre- apartheid period from the 1930s to the 1950s (Rosenberg et al. 2013)



Warwick Junction Precinct: 1970s

Legend

(B) Bus Ranks Road and freeway construction Land allocated to Tech Natal Railway

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Currie's Fountain Grounds | 2 St Augustine's School | 3 Kathiawad Schools |
| 4 Orient Islamic School | 5 M L Sultan Tech College | 6 Sastri College |
| 7 St Aidan's hospital | 8 St Aidan's Church | 9 St Anthony's C & school |
| 10 Indian Girls' High | 11 Hindu Tamil Institute | 12 Women's hostel |
| 13 Red Square | 14 Grey St Mosque | 15 Madressa Arcade |
| 16 Emmanuel Cathedral | 17 Cemetery & Badsha Pir shrine | 18 Early Morning Market |
| 19 English Market | 20 Technical College | 21 Oldham House |
| 22 'Duchene' residential are being vacated | 23 Grey St residents to vacate | |
| 24 West St Mosque | 25 Indian Market destroyed in fire | |

Fig. 21. Evolution of the facilities and institutions in the Warwick (WJP): apartheid period from the 1950s to the 1970s (Rosenberg et al. 2013)

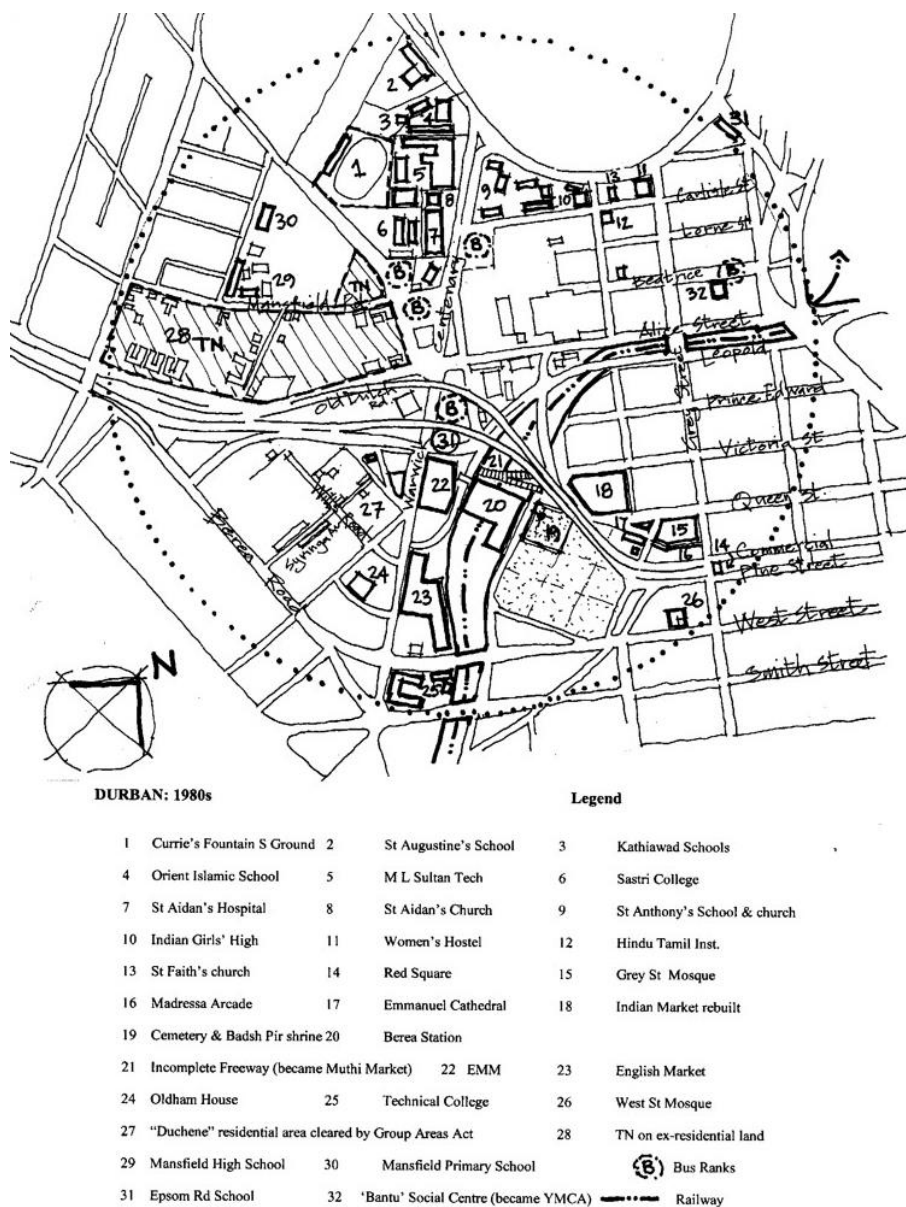


Fig. 22. Evolution of the facilities and institutions in the Warwick (WJP): apartheid period from the 1970s to the 1980s (Rosenberg et al. 2013)



Fig. 23. The Victoria Street Market with link bridge to the Berea Station www.contemplans.wordpress.com

by a pedestrian bridge that extended over the streets and railway below (Fig.23). During the post-apartheid era, from the mid-1990s, there was an increase in accessibility of previously excluded communities to the city. The Warwick Avenue district started to experience an exponential increase in the volume of commuters using the multi-modal transport facilities which characterized this district. There was a consequent increase in informal trade that served the fast-moving pedestrian traffic between the respective transport hubs, such as the taxi ranks, bus stations and train station. This increase in pedestrian traffic, coupled with the demand for food “on the go” as well as music CDs, clothing and African herbal medicine, resulted in some unique architectural interventions during the 1990s – the revitalization of disused bridges and the creation of light-weight steel “trade bridges”. These structures afforded a multi-level informal shopping experience that is unique to this precinct (Fig.24). Note the thickened lines in Figure 24, which indicate the new pedestrian trade bridges. Figure 25 illustrates the new steel link bridges for trade; all connecting bridges between the various functional precincts have been activated with trade. The new steel bridge design was a sensitive approach to contextual dynamics defined by socio-economic need. Figure 26 shows the “inhabitation” of lost space by human

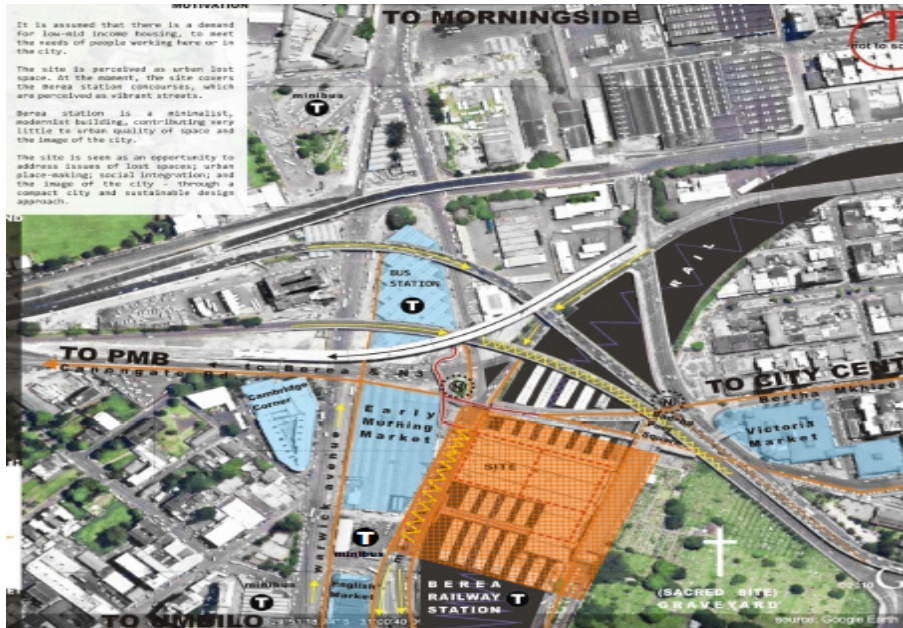


Fig. 24. Link bridges for trade, connecting the Grey Street Precinct to Warwick Avenue (Author)



Fig. 25. Link bridges for trade, connecting Berea Station to Warwick Avenue (Govender, V., Maharaj, S., Pillay, D., Ramchand, A. : DUT, Third Year Design Students, 2014)

need for economic survival. This was an act of seizing “atopia”.⁶ The indeterminate nature of “undersigned” spaces afforded the opportunity for people to define and determine the vitality of such “lost spaces”.⁷ The bridges and “lost spaces” ultimately became the spatial receptacles⁸ to socio-economic activities, which has ultimately created a socio-economic-spatial dynamic that is unique to the WJP. Such design was based

6. MENIN 2003.

7. TRANCIK 1986.

8. ALEXANDER 1966.



Fig. 26. The inhabitation of space socio-economic-spatial interrelationships (Del Monaco 2014)

on the acknowledgement of resilience and respect for people in place, with due adaptability to changing dynamics over time. On reflection of the development of the historic “white” CBD, one sees a sort of American City character (Fig.27-28). This is in complete contrast and yet, complementary to the WJP, the “black” CBD. Over time, since the early 1990s, some informal trade activity “infiltrated this part of the city, however without the synergistic vitality of the WJP, where informality is the defining characteristic of place. The Grey Street area, on the other hand, continued to evolve from its early urban form and “Durban Indian Art Deco” character. This precinct is characterized by the predominantly low-rise mixed use buildings comprising shops and arcades at street level, with residential units above (Fig.29). The scale and complexity of detail in this precinct is in direct contrast to the high-rise “American” image of the historic city. The cultural adaptation of a hybrid form of Art Deco is unique to this area. Each building is a unique representation of stylistic will, yet there is somehow, a coherency in the architectural expression of the streetscape. The architectural character, in an abstract way, relates to the hybridity of the formality/informality character of trade in the area, which exists in synergistic harmony. Figure 31 illustrates the existence of informal trade in the shaded space provided by wide covered arcades outside formal retail shops. Here, the informal and the formal do not compete, but rather complement each other. The opportunity for informal trade adjacent to formal retail shops,



Fig. 27-28. The present image of the historic city-centre; city hall and Farewell Square (Del Monaco 2014)



Fig. 29. The present image of the Grey Street Area (Author 2013)



Fig. 30. The "Durban Indian Art Deco" of the Grey Street Area (Author 2013)



Fig. 31. Illustrates the existence of informal trade in the shaded space provided by wide covered arcades outside formal retail shops

extends to the spaces between buildings (Fig.32). This rich street experience is an urban experience that is complex and comprises a journey that is enriched by a unique cultural experience. The imageability and legibility⁹ of the place, the Grey Street Precinct, is defined by monumental buildings such as the Mosque and the Victoria Street Market as well as "in-between" spaces such as these narrow yet complex trade arcades. Figure 33 heightens the image of place through an incidental, yet considerate spatial layering where the Main Street defined, by the Mosque, links via a bazaar – like in-between trade arcade/alley, to another main street that is defined by a landmark, the Cathedral at the end of the alley, all contributing to a rich complexity, defining the image and legibility of place. It is indeed, this legibility amongst complex diversity that gives the WJP its unique identity. Such complexity was derived from the synergy of life and architecture that allows such vitality to play out. This defines the socio-spatial character of the WJP.

9. LYNCH 1960.



Fig. 32. Trade arcades as "in-between" spaces (Author 2013)



Fig. 33. Complex spatial layering through "in-between" spaces (Author 2013)

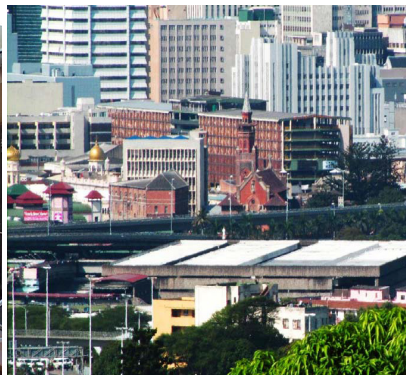


Fig. 34. A view from Berea to the Bluff – a new city image (Dobrev 2011)

Conclusion

The above discussion has revealed how the colonial planning and legislation of Durban resulted in the evolution of dual CBDS, each with a distinctly unique character, yet in very close proximity. While planning principles and legislation defined the development and character of the historically "white" CBD, resilience and adaptation over time defines the character of the Warwick Junction Precinct as a complex and unique place in Durban. The complexity of the Warwick Junction Precinct has realized an evolved urban identity that is a true reflection people's aspirations, in place over time. Resilience and adaptability of life is what ultimately defined the urban vitality of this precinct.

The paper concludes with a photograph looking from the Berea towards the Bluff today (Fig.34) – a very different, yet complex layered city as compared to the early colonial settlement in the landscape as illustrated in Figure 5. Note the Warwick Junction Precinct in the foreground against the backdrop of the historical CBD defined by high-rise density.

The paper concludes by raising a critical question, as the subject of future research in this area: How can the pedagogic approaches of contemporary architectural theory and practice transform in order to respond to the needs and aspirations of people, in complex urban environments that continuously evolve and adapt over time?

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