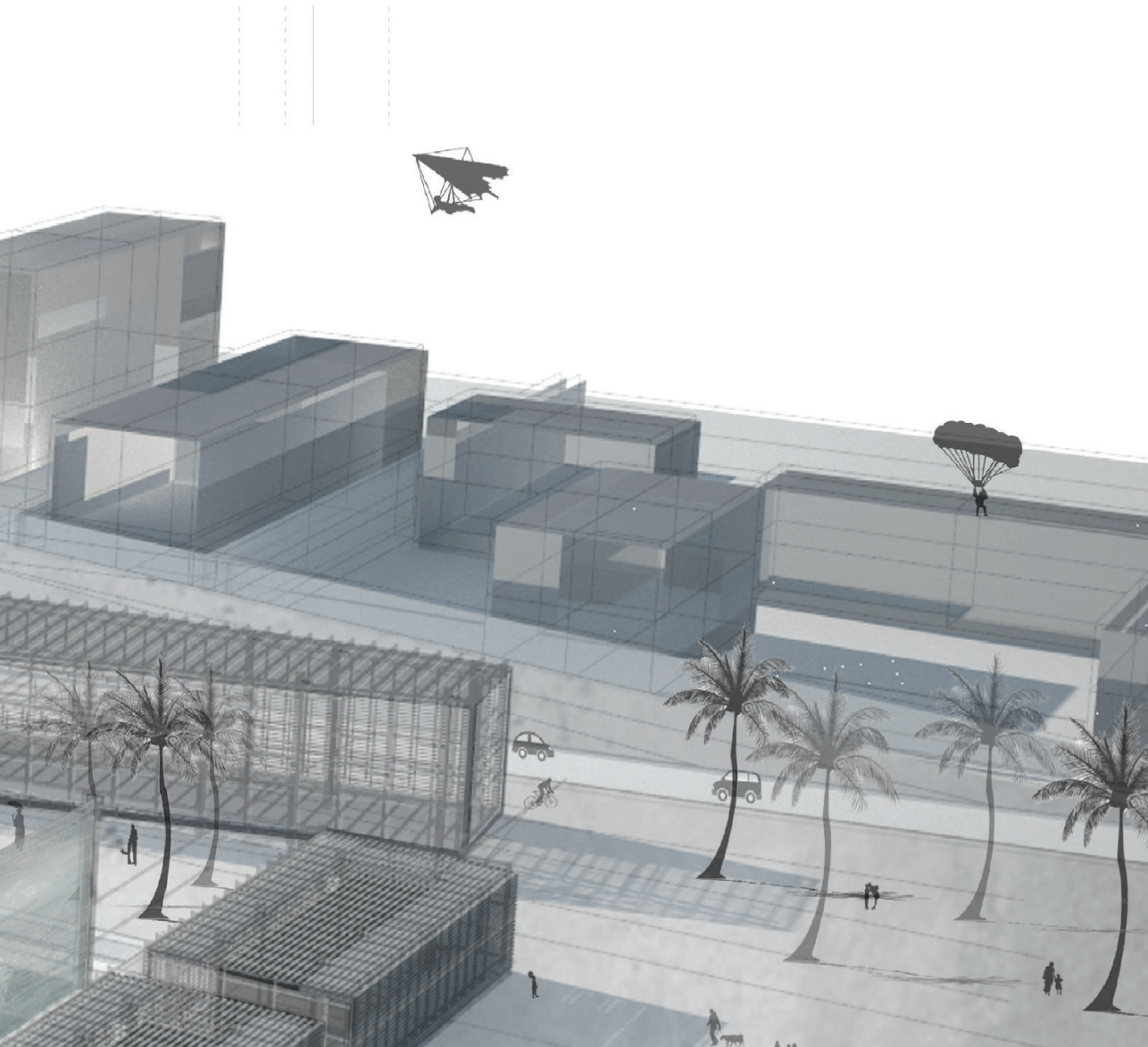


# REGENERATING WATERFRONT CITIES





# Durban, an African Water City. The discontinuity over the harbour and the beach front within a creolizing<sup>1</sup> urban form

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the results of the international workshop Summer Field Studio in Durban 2014 “Reconnection and Revitalization. From Warwick to Waterfront” held in July-August 2014 by the UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Urban quality and Urban Culture, notably in Africa of Sapienza University of Rome and its academic partners including CHU. The paper intends to highlight the significant water character of the city of Durban – a cogent African harbour-city. The spatial discontinuity between the beach front and the harbor is historically an evidence. A comprehensive urban rethinking might reconnect the fragmented urban episodes trying to preserve the creolizing aspects.

**Key words:** Durban, harbours, creolization, entanglement, discontinuity.

## Along the KwaZulu-Natal North coastline

And after all Durban is an African water city. Not only one of the most important harbour of South Africa. Albeit the high-way from King Shaka Airport to Durban Central Business District runs along the Indian Ocean coast – looking to no other emerged land then Australia in 4000 miles – crossing La mercy Indian suburbs, or luxurious residential gated-communities named Umhlanga Ridge and La Lucia – built in the middle of vivid greenery in which sneaking estuaries emerge – it recalls a Floridian environment rather than an African one; especially because of the mild weather. And when you arrive to Lower Marine Parade, received by the pretending decò-style Suncoast Casino, the Ocean breeze and the pedestrian parade – which recalls Barcelona’s beach walking path – drives you up to the uShaka Marine World located at The Point, a promontory closing the harbour bay, where high quality western-style residential neighborhoods raised along canals. The other side of The Point facing the old harbour, is under renovation its colonial buildings renewed with programs like fashionable bars and hotels. Lower Marine Parade brings back to Barcelona’s beach walking path – one of the most tangible manifestations of European ‘urban democracy’ – lived from the very early morning by multi-ethnic inhabitants and travelers hosted in the best hotels of the city having fun or sport on the beach. Durban is an African water city indeed, despite the environment described up to now could be in any other place in the world. But there was a time in which the waterfront was only on the other side of the town corresponding to the harbor that once was called Port Natal.

1. The term “creolizing” is a quotation from an essay by Orli Bass, *Palimpsest African Urbanity: Connecting pre-colonial and post-apartheid urban narratives in Durban*, further discussed.

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## Entanglement, creolisation, discontinuities: “The Point”

The spatial discontinuity between the beach front and the harbor is an evidence, especially for pedestrians: The Point is at the same time the hinge between the two parts of the city that developed in different periods and a promontory separating them. The spatial discontinuity is the result of an evolutionary process that starts with the Boer-British camps layout during the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is the evidence of the Boer urban culture through the long narrow proportion of the plots as well as considering the access of each site to the water. Instead the British urban culture character is given by the use of the urban grid and the presence of a central square in the camp layout. Indian settlers were brought to Durban as laborers in 1860 to work in the cane fields and mines, under the indenture system. They settled at the Point barracks and later moved into the suburbs where they were allowed to be landowner. This is probably one important reason why “The Point” – although it was the edge of the inner city – became an area of discontinuity in the urban developing process. The significant presence of Indians – Durban has the widest community of Indians living outside Indian national boundaries – made Indian goods highly requested: some of them became merchants and lived in the Indian market Quarter (Victoria Street Market) – shopping arcades with dwellings above. It used to be a very alive neighborhood in the past with interesting architectural decò features. There is a limited number of essays and papers discussing Durban urban form and development especially considering the interests of architects and urban designers; furthermore very few are the studies on Durban urban form that comprehensively analyze the water presence on the two coastal fronts, the beach and the harbor. On the contrary the literature on social studies is dense and explores especially the connection between the spatial, social and racial divisions within South African society. In *Rogue Urbanism*, a recent book on African urbanism, the essay by Christing Hentschel, *Outcharming crime in (D)urban space* highlights the potentiality of Durban in terms of ‘urban crimes’ and “reveals in a fascinating series of practices that seek to activate soft regulatory power manifest as ‘charm offensives’”.<sup>3</sup> Always in *Rogue Urbanism* Orli Bass<sup>4</sup>, senior project officer at the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (ccri) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal interested in cities and African identity, writes a paper entitled *Palimpsest African Urbanity: Connecting pre-colonial and post-apartheid urban narratives in Durban* enriched by a dense bibliography on social studies on Durban. For Italian architects used to cities like Rome to speak about palimpsest in terms of co-existence of historical and cultural events (in time and space) looks like a reductive definition since in the Italian culture of the cities the term palimpsest is usually related to historical layering (physical and non-physical) in urban areas. The multicultural character of Durban’s harbor is evident in several historical records: “Lieutenant Francis Farewell, Lieutenant James Saunders King and Henry Francis Fynn were the first group of “colonizers” of Port Natal, as they saw opportunity for trade, especially in ivory. These British settlers set camp and established their settlement, in 1824,

3. Edgard Pieterse & AbdouMaliq Simone (ed.), *Rogue Urbanism*, ACC & Jacana Media, 2013, pp. 399.

4. Orli Bass, *Palimpsest African Urbanity: Connecting pre-colonial and post-apartheid urban narratives in Durban*, in Abdou Maliq Simone, Edgar Pieterse, (ed.), *Rogue Urbanism*, ACC & Jacana Media, 2013, pp. 162.



among the indigenous people and the Boer people that were already resident along the edge of the bay”.<sup>5</sup> Also other references describes the “entanglement” between colonizers’ and indigenous’ culture since the earlier phases of Durban history: “The social space of the nascent settlement that was to become Durban was indicative of a host of creolizing and interactive social practices. The traders adapted to both the local environment and local customs (Pridmore 1996). Isaacs (1936) describes Fynn’s dress and the abandonment of attempts to maintain a dress code inspired by Britain, but there were most probably also practical reason for this. The merging of lifestyle was also reflected in the emerging settlement [...] Farewell adopted the local methods of domestic production and established homestead dependent on the labor of African settlement – the effective material reality behind the racist phrase “went native”.<sup>6</sup> The recent projects moving the harbor to a Northern location and build a by dig-out port by 2025 defined new opportunities of development for the logistic area at The Point that historically was the harbor edge. The presence of a logistic track line from the Point to Warwick cutting the continuity of the space from the inner-city grid facing the harbor is a major problem in the current urban design situation. Especially if the idea to renew the waterfront in a pleasant pedestrian environment is mainly based on the replication of the successful and pleasant environment present at the opposite side of The Point, where a number of restaurant, bars and shops are arranged in the location named “Wilson’s warf”. So, to cross over the logistic track line barrier is a main design issue to be solved.

#### Warwick Junction and the connection to the sea throughout the British grid

As many other contemporary African Metropolis also Durban lives the post-colonial dilemma concerning “rapid urbanization, resource management, population density, and national identity”<sup>7</sup>. Besides The Point area a further urban area in Durban demonstrates the unsolved connection between the beach and the harbor: the inner-city or CBD (Central Business District) which once was inhabited by whites and now, during the nigh is almost empty or abusively occupied by immigrants. It has an urban structure based on a grid and was established by British colonizers. Its low density is a main reason also why the connection between the harbor and the beach works scarcely. Close to Victoria Street Market, there is a very unique urban triangle, the Warwick Junction, a very singular intersection of urban functions and events, the primary public transport interchange on the edge of Durban’s inner-city boundary for train coming from the countryside. So, in Warwick Junction several different kind of markets are settled: the Early Morning Market, the Herbal Market and other informal markets enriched by an art-work bridge designed by the office Design Workshop. There is more than one essay analyzing the specific issue of Warwick Junction, especially after it became the main design issue of UIA 2014 in Durban. Among them The Making of

5. Yashaen Luckan, *D’Urban Resilience - The Warwick Junction Precinct*, “L’ADC, The Journal of the Scientific Socity Ludovico Quaroni”, n.3-4-5, 2014, p. 165.

6. Orli Bass, *Palimpsest African Urbanity: Connecting pre-colonial and post-apartheid urban narratives in Durban*, in Abdou Maliq Simone, Edgar Pieterse, Tau Tavengwa, *Rogue Urbanism*, ACC & Jacana Media, 2013, pp. 166.

7. Itohan Osayimwese and David Rifkind, *Building Modern Africa*, “JAE Journal of Architectural Education” 68:2, p. 5.

Place: The Warwick Junction Precinct<sup>8</sup> by Len Rosenberg and other authors published by the Durban University of Technology: “In the urban literature related to South Africa a considerable attention has focused on the forced relocation and destruction of integrated communities under apartheid. The best known examples are the destruction of Sophiatown in Johannesburg, the razing of District Six in Cape Town and the annihilation of Cato Manor in Durban. In contrast, this paper focuses on the Warwick Avenue Triangle (WAT), an inner city community, and attempts to explain how one of the oldest mixed residential areas in Durban defied the apartheid state’s strategies to destroy it. The paper traces the history of integrated residential development in the area and examines how slum clearance laws, the Group Areas Act and urban renewal programs were used to try to destroy the community. Attempts by the residents to resist removal and relocation are assessed.” These description confirm that today the most vibrant area of the town is around working Junction, in term of spatial identity in the sense explained in the following text. Culture works in a close relationship with the city. Indeed, as Nuttal (2004) argues, “the city form – and the city lives to which it gives rise – is the most conducive space to the remaking of culture and identity, because it is the place of most difference – where difference, that is, the juxtaposition of culture, works to revise and reread the orthodox, any stable notion of who is who... it is precisely within a culture of surveillance, or difference, and its legacy that highly charged border crossings are likely to occur, that people will find ways of walking, un-surveyed. The city, even where it is a space of segmentation to regimentation, is also a space of creolisation.<sup>9</sup>[...] to allow space for the articulation in of the originality of the African modern, its capacity to produce something new and singular, and yet unthought, and to find ways of accommodating this within our conceptual languages”. Various entities in Durban are actively involved in creating exploring, negotiating, confronting and constructing new, complex and complicated senses of vernacular urbanity. The next two decades will be crucial to learn how Durban learned to keep the balance between its historical existences, the new and the creolising elements.

Summer Field Studio in Durban 2014 “Reconnection and Revitalization. From Warwick to Waterfront”

In July-August 2014 the UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Urban quality and Urban Culture, notably in Africa of Sapienza University of Rome organized a workshop with Durban University of Technology. The workshop was held by academics and students of the partner universities of the UNESCO Chair (Sapienza University, University of Florida, Tsinghua University, Manipal University, Hosey University). The choice of the project sites was based on the need to revitalise and activate some of the most important yet neglected nodes of the city of Durban. The project focused on urban intervention through urban and architectural design of four precincts.

8. Rosenberg Len, Vahed Goolam, Hassim Aziz, Moodley Sam, Singh Kogi, *The Making of Place: The Warwick Junction Precinct*, Durban University of Technology Press, 2013.

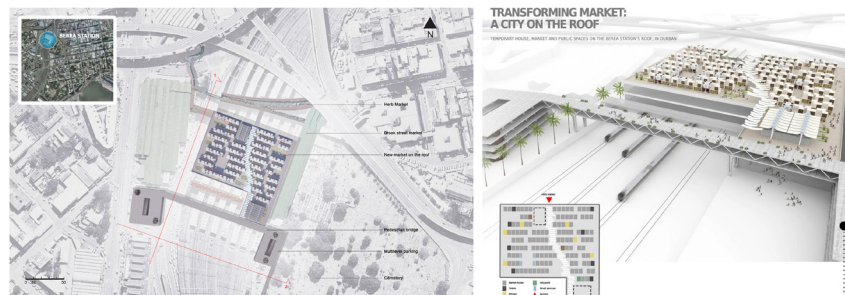
9. Orli Bass, *Palimpsest African Urbanity: Connecting pre-colonial and post-apartheid urban narratives in Durban*, in Abdou Maliq Simone, Edgar Pieterse, Tau Tavengwa, *Rogue Urbanism*, ACC & Jacana Media, 2013, pp. 171.



General Master Plan. "Reconnection and Revitalization. From Warwick to Waterfront"



From brook street to Albert Park: Pedestrianization to link the activity of the Warwick markets to Albert Park and the Wilson's Wharf. spaces along the street.



Berea Station: Development of stalls and temporary accommodation for traders on the roof of the station. Multilevel Parkades in order to free up ground space for more pedestrian-centered streets.



RESILIENCY AND COASTAL CITIES



*From Wilson's Wharf to Beach Point: Landscaped Activity Corridor to link Wilson's Wharf to the Point Commuter Train Stations.*



*Albert Park: Activation of Albert park with functions and amenities. New Landscaped link bridge between Albert Park and Wilson's Wharf.*

Tutoring and Jury Participants:

Lucio Barbera, Anna Irene Del Monaco, Liu Jian, Zhu Wenyi, Martha Kohen, Nancy M. Clark, Yashaen Luckan, Nishant H. Manapure, Christian Dautel, Yasuhiro Hayashi, Belula Tecle-Misghina, Zhou Zhengxu.

Participants

*Berea Station Theme:* Nkosingiphile A. Zungul, Lulama N. Mhlongo, Dumisani Shoji, Luca Saccoccio, Valerio Vincioni, Malusi Zwane, Khulekani B. Ntuli, Philani T. Mtshali, Raffaella Amatilli, Liu Zhiqiang, Phila Khumalo, Venero Rosa Russo  
*Albert Park Theme:* Nickiel Paramanand, Jean Pierre Jacobs, Paul Timbane, Iacopo Benincampi, Liu Pinghao, Bheka Msomi, Nduduzo Sibisi, Katohe Seliane, Giovanni B. Croce, Alexis De Rose, Zamah Mazibuko, Silindile Ngema, Nontethelelo Mkhonza  
*From Wilson's Wharf to Beach Point:* Nhlakanipho Mkhize, Nhlanhla Khumalo, Riaaz Sumed, Noemi Schiano, Valentina Frieri, Yusuf Rajab, Vimal Ramchund, Jesse Joseph, Giulia Quagliari, Liang Yingya, Masibonge Hlongwane, Sinothando Sibiyi, Zama Shoji  
*From Berea Station to Albert Park:* Uriel Maduray, Dinolan Pillay, Treston Govender, Jessica Alfieri, Xia Ji, Warren A. Simon, Suvanya Pillay, Shikaar Maharaj, Gioia D'Argenio, Ilaria Granello.