

The Durban Street Project in Rivertown Sustainable cultural heritage



The XXV UIA-Congress in Durban 2014 followed in the tradition of previous UIA-Congresses like Barcelona, 1996 and Istanbul, 2005. These congresses were successful because they were visible in the host cities, reaching out to the general population and decision makers. Durban was the first UIA-Congress in Sub-Saharan Africa. Just two others had taken place on the African continent before, in Rabat, 1951 and Cairo, 1985.

The organisers chose the programmatic title 'Otherwhere' - looking elsewhere for alternative ways of creating a better future, with the subthemes; 'resilience' (emergence, alleviation, spatial economy), 'ecology' (time, evolution and Rio+20) and 'values' (practice and teaching). Among others topics, the program focused on developing countries, and of course, specifically on Africa and its transformations. Both African and international architects alike made their views known about the urgent need for housing, infrastructure, basic services, employment, social development and poverty eradication, and their strong link to political decisions and economies. Keynote speakers like Wang Shu (China) and Rahul Mehrota (India) added new perspectives to the discussion of post and neo-colonial development. Furthermore, trends like the growing appreciation for 'planetisation' and other terms opposed to 'globalisation' could be sensed in many contributions.

The Congress followed on from two major events in Durban. The football-World Cup, 2010 and COP 17, 2011 (climate change conference), which had already left their marks on the development of the post-Apartheid city of Durban, the third biggest South African City home to 3,5 million inhabitants.

To discuss urban planning and architecture, and to achieve a legacy for the city, were major aims for the municipality. On this basis, many so called 'legacy projects' and 'fringe-events' were organised throughout the city including music, performances, installations and artwork as well as exhibitions in the street, under bridges and in galleries. A green band painted on the pavement connected the different locations during the event.

Out to the street and into the city. Architects as drivers

We proposed to extend the typically closed character of Congresses and bring architecture to the street, asking for a underutilised historic building as headquarters to publicly discuss architecture, heritage and sustainability, *live*. This corresponded with the cities intentions.

City architects Nina Saunders and Jonathan Edkins supported the idea and identified a street very close to the Convention complex in Rivertown Precinct, formerly Durban's light industrial area. It is located close to Durban's Central Business District from where, in the post-apartheid years, several significant large businesses and corporations fled and relocated their premises to the north of the city.

The re-development of Rivertown would provide more than just the opportunity to revitalise and regenerate a currently derelict area, it would also draw interest back to Durban's Central Business District. Accordingly, the city was investigating the feasibility of arts & culture as principal drivers for the revitalisation of the area with the attendant retail, commerce and housing elements required in order to bring sustainability and vibrancy to Rivertown.





Rivertown around John Milne Road is characterised by several low-rise warehouses, parking and moving trucks, closed gates, security signs and a canal that traverses the area along the street, bringing water from the former 'vleis' or wetlands, into the harbour. Today, the canal is covered by concrete slabs. The most outstanding historic building of the area is the 'Beer Hall', a listed brick building from 1914, with a typical silhouette of chimneys and an inner courtyard. It had served as a drinking place for black men and was utilised as a facility for controlling the natives who worked in the city. Later it became a panelbeater workshop and a storage place for the city's Art-Gallery.

During the Congress, parts of 'Beer Hall' were transformed into a public architectural and urban forum - a place to meet with exhibitions, workshops, performances, concerts as well as a place for discussions and evening parties. The audience, a couple of hundred people per day, was made up of Congress delegates, specialists and the Durban public, which knew little about this central part of their town. Food, beer and music were key ingredients to revive the place after 50 years and help to liberate it from its harsh history. In a few days 'Beer Hall' became an address. To showcase the experimental transformation of the street, part of the John Milne Road was closed to traffic and a section of the canal in front of 'Beer Hall' was opened and 'renaturalised'. All interventions in the building and street were financed by the city, as well as many events and security.



At 'Beer Hall' we discussed socially responsible and cultural approaches ('sustainable heritage') as alternatives to redevelopment strategies from a purely merchantil/commercial real state perspective, going along with demolition and gentrification processes and we showed best practice examples from other places. Our aim was to enhance the development potential of the existing urban pattern and its buildings, to discuss their values and qualities and to point out possibilities of reuse and

transformation of the area and its characteristic (brick) warehouses.

The Durban Street Project at the 'Beer Hall' became a kick-off event and a catalyst for change in the Rivertown district for the period after the UIA-Congress.

Its success is based on many factors. Durban is a young, mid-sized city at the periphery of Africa, with a very specific historical, social and urban context, and with city planners that have vision and are open to experimentation.

Program at 'Durban Street'



The UIA- workprogram 'Architecture for All', director: Fionnuala Rogerson (Ireland), invited the Remix Dance Company (Cape Town) with dancers Xolani and Zama and the artistic director Malcolm Black. Remix is an award winning, unique dance company, founded fourteen years ago with the purpose of creating a platform to bring together dance artists from diverse backgrounds and with different physical abilities. Remix has built up a reputation as a groundbreaking and inspirational force in both dance and education. The piece '*Is Anybody Out There*' was presented at the Congress and on the street in front of 'Beer Hall'.



UIA- workprogram 'Architecture and Children', director Hannes Hubrich (Germany) and Ewa Struszinka (France) organized various workshops, among them '*Spatial Sensitivity and Children*', conducted by Carolina Pizarro Hernandez and Fernando Thiel Furlano (Costa Rica). It exercised spatial sensibility, using emergency housing as an example, from the perspective of children. The Workshop '*Architectural Gymnastics - Representation of Architecture by human body*' from the team Kenchiku Taiso, Masaki Onishi and Motoko Tananka (Tokyo) consisted of exercises inspired by iconic buildings and was offered to both children and adults.



'Beer Hall' through the Times

Architect Rod Choromanski (Durban) prepared a small photo exhibition on the story of beer halls in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) region and how these structures were used as facilities for control. The exhibition focused on the 'Beer Hall' in Rivertown, describing its journey through the many functions it housed. The photos were mounted into frames that were found on-site and had belonged to the art storage of the Durban Art Gallery.



The Rivertown Exhibition presented the results of the 'Call for universities' – International Students Competition Durban-Rivertown, in which students from Università degli Studi di Genova, Sapienza Università di Roma Facoltà di Architettura (Italy), TU-Dresden and TU-Darmstadt (Germany) participated. The task was to develop visions and strategies for the area around John Milne Road. The projects proposed solutions for public spaces around the re-naturalised canal, the development of public green spaces (urban gardening, pocket parks) and the refurbishment of the 'Beer Hall' as an arts and culture activating centre and administrative hub for the municipality



The 'Student Summer School' started before the UIA-Congress with the 'Call for universities' – International Students Competition Durban-Rivertown, as an international students competition with students from Università degli Studi di Genova, Sapienza Roma Facoltà di Architettura (Italy), TU-Dresden and TU-Darmstadt (Germany). In Durban they were joined by students from the Kwazulu Natal University (Durban, South Africa). The proposed theme was the analysis of the Rivertown area as 'laboratory' for the development of new concepts for a coherent mix of different social groups and the need to achieve a productive coexistence in our cities. The students worked on ideas for the revitalisation, social integration and sustainable development of inner cities by introducing pedestrian oriented mixed uses and models for higher density building. The school also served as a platform for international collaboration, interdisciplinary exchange, and innovation in urban research and practice, specifically for young architects and planners from different parts of the world. The students and visiting critics worked publically in the middle of the exhibition space.



Informal Studio: Marlboro South

Current thinking about housing in South Africa is gradually shifting towards upgrading rather than the

eradication of informal settlements. The need for suitably experienced professionals, community planners and officials who can engage in a process of participative planning, is becoming increasingly urgent. Universities and professional bodies are seeking new modes of education and practice. The travelling exhibition documents a seven-week period university course on in-situ. Fifty architecture students working with community planners (residents) from the informally settled warehouses and open plots in the industrial area of Marlboro South. Curators: Anne Graupner and Thorsten Deckler (26'10 South Architects, Johannesburg) worked together with Alex Oppen (University of Johannesburg). The exhibition was produced in partnership with the Goethe-Institute Johannesburg.



Ecology. Design. Synergy. This exhibition is focusing on qualitative aspects of the term 'sustainability', understood as the result of an integrated design process. It approaches specific aspects of the work of the offices Behnisch Architekten (Stuttgart, Munich, Boston) and Transsolar ClimateEngineering (Stuttgart, Munich, New York, Paris) and shows projects such as the RiverParc Development in Pittsburgh, the Senscity Paradise Universe in Las Vegas and the building for the Norddeutsche Landesbank in Hannover.

Curator: Frank Ockert. The exhibition was produced with the support of the German Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e.V. (ifa) and the Architekturforum Aedes (Berlin).



The informal **Poster Exhibition** along the street, on the brick facades of 'Beer Hall' showed projects that function as 'catalysts for the revitalisation' of ensembles, quarters and boroughs. The projects presented involved different and interdisciplinary competences of public authorities, architects, engineers, urban planners, sociologists, economists and the civil society. The initiatives range from small to large scale. Contributions came from India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Germany and Brazil.





Archiball, the annual architects Ball of Durban, took place on John Milne Road and at the 'Beer Hall' as one more way of attracting the public to events around the UIA-Congress. Around 2,500 people celebrated with gogo-dancers and various DJs playing House and Techno music. The moderator thanked the UIA and the City municipality for the opportunity of having "Arts, arts in the streets of Durban!"

In January 2015 The New York Times | Travel put Durban at No.7 of 52 Places to Go in 2015:

"The city's creative set is staking its claim on a hefty share of the country's cool quotient. The reinvention of Rivertown kicked things off: The city enclave is now home to a popular market, beer hall and, coming soon, a raft of boutiques showcasing proudly local brands."

We are looking forward to seeing this development continue to unfold!

Nina Nedelykov
with
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Credits

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