TWO RIVERS URBAN PARK

Making more with less - are there lessons in place-making that we can learn from those living in informal settlements, from those who have made do with what they had and maximised all available resources? Could these lessons offer the key to solving the Two Rivers Urban Park’s (TRUP) development challenges?

The 116ha project area sits at the confluence of the Black and Liesbeek Rivers, their sources divergent and reflective of the divided city: black versus white; poverty-stricken versus affluent, polluted versus healthy. Its accessibility is unparalleled sitting a mere five kilometres from the CBD by road and ten minutes by rail, accessible from seven stations. The expanded project area includes largely under-utilised Provincial and City government owned landholdings, which together create a development opportunity of catalytic proportions. Strategically located, it lies shoulder to shoulder with other significant initiatives, making the TRUP a keystone between current and future initiatives. Frustratingly, it is underdeveloped largely due to a lack of infrastructure, notably, transport and sewage.

To unlock the development opportunity, a new approach is required. One that challenges conventional development models and uses innovative alternative technologies and design as catalysts to sustainable urban growth. The diverse team of professionals interrogated the components of the urban metabolism to understand the changing relationship between society, city and nature. The conclusion is that these relationships are rapidly changing and evolving whilst resources dwindle and demand increases.

A sustainable, ‘green’ approach that ‘makes more with less’ has been adopted to guide the development of this project. It is central to our work as it identifies opportunities for resource management and urban integration. Conceptually this means converting a ‘linear input-output system’ into a ‘circular consumption system’ by adopting principles of re-use, reduce and recycle. A resultant shift in dependency on outsourced resources achieves balanced sustainability and highlights the need to exploit fully all available resources. Alternative technologies will be used in, for example sewage. This will be treated on site and used in biodigestors to generate energy. In this way, waste is treated as a resource.

Five simple interconnected ideas guide the development of this proposal, namely; live-work-play, a public realm for people, connections for integration, environmental rehabilitation for urban upgrade and ‘more with less’ as a generator of innovation.

1. The live-work-play concept creates a self-sustaining community. It comprises of a mix of land-uses, housing typologies and tenure options with an emphasis on those for the poor. This medium density mix combined with a fine-grained urban scale will contribute to the elimination of the need for extensive travel. It will encourage pedestrian movement. For connections into the greater metropole, a significant shift towards rail will be facilitated by amongst others, the upgrade of the existing service and the associated stations.

2. By incorporating a safe, public realm that prioritises the pedestrian’s experience, into this structure, an active lifestyle is offered. This example of an healing environment will also offer recreational facilities in the two river parks.

3. Urban and natural systems will integrate with rivers intertwining with paths that connect the poor Cape Flats to the City and northern suburbs. Bridges will cross the rivers weaving the halves together.

4. Environmental rehabilitation of the rivers and infrastructure development including a robust flood management plan is critical to the development’s success. This plan will include active recreational and environmental exploration. A metropolitan urban park will be built to service the larger catchment, inclusive of the poor Cape Flats. This amenity will increase property values, support environmental rehabilitation and provide educational opportunities.

5. The challenge of engaging meaningfully with food security in a city that is aiming to densify is challenging. As more land is used for housing the amount available for agriculture is reduced. The TRUP offers a unique opportunity for radical innovation in urban agriculture and a re-definition of the food chain. Further research and development by academics in partnership with the professional team.
APARTHEID LEGACY

INEQUALITY

URBAN SPRAWL

INSUFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

LACK OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

DIVIDED CITY

FLOODPLAIN AREA

TABLE MOUNTAIN

AFFLUENT AREAS

POOR AREAS

TYGERBERG HILLS

MIXED-USE ACTIVITY CORRIDOR

CAPE TOWN
Many questions will be tackled in the upcoming stages, amongst them those relating to the institutional arrangements and implementation strategy. In principle agreement has been reached between the City of Cape Town and the Western Cape Government with regards to the formation of a landholding company with the further hope that National Government will participate. This would transform the project into a ground-breaking initiative for inter-governmental and private sector cooperation. ‘Making more with less’ may well offer lessons in place-making and resource management. Only time will tell. Importantly however, the lessons learnt on the TRUP will be replicable elsewhere. This would go a long way towards weaving the disparate parts of our apartheid cities back together whilst redressing previous inequalities, offering opportunities for transformation, healing and hope.