

Stephen Read

With: John Andrews
Dr. Magda Minguzzi

Assistant: Mamohau Khemi

Port Elizabeth, moving forward together

This is a project carried out by first, second and third year architecture students of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. It is a project of learning about the Port Elizabeth metropolitan area in its actuality, but also in its potentiality, and how actuality and potentiality can be built towards an equitable and sustainable future.

The project has introduced students to some elements of urban practice and thinking including research, strategy, and future visioning. It has focussed particularly on researching the everyday lives of the different people of Port Elizabeth, and strategising and visioning an urban future in terms of diversity, guided by normative values like social equity, integration and sustainability.

WHICH PORT ELIZABETH?

We have to ask first what the object of this project is. Which Port Elizabeth is the object of our concern? Cities are conceived and theorised in many different ways and we have thought in this project about cities as economic machines, as mobility machines, and as technologies for modern lives in every era.

These ideas (of what cities essentially are) are important ones, but they also somewhat miss the point, because when urban professionals like planners and designers aim for the future it is not these essentialist ideas but more normative descriptors that they use to describe their visions. The instruments and methods they use become organised and understood in relation to these values.

The Port Elizabeth we deal with technically is a city of mobile people, but the city we want to aim at is a public and democratic city. We are interested in the equity, integration and sustainability of Port Elizabeth as a 'community' of diverse and different peoples, the ways we can bring this community of differences together in public space, and the ways this diversity can add value to the city.

Of course economic and industrial planning, for jobs and prosperity, are important and are a vital part of city visioning, but 'prosperous' and 'economically viable' are not the only descriptors that influence our strategising and visioning, and it is doubtful that aims like 'equity' and 'integration' can be achieved without specifically targeting these.

The Project

Port Elizabeth is a community of very different lives. But it is also a divided city, and as such it fails to fulfil its potentials and fully support the potentials of its people.

Port Elizabeth doesn't just have problems related to difference and division; it also has assets and potentials in the capacities and energies of its diverse people and these are resources it can mobilise in the solving of problems and shaping the future. Inward investment and job creation is of course crucial to the development of these assets, but concern with investment has to be matched with concern for how that investment builds on and reinforces local assets and potentials and takes the whole diverse urban population forward in broad-based, shared projects of development.

Developing a broad participatory base to development initiatives is part of the issue; another is identifying interesting and challenging ways of tackling problems of segregation and fragmentation, and using these to provoke thinking and debate about the forms development should take. This studio has chosen to investigate the mobility patterns of metropolitan Port Elizabeth and to ask what contribution an attention to and knowledge about mobility patterns will make to decisions about the sorts of development projects Port Elizabeth needs.

We hope our results will contribute to an on-going debate about development in Port Elizabeth and the directions and forms development should take.

The research

We took a sample of nine neighbourhoods and asked people from these neighbourhoods about their daily movements – their journeys to work, to school, to the shops. We then plotted these on a map of Port Elizabeth.

The neighbourhoods were chosen to be roughly representative of the diversity of cultural backgrounds and socio-economic groups in Port Elizabeth. Originally Newton Park was chosen as well but due to unforeseen changes in the student groups this neighbourhood had to be omitted. Also neighbourhoods in the north and west are underrepresented due to constraints of time and to the considerable challenge of gaining real insight into those of the north. We feel the neighbourhoods of the north should be the subject of their own research.

Personal movement data was collected by interviewing neighbourhood residents. Data included origins and destinations of movements to work, school, shopping and recreation. It was differentiated by transportation mode, including personal motorcar,

taxi, bus, and by foot. No journeys by train or bicycle were recorded in the interviews conducted. The number of people interviewed per neighbourhood varied from 4 to 16; the reason for this variation was the difficulty in some cases of finding interviewees. For reasons of ethics and safety we had to source interviewees through personal and university networks.

The product of the research was a map of daily movements of the people interviewed. This research is intended to be exploratory and indicative only, due to the small numbers of interviews and possible problems with the representativeness of neighbourhoods and interviewees.

The result

A review of the map of daily movements showed there were substantial differences in movement patterns in the north and the south of the metropolitan area. Journeys from neighbourhoods in the north, especially the commute to work, tend to be longer, and they are directed towards or into the south. Journeys from neighbourhoods in the south tend to remain in the south and are surprisingly short.

For example, journeys to work from Mill Park in the south tended to be short while journeys to work from New Brighton in the north were relatively long and into the south. If this result can be confirmed, this does not conform to our expectations of higher-income, suburban, people travelling relatively longer distances to work while lower-income people try to keep travel distances short.

Ostensibly 'suburban' places in the south of the metropolitan area have surprising 'urban' characteristics in the way that home, work, shopping, schools and even recreation are located relatively close to one another. On the other hand the lower-income neighbourhoods in the north have more typically suburban characteristics, being relatively far from workplaces and large shopping facilities. There are more affluent suburbs to the west of the south that did not form part of our study, but we have assumed these will also generate longer commutes.

This is preliminary research and results and conclusions are tentative. The purpose is to spot patterns and generate ideas which should be confirmed with more, and more rigorous, research.

Conclusions

There exists a 'gap' between the travel patterns and local urban amenity of the lower-income north and the more affluent south of the metropolitan area.

Firstly, the north appears to 'serve' the south, with many commutes being from the north into the south to work, to shop and for recreation, while at the same time there are relatively few commutes (none in our sample) from the south to the north. This is suggestive of the relations between an 'urban' south and a 'suburban' north. We assume a similar 'gap' exists between suburbs in the west and the south.

In addition, the 'urban' character of the south is expressed by the relative proximity of home, work, schools, shopping and recreation to one another for those who live there.

There is a southern part of the metropolitan area, encompassing Newton Park to Central, and Central to Summerstrand, that, though ostensibly and for the most part suburban, has interesting 'urban' characteristics. These characteristics are expressed on the one hand by the way other neighbourhoods in the metropolitan area 'serve' this area, with a major proportion and diversity of employment, education, shopping and recreation being contained in the south.

Strategy

Our strategy is based on a principle of public space: that what binds us together as a society is not our similarities but our differences. 'Society' is not a 'community' of this or that culture but rather a 'community' of differences that meet in public space, where public space is wherever and whatever we devise to effect this meeting.

The strategy has two components: we want to find ways to 'disrupt' the 'gap' between the north and the south so that the south can meet and know the north better, and; we want to find ways of re-urbanising the south so that it can more effectively serve, as urban centres traditionally do, as an activity centre, and melting-pot of differences for the metropolitan area.

The strategy will be realised as an 'integrated development project' consisting of two key projects of movement infrastructure and movement culture development, and other sub-projects or activity projects designed as 'public spaces of differences'.

A new "image" of Port Elizabeth

The project defines a new image of Port Elizabeth. This image is of an increasingly urban centre linked to suburbs in the north and the west by a fast, comfortable and easy-to-use rail link. The train itself becomes a 'public space' as people from the north, from the south and from the west move to destinations along the line. Destinations also become 'public spaces' as new destinations in the west serve also people from the north, new destinations in the north serve also people from the west, and new destinations in the urban south serve all.

The south becomes a public space in its own right, linked up by a safe, comfortable system of bicycle travel. We imagine the south as an urban centre, populated by increasingly urban people, traveling to work and other destinations by various transportation modes, but increasingly also by bicycle.

Travel by rail is intended to reduce the 'gap' between the north and the south and provide opportunities for establishing places of joint activity by different population groups. Travel by bicycle is intended to provide a cheap and publicly connected form of transportation to promote and intensify the urban character in the south. Both forms of travel are also environmentally sustainable.

This will not be the only image of Port Elizabeth, of course. There will remain, for example, an image of a city universally accessible by motorcar, and another of a city selectively accessible by bus, by taxi, and so on. The important point is that we propose establishing an image, and building new projects consistent with and supporting this image, that will go some way to promoting a more public, more equitable and more sustainable Port Elizabeth.

An integrated project of development

In order to realise this strategy we have chosen a number of sub-projects to develop together as an integrated project of a future Port Elizabeth.

The two key sub-projects are the restoration and upgrading of the Apple Express and northern railway lines and their stations, to the west and to the north of the centre, and the establishment of a dedicated cycling grid over the south, more urban, part of the city. The purpose of the first is to make fast, safe, and comfortable public transport connections from the lower-income suburbs in the north and the higher-income suburbs in the west to the more urban area in the south. The purpose of the second is to provide the basic infrastructure for traveling by bicycle quickly and safely through the whole southern area. The first integrates a metropole consisting of higher-income suburbs, lower-income suburbs and a more central area. The second integrates an enlarged central area, which will be the activity centre and 'melting pot' of a diverse metropole. The intention here is to reinforce the urban character found in the short distances from home to work, and so on, by supporting a slower travel mode and culture in this area.

The effective creation of new cultures of movement demands an integrated approach to the way sub-projects are integrated with new travel modes. The crucial design task is not the activity projects or the movement infrastructures separately, but the way the connections between these are realised. The rail and bicycle infrastructures should be

seen as 'armatures' on which the other activity projects are designed. They centre cultures of travel and doing things in the city.

Students

Jacobz Joey,
Griffiths Courtney, Hansen Keane,
Alberts Zanie,
Bruinders Tahalia, Stander Christian, Meyer Jenna-Lee, Paine Luke,
Saunders Tess,
Makhele Busang,
Hart Guy,
Diesel Devon,
Lentz Karla,
Sizani Zani,
Matikinca Mazizandile,
van Niekerk Neil,
Keet Gene,
Bolton Daniel,
Segali Naledi,
Hayden Lisa,
Matlanyane Samson, Monne Corneliase,
Scott Gailyn,
Lubbe Pieter,
Cochrane Camryn, Dealtry Thomas,
Joubert Simone,
Du Preez Ryk,
Scholtz Michal, Nakkungu Mildred, Steytler Willem,
Musakanya Ishanesu,
Mkonwana Zintle,
McNaught Nicholas,
Westraad Edward, Hirst Charne,
du Plessis Michal, Lindeque Hilette,
Mpshe Kutlwano, Lenton Scott,
Abdullakhan Maria, Vos Charne,
Akom Chelcie,
Cizek Judy,
Warner Bradley, O'Dwyer Onéca, Changfoot Alana, Smit Bianca,
Tlaba Makara,
Blignaut Kelsey,
Mbulawa Neo, Niedermeier Lena, Booth-Jones James,
Madyibi Nwabisa, Gao Jessie,

Warren Doherty-Bigara