

## REGENERATING PRETORIA'S HISTORICAL CORE

### *Heritage as an asset for inner city development*

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**Abstract.** The regeneration historical city centres requires an institutional framework to provide favourable conditions for appropriate private investments. The case of Pretoria shows that private investment can also precede (and provoke?) public intervention while capitalising on the iconic value some heritage structures present. In both approaches the main challenge is to identify and use development potentials of the historical features at stake.

### 1. Introduction

In September 2009 the authors took part in a successful field academy conducted between the University of Pretoria's Department of Architecture, the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency, ICOMOS ISC SBH and the ArchiAfrika Foundation.<sup>1</sup> The project was supported by the Dutch programme on Mutual Cultural Heritage (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands 2008) and executed within the Memorandum of Understanding on Mutual Cultural heritage between South-Africa and the Netherlands (Republic of South Africa and Kingdom of the Netherlands 2004). The aim of the academy was twofold: the first being educational, the second to establish if and how the Pretoria's historical features could contribute to a desired regeneration of its historic core.

At the time, the inner core of the City of Pretoria had been subject to a systematic abandonment dating from the mid 1980's when new commercial cores were established to the East thereof, leaving the core to decay. This process was expedited by the systematic dismantling of the Apartheid state and the repeal of the Groups Areas Act of 1966 in the year 1991, leading to the financially privileged to withdraw into gated office parks and neighbourhoods. The realisation that this process of decay was in fact becoming epidemic lead to the field academy workshop being undertaken.

Local architecture students were invited to take part in this 4-day academy in which a large portion of the historic core of the City was 'quick scanned', mapped, photographed, assessed and debated. The development of the City was studied through archival material at the same time to understand the current character of the City as a consequence of its past. In considering the outcome of the fieldwork and the analysis of Pretoria's spatial development through time, the work party formulated a

development perspective for the City with, as departure point, it's historical features. The main result was a strategy map showing development opportunities and risks along with more detailed perspectives for six selected precincts in the city centre. They were presented to an audience composed of representatives of the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM), the Provincial Heritage resources Agency - Gauteng and stakeholders from the real estate sector.

The field academy proved to be a success on an educational level. This is evidenced by the fact that the method has permeated the school of architecture at the University of Pretoria and students now apply this methodology as standard part of their investigations. It has also since been used with success in in Maputo, Mozambique, in an intercontinental project involving the University of Pretoria, South Africa, The University of Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique and the Technical University Delft, the Netherlands, with support of the ArchAfrica Foundation. This project was in response to a request received for the Maputo Municipality to investigate future perspectives for the revitalisation of the Baixa de Maputo, the historic core of the City (Clarke, Corten and Peres 2011). The outcome of the Pretoria workshop results have been presented as a policy advise document to the CTMM. Thus its final success can be gauged by the impact it may have on municipal policy. Revitalising urban structures of historical significance is internationally addressed as Integrated Conservation.

<sup>1</sup> Peter van Dun (ICOMOS ISC SBH), Jean-Paul Corten (Dutch Cultural heritage Agency), Berend van de Lans (ArchiAfrika) and Nicholas Clarke (University of Pretoria) lead the project in Pretoria.



The history of the City of Tshwane can be traced back to the early 1850's, when itinerant Boers established Pretoria as the capital of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR), granted independence in 1852 by Great Britain, which at the time dominated Southern Africa politically. For hundreds of years preceding Boer settlement the Apies River Valley had supported a large population of Iron-age peoples of different cultural groupings, notably small tribes of the AmaNdebele. However, the militant growth of the Zulu and the splintering of the Matabele people during the first half of the 19th century, resulted in great disruption and massive dislocation of the original peoples. When the Boers arrived in the year 1841, they trekked into a temporary uninhabited region and settled in an area over which a vacuum of power existed (Guiliomee and Mbenga 2007).

The first plans for what still had to become the City of Pretoria date from the time the tiny frontier village was created as Capital of the ZAR. To accommodate the capital's needs, an orthogonal grid was designed. Tradition has it that the width of the streets forming the

grid, was determined by the length of the oxen wagons, used by the Boer farmers, and the street width required by these vehicles to make a U-turn (Allen 1971). These wide streets today still give evidence of Pretoria's rural origin. In the early years the building blocks within the grid contained single storey buildings for residential use with large backyards, or offices for administration and regional services as well as shops for retail trade. While building sites were mainly closed, building lines were strictly regulated in order to keep the orthogonal grid. Citizens were obliged to plant and maintain trees in front of their property to provide shade in the streets. Dwellings were provided with fresh water by canals that were running along the streets and were fed by the source of the Apies River, a fountain located at Elandspoort to the south of the fledgling settlement. At the crossroad of the central axes of the orthogonal grid there was an open square, containing the church where the Boers of the region gathered for Sunday services and where they put their tents for the duration of their stay in the capital (Holm,1998).



Figure 2. Pretoria's growth over the years 1855-1928 showing eastward expansion. (Authors)

The discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886 had a major impact on the ZAR as a whole, as well as on its, thus far, unpretentious settlements. For Pretoria the gold rush not only caused an enormous influx of people, but also transformed a rural community to an urban society. The first expansions of the City could be accommodated within the central grid, being bordered by the Apies River in the North, East and South and by the Steenhovenspruit (Steenhoven Stream or rivulet) in the West. But by the end of the 1880's the City had already expanded outside its central grid. While administrative use expanded within the city centre, a new orthogonal grid was laid out to the South-East to accommodate residential dwellings. The new city quarter was optimistically baptised Sunnyside. The next expansion, called Arcadia in the same optimistic mood, was also directed Eastwards, using Church Street, the main East-West axis of the central grid, as its base of expansion and connection to the city centre. Expansions to the North and South were limited due to the mountainous geography and to the West due to the horse racing track, located beyond the Steenhovenspruit. Only halfway the 20th Century the Western side of the City developed, in the end incorporating the horse racing track.

The economic and social transformation, underlying Pretoria's growth and morphological changes during the second half of the 19th century caused political tension within the young and somewhat feeble republic. This led to a series of military conflicts. Pretoria became the centre of several sporadic disputes during the second half of the 19th century: among the Boers, between Boers and indigenous tribes and between the Boers and the British rulers over the South of Africa. These conflicts

culminated in the South African War (or Second Anglo-Boer War) (1899-1902), bringing the ZAR under British rule. The first half of the 20th century, in contrast, was a period of political stability and economic growth. This city prospered especially after 1910, when Pretoria became the administrative capital of the new Union of South Africa, under the British Crown. Its importance as administrative centre grew with more civil servants demanding more office accommodation. Meanwhile industrialisation took off. Both developments caused further urbanisation and a building boom (Fisher 1998).

When Prime Minister Verwoerd withdrew South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961, Pretoria became the capital city of the newly born republic. By then economic recession and Apartheid politics, dating from post-war times, had already brought about new major changes in Pretoria's features and urban morphology. Racial segregation deprived blacks and coloureds from their rights to live, and sometimes even visit, the city quarters reserved for whites, legislated through the Group Areas Acts of 1950 and its revisions of 1957 and 1966. New townships, like Mamelodi to the far East of the City centre, were constructed to house the non-white population and within the City public facilities for whites were separated from those for blacks. Racial segregation left its marks on the City of Pretoria, even noticeable after Apartheid was abolished in 1994 - these are still present today. Unlike the Union Buildings, the main architectural icon of the City, once the home of a racist regime, now the symbol of cultural diversity and reconciliation, the City centre has not yet regained its diversity of functions and facilities needed to serve an urban society and rainbow nation.

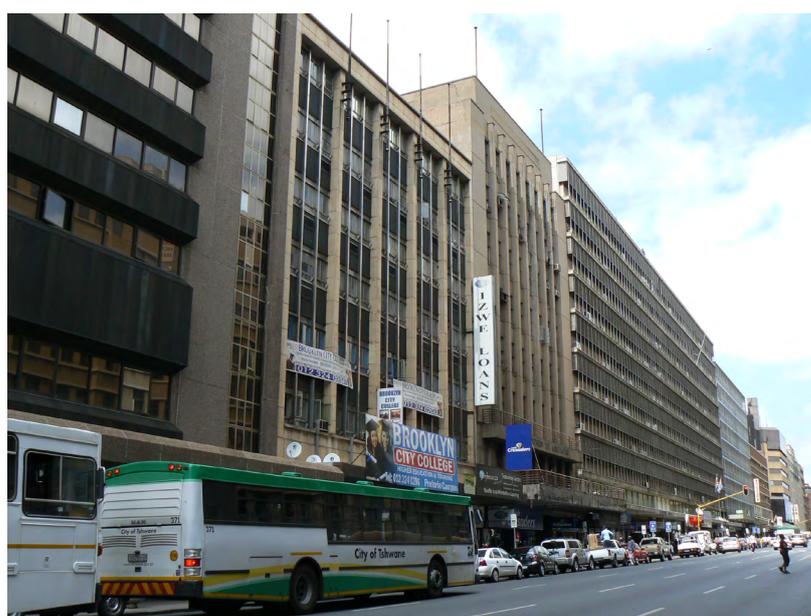


Figure 3. Pretorius Street, arguably the highest density in the City. (Authors)

#### 4. The present situation

Most lasting of Pretoria's features is its identity as capital city and centre of administration. This is still apparent today and the City is likely to stay the seat of government for the near future, notwithstanding the long distance to the Legislative seat in Cape Town and Judiciary seat in Bloemfontein.

Morphologically, Pretoria's urban grid is one of its main historical features, and has turned out to be its most lasting and sustainable aspect. It dates from the start of this city's existence and has been able to accommodate a remarkable number of developments and changes since that time. Only at Skinner Street has the grid been altered to accommodate a new, yet never completed, traffic circulation plan, proposed by Baron William Holford in 1949 (Holford 1949; Bryant 1963). The urban grid seems flexible enough to accommodate future developments and is expected to have a lasting future. Although the parcelation and building lines of most of the urban blocks date back to early times, the urban fabric of many of these blocks has been altered through time, especially where it comes to building heights and volume, yet always contained within the urban grid. Architecture and construction are, not surprisingly, even more variable than

the urban fabric and have frequently been changed and altered to suit an ever changing vogue (Corten and Van Dun 2009).

In the execution of the quick scan Pretoria's urban qualities, state of maintenance and functioning were investigated. The analysis shows that the City's main failure is not the lack of maintenance, but rather an unbalanced functioning (figure 4). Office buildings dominate the city centre, underlining the City's identity as capital city and centre of administration. This is not in itself a sign of disfunction. However, a large number of these office buildings stand idle, potentially providing possibilities for expansion of administrative use. Most striking is the lack of residential accommodation, public services, commercial activities and retail space (figure 6). This may be both result and cause of the commonly felt sense of insecurity. With regards urban quality, the quick scan highlighted the centre of the historical core, mainly Church Square and surroundings, as a coherent urban precinct (figure 5). The same is true for the urban blocks East of the central square. Moving North and West of the centre however, coherence diminishes (Corten and Van Dun 2009) and the City presents a haphazard nature.



Figure 4. Technical conditions mapping. (Corten and Van Dun 2010)

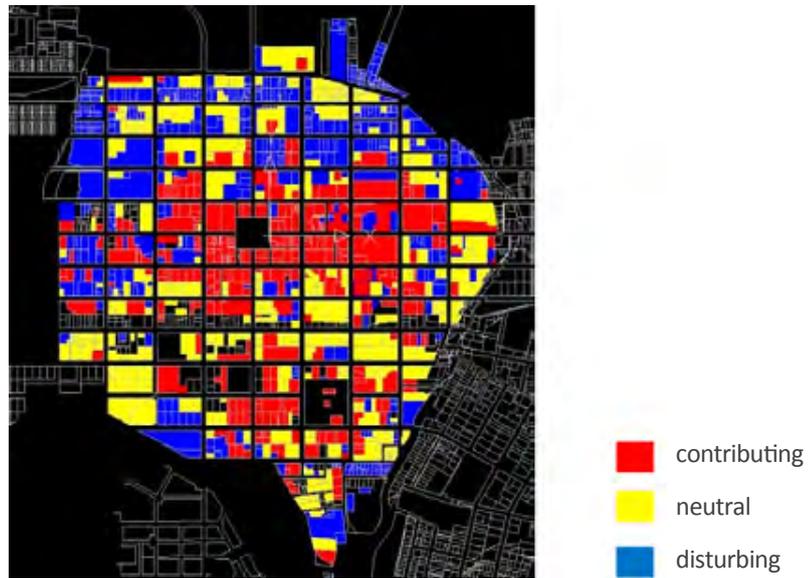


Figure 5. Historical identity mapping. (Corten and Van Dun 2010)

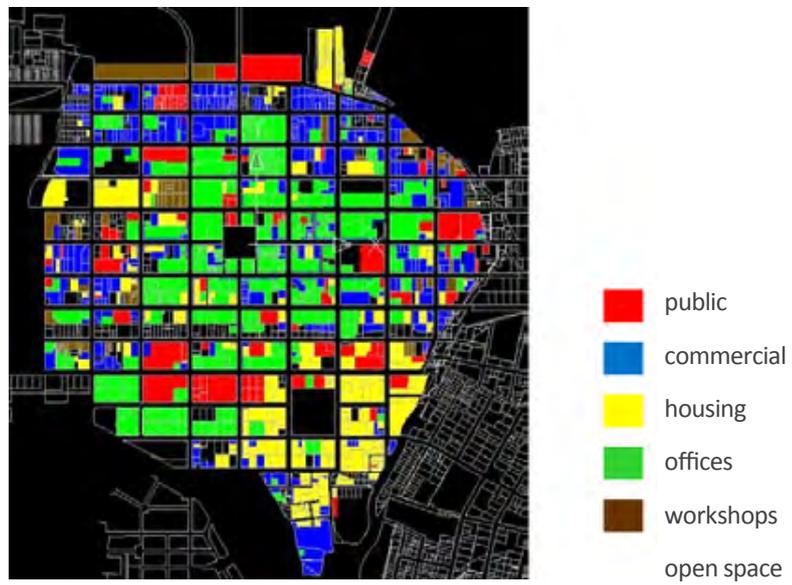


Figure 6. Functions map. (Corten and Van Dun 2010)

## 5. Future perspectives

Along with the quick scan, the Field Academy executed a SWOT-analysis. Combined with the before mentioned quick scan, this generated insight into the potential Pretoria's historical features offer. Resulting from this, development opportunities of Pretoria's historical core are expected to lie in its identity as capital city of the country and centre of administration. Pretoria's cultural diversity could be exploited and enhanced, as could the tourism potential of the City. By adding missing commercial functions and entertainment to the administrative functions, the city centre could become a lively place for 24-hours a day and gain attractiveness as residential area. Several spots in the city centre offer opportunities for brownfield developments; transforming marginal industrial and commercial sites, as well as vacant plots and idle office buildings into cultural precincts. Marabastad, a rather isolated precinct North of the city centre, too offers opportunities to be linked to the emergent vibrant urban culture. The natural resources in the periphery of the city centre, like the Apies River and Steenhovenspruit, could be exploited and capitalised, thus improving urban quality. One aspect requiring urgent investment is the City's public transport system to improve ease of access to the centre (Corten and Van Dun 2009).

The Field Academy also identified threats to the historical identity of Pretoria's historical core. They mainly result from a lack of coherent vision on Pretoria's future leading to ad hoc developments and investments. There exists a tendency towards ghetto formation, this catering to specific groups and activities of which Marabastad is an example. This is an omnipresent trend in Pretoria's historical core. Inner-city residential areas have of late also taken on slum characteristics. Corten and Van Dun (2009) also argue that the inverse of this, a danger of gentrification of residential areas, potentially resultant from inner-city redevelopment, were this to take place.

The participants of the Field Academy managed to translate the mentioned development opportunities and risks of Pretoria's historical features onto a map, thus providing the Metropolitan Municipality with input data for a master plan. In addition the Field Academy suggested the establishment of a Regeneration Authority and an Independent Implementation Body. The first could deal with the legal and political issues concerning the revitalisation, and thus should operate within the municipal organisation. Corten and Van Dun (2009) argue that the implementation of a revitalisation scheme, on the other hand, should rather be mandated to an independent body. This body could implement the results of the political approved renovation and multiyear implementation scheme. Its independence would have to be guaranteed in order to secure the continuity of implementation of the whole programme and it should

preferably be commercially based. A benefit to it being an NGO would be an ability to raise external funding for the renovations (Corten and Van Dun 2009).

## 6. Attempts at urban regeneration to date in Pretoria

In 2005, eleven years after the transition to Democracy in South Africa, the National Department of Public Works, along with the Department of Public Service and Administration and the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality launched the 'Re Kgabisa Tshwane' program. This program aimed at ensuring the viability of the historic centre of Pretoria through investment by National Government in public-private partnerships<sup>1</sup> This was a direct reaction to a disinvestment in property in the historic city centre with the associated decay, leading to urban sprawl in areas of lower density. Government itself contributed to this with individual government departments removing themselves from aging city buildings to commercial gated office developments in wealthy neighborhoods rather than reinvesting in the building stock of the city centre. Added to this Provincial Government relocated from Pretoria to Johannesburg in 1994, leaving large landmark buildings vacant. The Re Kgabisa program developed a Spatial Development Framework (SDF) with seven development nodes where the Department of Public Works would invest through the allocation of Government functions.

With regards the SDF the Re Kgabisa project had:

«... determined a series of precincts within which departments and agencies are to be consolidated and clustered. There are seven precincts in the inner-city along the two corridors of development investment being Paul Kruger and Church Streets. These precincts are currently the Presidency Precinct, Mandela Corridor Precinct, Sammy Marks Square Precinct, Paul Kruger North Precinct, Church Square Precinct, Museum Park Precinct and Salvokop Precinct. Each of the precincts are intended to develop their own character and are linked by the proposed dedicated pedestrian and public transport route along Paul Kruger and Church Streets, from Freedom Park to the Union Buildings.» (Re Kgabisa 2011)

Six of the seven precincts (figure 7) have a strong historical identity. Six years into the programme only one of these nodes has seen large scale development with one government department being allocated there: the Department of Trade and Industry campus development as part of the

<sup>1</sup>The official website of the Re Kgabisa Tshwane programme lists the purpose of the programme as: "The main purpose of Re Kgabisa Tshwane is to ensure a long term accommodation solution for national Government department head offices and agencies within the inner city of Tshwane." (Re Kgabisa 2011)



Figure 7. The Re Kgabisa Tshwane Inner City Project Spatial Development Framework. (Re Kgabisa 2011)

Mandela Corridor. This new campus, while altering the urban character of its immediate precinct, is located on a site of lesser historical significance and has not greatly contributed to inner-city renewal for the core. Tellingly the new campus for the Department of Foreign affairs is located far outside the core in a suburban neighbourhood and is removed from the City by a mountain. The drain of government departments from the historic urban centre thus continued.<sup>1</sup> The project did lead to investment in the inner-city with single new-build projects and re-use of extant building stock, but did not reach its main goal of precinct redevelopment or spatial improvement. This is due to a lack of political will in both City governance and Government, and is not the first of a long list of master plans and development frameworks prepared for the City, but never executed. The Re Kgabisa project itself is case in point, it being submerged in to another programme in 2007, the so-called City Improvement Development Framework (Damstra, 2011), which itself has brought about even less visible investment.

Until now identity seems to have remained a low priority for the City of Tshwane. The City of Tshwane Integrated Development Plan for 2011-2016 does not even list the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) as policy or legislation relevant to the City and the management thereof, despite obvious legal obligations contained therein.<sup>2</sup> This apparent inability of local government to take control effectively has led to a vacuum in managing the inner-city and its heritage values. Individual property owners have identified this void and have taken it upon themselves to restore and reuse heritage buildings in the city as commercial ventures, often buying buildings from Government itself. As case we can investigate one specific local real-estate owner and manager City Property (Pty

Ltd. In 2004 this company started investing in the city centre when others were disinvesting and saw commercial opportunity in the changing demographic brought about by the transition to democracy in South Africa. Being in need of ensuring a profit for its stakeholders the company capitalized on the lack of residential opportunity in the City by starting to transform much of the empty office space in its portfolio into residential accommodation marketed at emergent middle-class urbanites. In doing so it was inadvertently addressing a need which ideally should have been provided for through a spatial development framework, a need identified in the Field Academy. Today the company manage 700 buildings in both Johannesburg and Pretoria containing 1,4 million m<sup>2</sup> which houses 10 000 apartments and 8 000 office units, servicing 18 000 tenants (City Property 2011). Their strategy has been to acquire buildings which had been abandoned, vandalized or not invested in with low or no return and redevelop these to provide a good return on investment.

The new inhabitants of the City of course require amenities and services making the renovation and upgrade of other buildings, specifically those with street-side retail accommodation, viable. The flagship restoration project of the company is undoubtedly the restoration of a building on the central square of the city named Tudor Chambers (Architect John Ellis, 1906) at a

<sup>1</sup> Currently two more projects are being planned on the periphery, but within the bounds of the original Re Kgabisa Tshwane programme, both sites containing structures of significance. The programme was planned to come to an end in 2014 but has already been abandoned

<sup>2</sup> City of Tshwane. 2010. Integrated Development Plan. 2011-2016. p10

cost of 20mil ZAR (Approximately 2 million Euro at the time) (Property24 2009; Clarke 2011). The restoration of this turn of the twentieth-century building became feasible due the increased rental that could be realized from the retail accommodation on the street, but was also undertaken in an attempt to re-brand the identity of the city centre (figure 8). The building is a prominent landmark building located on Church Square, the heart of the city. Its restoration was undertaken in order to revitalize the core of the city, thereby safeguarding the value of other property investments in the area. However, due to unfavorable conditions and lacking support from authority in planning for parking the office floors have stood vacant for two years. Additionally the City won't issue an occupation certificate because the building now is not deemed to comply to current fire regulations, thereby disqualifying the project from benefitting from tax reductions in lieu of inner city investment. Still City

Property is continuing to renew the building stock under its control in the City based on financial feasibility. This process is helping to ensure the viability of the historic inner-city. As a large part of the building stock the company manages is historically significant, it has evolved a strong heritage ethos and employs heritage consultants as a matter of course. These historical structures have been turned into economically viable structures. City Property believe that the "revitalization of city buildings and the rehabilitation of city centers is plain good business" (City Property 2011).

However they too have been frustrated by the lack on information on heritage structures, the understaffing of local heritage authorities and lack of formalized frameworks within which to plan their redevelopments. At the same time as that they were engaged in the restoration of early C20 structures in the City, the same



Figure 8. Tudor Chambers (1903) during restoration in 2009. (Authors)

company undertook the demolition of another of their properties, Marchie Mansions (1937). At the time they were not aware that this structure was an important Modern Movement icon in the City, designed by an architect of great importance, Itten-Schulle trained Hellmut Stauch (figure 9).

While ignorance is no excuse for demolition, it must be mentioned that the City to this day have no register of heritage structures, nor do the Provincial or National heritage bodies. This is direct contravention of national legislation, the National Heritage Resources Act (25 of 1999) requiring local, provincial and national authorities to have compiled heritage registers by 2009 (Republic of South Africa 1999). The demolition of Marchie Mansions was halted, but not after irreparable damage



Figure 9. Marchie Mansions (1937) in 2010, the front block demolished, the back or Southern block still extant, (Authors).

had been done. To address this vacuum the Department of Architecture at the University of Pretoria has initiated an open source wiki-based documentation and information dissemination project on the portal [www.ableup.org](http://www.ableup.org) which now contains information on structures of significance in the city and hopes to be able to generate heritage registers in the near future.<sup>1</sup>

### 7. The here and now

Not all is doom and gloom. In 2009 the City issued a call for tenders to develop macro and micro precinct plans, informed, the authors believe, in part by the results of the Field Academy which were presented to the City in 2009. An interdisciplinary consortium of consultants, including heritage architects and cultural historians have now been appointed to develop these plans. Echoing the proposals of Corten and Van Dun (2009) this consortium are now proposing an independent development agency be tasked with implementing these frameworks. The Municipality itself has also now issued a call for nominations to a heritage committee, located within the Department of Sports Recreation Arts and Culture.

Even more promising is the recently issued regeneration policy paper issued by Tshwane's municipality in 2011. This enables the City's planning board to execute a long desired improvement programme. The City's officers leading the programme showed their rising awareness of Pretoria's historical features. The participation of two of the City's planning officials in a course on Urban Heritage Strategies, presented by the Dutch Cultural Heritage

Agency in collaboration with the IHS, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, in June 2011 was a direct outcome of the Field Academy of 2009 and was executed within the same framework concerning cooperation on mutual heritage between South Africa and the Netherlands (Hanekom et al, 2012). As an interesting aside the project office of the consortium of consultants tasked with developing the new macro and micro precinct plans have, in a move to show their commitment to both the City and public transport systems, established their project office in Tudor Chambers on 1 November 2011, the office component of this building having stood vacant since restoration due to a lack of parking provision as discussed above.

### 8. Conclusion

We may conclude that history and development have a reciprocal interest. History serves development by providing spatial quality. Development in its turn serves history by providing it with a base of existence. Regenerating historical city centres thus is a public-private enterprise. The public sector should provide favourable conditions for developments through ensuring legal security and continuity in policy, the last a quality lacking in Tshwane up to the present, but hopefully now set to change. This has not deterred intrepid investors from venturing into the City when others have been seen abandoning it. This investment, we have seen,

<sup>1</sup> This project, lead by Nicholas Clarke aims at documenting African Buildings and Landscape Environments (able) and is operated from the infrastructure of the University of Pretoria.

has lead to economic gain, capitalising on the iconic qualities and visibilities of heritage structures and areas. However for large scale, precinct wide regeneration of historic urban landscapes it is imperative that the authority take the lead in partnership with the private sector which, from the reading of the current situation, are all to happy to invest in heritage, if the frameworks within which this can happen are formalised. Sporadic investment in heritage can be brought about by both

iconic value as well as financial gain. Where this is done at a large scale and with a clear strategy this can serve as second rate replacement for a clear development framework but will always be frustrated by the disparity which will in time emerge between the individual building and larger urban environmental issues such as adequate transport, streetscape maintenance and so forth.

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