

**HOUSING THE MASSES. A COLLAGE OF THE SCHUBART PARK HOUSING PROJECT WITHIN THE GOEDEHOOP URBAN RENEWAL SCHEME.**

BÝVANIE PRE MASY. KOLÁŽ K OBYTNÉMU PROJEKTU SCHUBART PARK V RÁMCI PROGRAMU OBNOVY ŠTVRTE GOEDEHOOP.

Source Zdroj: Cornelius van der Westhuizen, 2022

## Schubart Park: A South African Experiment in State-Sponsored Social Housing Concepts and the Urban Renewal of Pretoria

Schubart Park: Juhoafrický experiment v oblasti štátom sponzorovaných koncepcií sociálneho bývania a obnovy mesta Pretória

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Tento článok sa zameriava na vývoj superbloku Schubart Park: rozsiahleho projektu bývania pre veľký počet ľudí z obdobia modernizmu, ktorý vypracovalo Ministerstvo pre komunitný rozvoj začiatkom sedemdesiatych rokov. Tento projekt bol súčasťou programu obnovy štvrte *Goedehoop*, ktorý bol jedným z najväčších a najkoncentrovanejších projektov odstraňovania slumov, uskutočnený vládou *apartheidu* v juhoafrickej Pretórii. V súlade s témou sociálneho bývania a sociálneho štátu uvádza tento článok Schubart Park do kontextu medzinárodného diskurzu. Predpokladá sa, že začiatky štátom sponzorovaného bývania v Južnej Afrike boli ovplyvnené vývojom legislatívy Britskej rady o bývaní. Cieľom tohto bytového projektu v Pretórii bolo poskytnúť bývanie pre novú populáciu mladých profesionálov a rodín v centre mesta.

Treba uviesť, že v šesťdesiatych rokoch 20. storočia bola Pretória administratívnym centrom nacionalistickej vlády a v podstate bola administratívnym mestom. Odhadovalo sa, že v určitom období bola každá piata osoba bývajúca v Pretórii zamestnaná vládou alebo miestnou samosprávou. Schubart Park mal poskytnúť novým pracujúcim bývanie a všetok luxus a služby, ktoré by mohli potrebovať. Zástavba masívnych rozmerov s vežovými blokmi zahŕňala voľnočasové aj obchodné aktivity: mesto v meste. Mestská rada Pretórie a apartheid dúfali, že v ideálnom prípade tento projekt zastaví odliv obyvateľstva z centra mesta tým, že tam vznikne viac obytných štvrtí. Historický kontext projektu siaha späť až k vypracovaniu dopravného plánu Pretórie, veľkolepej vízie dopravného inžinierstva navrhnutého v roku 1948, ktorej cieľom bolo vzájomne prepojiť dôležité juhoafrické veľkomestá (Kapské mesto – Johannesburg – Pretóriu) a vytvoriť hlavnú dopravnú tepnu do Afriky. Ďalšie analýzy urbanistickej situácie Pretórie ukazujú, prečo sa od založenia mesta venovalo západnému kvadrantu mesta tak málo pozornosti či rozvoja. Na tento účel bol iniciovaný projekt *Goedehoop* (Dobrá nádej), známy aj ako projekt Kruger Square. Tento rozsiahly a ambiciózny projekt mal vytvoriť sekundárne centrum mesta a obnoviť jeho západný kvadrant. V roku 1948, krátko po

nástupe novej nacionalistickej vlády k moci v Juhoafrickej republike, bol načrtnutý dopravný plán ako reakcia na očakávaný prílev nového obyvateľstva a rastúcu ekonomickú strednú triedu.

Aktuálne výskumy oblasti Pretória-Západ (a teda aj Schubart Parku) skúmajú túto zástavbu a ďalšie podobné projekty cez prizmu plánovania a politiky apartheidu alebo sociologickú prípadovú štúdiu. Je nepopierateľné, že segregačná plánovacia politika existovala a hrala dôležitú rolu vo vypracúvaní týchto návrhov. Skúmaná zástavba sa napríklad realizovala v časovom rámci a pod vplyvom zákona o zoskupených oblastiach z roku 1966. Chýba však analýza tejto schémy, zástavby Schubart Parku ako príkladu meniacej sa urbánnej morfológie a architektonického výrazu neskorej moderny. V súčasnom akademickom diskurze chýba analýza architektonických koncepcií a ich vývoja pre túto schému. Tento článok sa preto primárne zameriava na hodnotenie urbanizmu a architektúry objektu.

Dnes už neexistujúce oddelenie komunitného rozvoja ako hlavný investor a realizátor tohto ambiciózneho projektu sa v západnom kvadrante mesta snažilo iniciovať rýchle zmeny. V spolupráci s miestnou samosprávou, mestským zastupiteľstvom Pretórie, sa rozhodlo odstrániť slumy a vysídliť chudobné biele i farebné komunity, ktoré tam dlhodobo žili. Táto oblasť bola vyprataná a jej rozvoj zmrazený na nasledujúcich 10 rokov. Problémy súvisiace s absenciou dôsledného územného plánovania, s nedostatočnou komunikáciou a rozkolmi medzi miestnymi a štátnymi riadiacimi orgánmi však tento projekt už od začiatku odsúdili na neúspech.

Napriek tomu sa začiatkom sedemdesiatych rokov začala výstavba Schubart Parku. Išlo o pokus o udržanie záujmu verejnosti. Nový obytný superblok začal fungovať v roku 1976. Spočiatku boli noví obyvatelia spokojní a projekt priaznivo prijala aj širšia verejnosť. Ďalšie skúmanie fungovania a usporiadania zástavby sa odvíja prostredníctvom grafických analýz.

Schubart Park sa však nakoniec dostal do rovnakých problémov ako jeho britské náprotivky. Rastúca kriminalita, násilné trestné činy a sociálne problémy donútili ideálnu a zamýšľanú cieľovú skupinu tejto zástavby odsťahovať sa. Koncom osemdesiatych rokov, keď v Južnej Afrike nastalo uvoľnenie rasovej segregácie, došlo k podpore väčšej rozmanitosti nájomníkov. Do roku 2001 došlo k zmene vo vlastníctve budov, ale obyvateľom aj naďalej komplikovala život nedostatočná údržba a chabé služby. Početné spory medzi novým mestským zastupiteľstvom, miestnou samosprávou a obyvateľmi Schubart Parku nakoniec viedli k násilným protestom a následnému vystaňovaniu obyvateľstva v septembri 2011. V roku 2011 bola budova vyhlásená za nevhodnú na bývanie a ponechaná svojmu osudu. Záver článku je tak úvahou o zlyhaní utopických vízií autoritárskej vlády. Schubart Park je v súčasnosti naďalej prázdny, zbavený ľahkých ocelových fasád a základných služieb. Budúcnosť schátratej budovy je nejasná a z kedysi rušného sídliska je dnes len pustý priestor.

## Introduction

The issue of housing in South Africa has always been a contentious topic. The legacy of planning strategies from the segregationist era, such as the forced removal of the non-white communities, left visible scars on the urban structure. Even today, in Pretoria, there are still large swaths of uninhabited land within the central part of the city. The *Apartheid* planners sought to construct physical as well as political and economic barriers within South African population up until the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the effects and legacy of these practices have already been previously discussed by numerous academics and professionals, the present text, however, looks to investigate an ambitious urban development and government-sponsored housing scheme within the Pretoria urban structure during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was during this period, in the spirit of urban renewal and improved urban hygiene, that the now defunct Department of Community Development planned a new city centre, as such, launching the promotion of the *Goedeheoop* (Good Hope) project. This proposed development would undoubtedly be influenced by the CIAM 8 conference: “The

Heart of the City” debate from 1951. Pretoria’s city planners and architects claimed to have been inspired by Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse*, as well as the principles perpetuated by the ideal city of the modernist era utopias after the Second World War. However, in the case of South Africa and Apartheid-era Pretoria, urban renewal was merely the PR vehicle, designed to disguise the actual intentions of the Nationalist government (1948 - 1994): slum clearance and segregation. Ironically, the outcomes betrayed the noble aspirations of the project’s name.

The inaugural project, meant to lay the foundation for the further development of, and investment in the *Goedeheoop* scheme, was the mass housing project entitled Schubart Park. This massive, high-density housing scheme was designed to renew interest and private ownership within the city centre, and furthermore to stem the mass exodus of residents from the old urban core, Pretoria Central. This housing project sought to accommodate a new population of young professionals and families within the city. It should be noted that during the 1960s Pretoria was the administrative centre of the Nationalist government, and for all intents and purposes, it was an administrative

city. Schubart Park was to accommodate this new working person. The tower blocks and massively scaled development featured both leisure and commercial activities: a city within a city. The present text will analyse the Schubart Park project as an extension of the *Goedehoop* scheme, as well as within the context of government sponsored housing of the welfare state.

## The Background to the Social Policy

An increase in the industrialization of South Africa after WWI, as well as the rapid urbanization of the cities, a by-product of rural depopulation, created a greater demand for housing. The origins for the basis of state-sponsored housing in South Africa were influenced by British legislation. Even if this concept would, in fact, find limited legislative implementation in South Africa, the country had still been part of the British Empire (1902 – 1931), and thus British legislative influences remained common within its planning sphere. Mention should be made of the British legislation, as this would later come to influence the South African planners and lawmakers in establishing their own concepts, although this local legislation would focus predominantly on the issue of racial segregation. Council housing, the precursor to mass housing in Britain, was introduced through the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890<sup>1</sup>.

It is important to understand that British post-war housing policies came about as a result of challenging the issue of private landownership. By the 1920s, it was estimated that nearly 80% of Britons rented their homes<sup>2</sup>. The concern about the poor quality of the existing housing stock, and the return of British war veterans to civilian life, led the then Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, to initiate the Addison Act in 1919. This Act would see to the construction of almost 500 000 homes – of which only 213 000, i.e., less than half, were ever built. At this point, it becomes necessary to define the concept of council housing. One definition of the council house is a form of social housing that is owned and administrated by the local town councils, rather than private landlords<sup>3</sup>. These modest houses were rented out to working-class tenants at reasonable prices. As such, the Addison Act would empower local councils to develop and construct large-scale social housing, with financial subsidies awarded for this purpose.

It should also be noted that the British approach to social reconstruction, and thus housing as well, was supplemented in the post-World War II era by two additional pieces of legislation: one of the Acts that focused on the creation of new towns was the Town Planning Act of 1947<sup>4</sup> and the other was the Education Act of 1944. Subsequently, several additional Housing Acts were introduced in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A similar approach was yet to appear in the South African urban context, although it could be argued that there was a greater tendency to provide state-sponsored housing for the lower income groups that would be closer to their places of employment. One such example of experimentation in mass housing is the mine workers' compounds of Johannesburg. This same formulaic method of organizing the African workers would later be expanded in the segregationist land allotment and housing policies of the government.

## A New Heart for the New City Centre: Contextualising the Goedehoop Urban Renewal Scheme

In 1939 Pretoria achieved city status. By 1948, the city administrators and infrastructure planners projected that the population of the town would increase by 200,000 inhabitants within the following five years<sup>5</sup>. Thus factors, such as population increase, rapid urbanization, and the more focused and radicalized formalization of the segregationist laws, all meant that the city would continue to expand eastwards, as space within the city centre was scarce and generally expensive. One of the reasons for this asymmetrical bias in the urban development can be traced back to the strict religious, almost archaic superstitions of the original city planners, who believed that the western realm was always associated with death. Evidence of this is the placement of the original cemetery, *Zandfontein* (Fountain of Sand) at the furthest western edge of the town limit. Additionally, *Die Heldeakker* (the Hero's Acre), a newer cemetery was later situated west of the historical city centre, Church Square. A third cemetery was also established in what is today known as Atteridgeville, a township at the western limits of the current metropolitan area, inhabited by predominantly African residents. During this time, town planning practices were still influenced by the doctrine of the separation of peoples, and as a result meant that the western boundaries of Pretoria were largely rural and underdeveloped. This area was generally of low income, mainly occupied by Black and Asiatic peoples, with an isolated poor White community<sup>6</sup>. A lack of interest and development on the part of the government meant that this area was primarily neglected. However, by the 1960s, there was an increased tendency towards suburban living, exemplified by privately owned houses with gardens. The preference of the car over pedestrians, and a large migratory population (both Black and White), meant that the city centre was at a risk of becoming depopulated after business hours. A solution was needed.

Initially, the area that was earmarked for urban renewal to become Schubart Park has always been zoned as a residential area and one requiring further development. Occupied by a poor White community, it was generally considered a slum – and deemed an “eyesore” and unhygienic – by the city administrators. In the mid-1960s, the city council of Pretoria purchased plots of land in the western quadrant of the city, and by order of the Minister of the Department of Community Development, “froze” the area for any building or development for a period of 10 years. During this time, the area was completely cleared, and large plots of land were left vacant<sup>7</sup>.

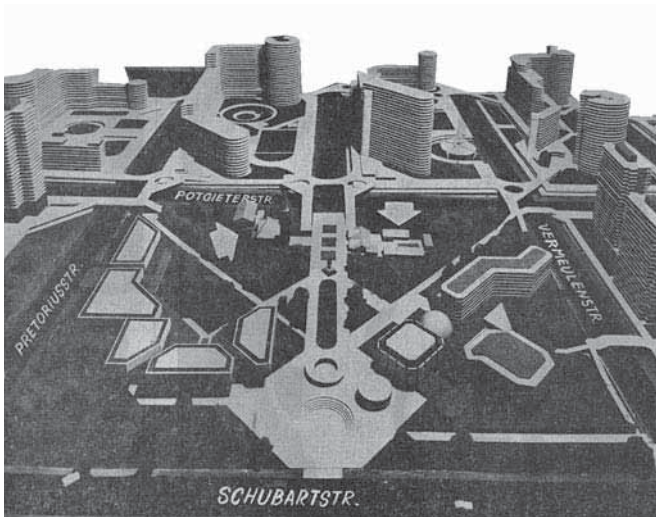
It was during this time that Pretoria fully established itself as the administrative capital and intensively pursued urban development to remain on par with Johannesburg. Statistics from this time period estimated that 1 in 5 Pretoria residents were government employees, along with a growing number of the young, professional middle class in the private sector. The Department of Community Development estimated that almost 10 000 homes would be needed to accommodate this demographic phenomenon<sup>8</sup>. The parallel international trend in most industrialized cities was to return housing to the city centre.



DIAGRAM OF PRESENT-DAY CENTRAL PRETORIA, WITH THE CITY CENTRE (CHURCH SQUARE) HIGHLIGHTED IN DARKER TINT. THE PROPOSED AREA SLATED FOR URBAN RENEWAL IS HIGHLIGHTED, WHILE THE SITE UNDER DISCUSSION IS IDENTIFIED BY THE RECTANGLE.

NÁKRES DNEŠNÉHO CENTRA PRETORIE, TMAVŠÍ ODTIEŇ ZVÝRAZŇUJE CENTRUM MESTA (NÁMESTIE S KOSTOLOM). NAVRHOVANÉ ÚZEMIE URČENÉ NA URBÁNNU OBNOVU JE ZVÝRAZNENÉ VÝPLŇOU, PRIČOM DISKUTOVANÁ LOKALITA JE OZNAČENÁ OBDŹNIKOM.

Source Zdroj: Cornelius van der Westhuizen, 2022



ARCHIVAL IMAGE OF THE PROPOSED URBAN RENEWAL SCHEME, PUBLISHED IN THE DAILY PRETORIA NEWS, C. 1970. THE DIAMOND-SHAPED SQUARE IN THE FRONT CENTRE IS KRUGER SQUARE, AND TO THE EXTREME RIGHT OF THE IMAGE IS SCHUBART PARK.

ARCHÍVNA SNÍMKA NAVRHOVANÉHO PROGRAMU OBNOVY MESTA UVEREJNENÁ V NOVINÁCH PRETORIA NEWS PŘIBLIŽNE V ROKU 1970. KOSOŠTVORCOVÉ NÁMESTIE VPREDU V STREDE JE KRUGEROVO NÁMESTIE A ÚPLNE VPRAVO JE SCHUBART PARK.

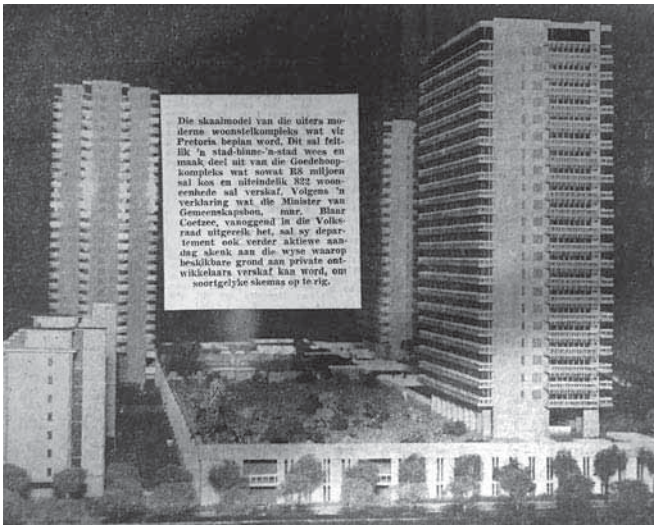
Source Zdroj: AAUP

Ideally, this meant that office workers and consumers would now live closer to their work and could potentially stimulate nightlife in the centre.

It should be noted at this point that the government, represented by the Department of Community Development, and the city council were the primary clients and stakeholders of this ambitious urban redevelopment project. However, neither the state organ nor the local council could agree on what the best way forward would be. Eventually, it was the Department of Community Development that came to the fore as the primary driver of proposals and development procurement. Growing public criticism and general skepticism about the lack of progress meant that eventually something needed to be done to promote the idea of urban renewal. At some point, in obscure records of the minutes of meetings between the city council and the representatives of the Department of Community Development, there were proposals to rezone the area for light industrial usage, which could in turn encourage private developers to continue developing the area, under the supervision of the State. This

proposal was quickly discouraged<sup>9</sup>. However, it is from these records in the communication between the State and the local municipality that a new notion became apparent, namely that there was a lack of a grand scheme or masterplan for the newly flattened landscape. Although a town planning scheme existed at some point in time, the specific date of its origin is uncertain, and this scheme had also been updated several times during the past. The lack of availability of this planning proposal supports this speculation.

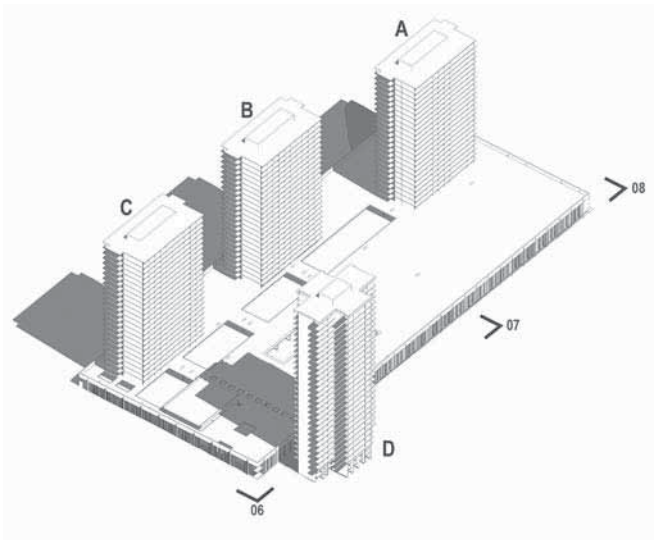
This large scale and ambitious project envisaged a secondary city centre and rehabilitation of the western quadrant of the city. In 1948, shortly after the new Nationalist government came into power in South Africa, the Pretoria Traffic Plan was drafted as a response to the anticipated influx of new residents and a growing, affluent middle class. Hence, the city planners and administrators introduced the plan<sup>10</sup>, which proposed to introduce a literal ring road around the historical city centre and connect two superhighways, thus situating Pretoria as a centre point for traffic coming up from the south (Johannesburg and Cape Town), and traffic heading north into continental Africa. The Pretoria Traffic Plan was never fully implemented, and only a small part of the road network was partially developed and constructed. However, as a result of this grand scheme, several large-scale developments can trace their subsequent inception to this proposal. Specifically, the *Goedehoop* urban centre, and the Schubart Park housing estates were envisioned to fit into this traffic infrastructure.



ARCHIVAL IMAGE OF A SCALE MODEL FOR THE PROPOSED HOUSING ESTATE OF SCHUBART PARK, PUBLISHED IN A PRETORIA NEWSPAPER C. 1972. THE CAPTION GIVES A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE THE COSTS FOR THE PROJECT, AND WHAT GUIDELINES WILL BE PRODUCED FOR FUTURE PRIVATE DEVELOPERS.

ARCHÍVNA SNÍMKA MAKETY NAVRHOVANÉHO SÍDLISKA SCHUBART PARK UVEREJNENÁ V NOVINÁCH PRETORIA PŘIBLIŽNE V ROKU 1972. TEXT VŠEOBECNE OPISUJE KALKULÁCIU NÁKLADOV NA PROJEKT A AKÉ USMERNENIA BUDŮ VYPRACOVANÉ PRE BUDÚCICH SÚKROMNÝCH DEVELOPEROV.

Source Zdroj: AAUP



A SERIES OF THREE DIAGRAMS INDICATING THE CHANGING FACE OF THE SCHUBART PARK SITE, FROM 1855, 1969 AND THE FINAL CONSTRUCTED EDIFICE IN 1976. THE FINAL IMAGE IS AN EXPLANATORY DIAGRAM OF THE SUPERBLOCK COMPLEX. ILLUSTRATED HERE ARE THE TOWERS A, B, C AND D, CONNECTED BY THE RAISED PODIUM.

SÉRIA TROCH NÁKRESOV, KTORÉ ILUSTRUJÚ MENIAČU SA TVÁR LOKALITY SCHUBART PARK V ROKU 1855, 1969 A KONEČNÚ BUDOVU POSTAVENÚ V ROKU 1976. NA POSLEDNOM OBRÁZKU JE VYSVETLJUJÚCI NÁKRES SUPERBLOKOVÉHO KOMPLEXU. ZNÁZORNENÉ SÚ VEŽE A, B, C A D SPOJENÉ VYVÝŠENOU PLOŠINOU.

Source Zdroj: Cornelius van der Westhuizen, 2022

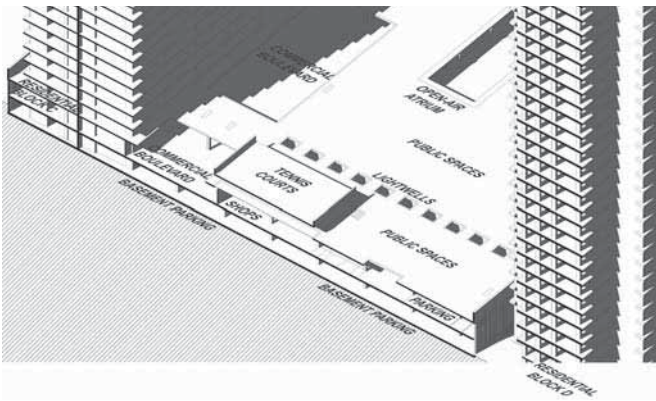
## Unpacking Schubart Park within the New Urban Centre

Most of the current research done on Pretoria-West (and thus, by default, Schubart Park) investigates the development and other similar projects through the lens of *Apartheid* planning and policies, or as a sociological case study. It is undeniable that the segregationist planning policies existed and were prominent in the development of these proposals. For example, this development occurred within the timeframe and influence of the Group Areas Act of 1966<sup>11</sup>. What is lacking however, is the analysis of this scheme, Schubart Park, as an example of the changing urban morphology and architectural expression of the later modernist era. An analysis of the architectural concepts, and their development for this scheme, is the focus for this text.

Nevertheless, construction on Schubart Park commenced circa 1970, and by 1976 the superbloc housing complex had been completed. The project was marketed as a city within a city, offering all the comforts and luxuries befitting of the 20<sup>th</sup> century urban city dweller. A secondary intention of this scheme was to launch more wide-ranging urban redevelopment and promote additional private developer and industrial investments in the project. From the very onset of the project, Schubart Park, although promoted as a community housing project, ended up being more like the antithesis of social housing.

In analyzing Schubart Park through the lens of urban development in the South African context, it is important to document how the site changed radically from what existed in 1890, to what was built in the 1970s. Gone now was the fine-grained urbanism and sense of community that had existed within the original urban structure. This was now replaced by four massive towers, and a massive closed-off and built-up communal based area - a bold new example of the utopian-oriented development that was yet to come<sup>12</sup>. This sentiment is supported by an analysis of the planning practices of the 1960s in South Africa. Developments could be categorized either as systemic planning methods, examples of political intervention as urban renewal, or an engineering approach to problem solving<sup>13</sup>. Systemic planning methods were often empirical, with carefully hidden political agendas, and did not consider community engagement as necessary<sup>14</sup>. Political interference in urban interventions concentrated planning in the hands of the bureaucracy, best illustrated by the *Apartheid* government's ability to legally remove non-white residents from the inner city. And finally, the engineering approach could be considered as representative of the utopian ideals of planners and architects, an approach that ignored the changing nature of the urban environment<sup>15</sup>.

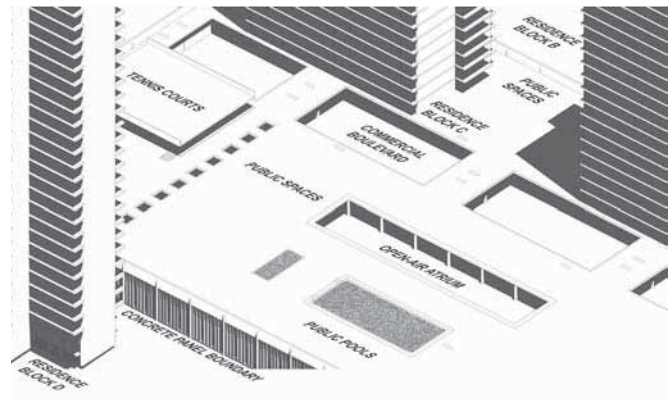
Publications with information about the urban development was scarce, and primarily organized by the state through printed newspapers. A rare publicly available promotional photo of the envisioned project, from a local newspaper, offers one of the few glimpses into the "towers in a park" concept that was proposed. The overall urban regeneration scheme was produced by Interplan Town Planners<sup>16</sup>, the dates of which are uncertain, as most primary documents from this time are lost. A generously sized, diamond-shaped square was placed at the centre of this new precinct. Bordering on this square is the historically



A SECTION THROUGH TWO OF THE RESIDENTIAL TOWER BLOCKS, ILLUSTRATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUBLIC AMENITIES AND PRIVATE RESIDENCES. ALSO SHOWN IS THE COMMERCIAL BOULEVARD THAT PROVIDED ESSENTIAL SERVICES TO THE ESTATE RESIDENTS. THIS AREA WAS ALSO CONNECTED TO THE ENTRANCE LOBBIES OF ALL FOUR TOWERS.

PRIEREZ DVOMA OBYTNÝMI VEŽOVÝMI BLOKMI ZNÁZORŇUJE VZŤAH MEDZI VEREJNOU VYBAVENOSŤOU A SÚKROMNÝMI BYTMI. ZOBRAZENÝ JE AJ OBCHODNÝ BULVÁR, KTORÝ POSKYTOVAL ZÁKLADNÉ SLUŽBY OBYVATEĽOM SÍDLISKA. TENTO PRIESTOR BOL ZÁROVEŇ SPOJENÝ SO VSTUPNÝMI VESTIBULMI VŠETKÝCH ŠTYROCH VEŽÍ.

Source Zdroj: Cornelius van der Westhuizen, 2022



A DETAILED ILLUSTRATION OF THE PUBLIC POOLS, AND SOME OF THE LIGHT SHAFTS THAT PUNCTURED THE UPPER LAYER OF THE RAISED PODIUM TO BRING NATURAL LIGHT INTO THE LOWER BUILDING MASS.

DETAILNÝ NÁKRES VEREJNÝCH BAZÉNOV A NIEKOTRÝCH SVETELNÝCH ŠAČT, KTORÉ PRERÁŽAJÚ HORNÚ VRSTVU VYVÝŠENEJ ČASTI KOMPLEXU A PRIVÁDZAJÚ PRIRODZENÉ SVETLO DO SPODNEJ ČASTI BUDOV.

Source Zdroj: Cornelius van der Westhuizen, 2022

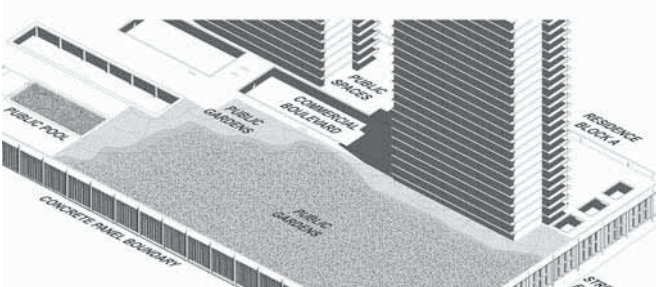


ILLUSTRATION OF THE GREEN SPACES THAT WERE CREATED FOR THE RESIDENTS ON TOP OF THE RAISED PUBLIC PODIUM.

ILUSTRÁCIA ZELENÝCH PLŔCH, KTORÉ BOLI VYTVORENÉ PRE OBYVATEĽOV NA HORNEJ ČASTI VYVÝŠENEJ VEREJNEJ PLOCHY.

Source Zdroj: Cornelius van der Westhuizen, 2022

preserved home of the Afrikaner president, Paul Kruger, the last president of the Transvaal Boer Republic during the Second South African War against the British empire. The new precinct would thus inspire nationalistic pride in the new middle-class residents as well, due to the proximity of a “cultural hero”. To the edge of this new cultural node, there stood Schubart Park.

### The Concept of Schubart Park: A City within a City

Described as a city within a city, the new housing estate experimented with a multi-functionality programme. The result was a massive estate of residential units, serviced by commercial and other essential services. Ultimately, this project attempted to establish a terraced social space within the new city centre that could eventually be connected to future developments.

The first half of the 1970s saw construction begin on the four massive tower blocks, and by 1976, Schubart Park was completed. The final design was based on the proposal by the architectural firm of Joubert, Owens & Van Niekerk, together with Interplan Town planners<sup>17</sup>. The final architectural object was a combination of precast concrete panels and in situ cast concrete structures.

The built edifice covered an entire city block and occupied an area of almost 26 758m<sup>2</sup>. Four towers, 22 storeys in height, rose from a massive 3-storey concrete podium. Of the four towers, A, B, and C were almost identical, but D tower was taller (25 storeys), and contained a variety of apartments<sup>18</sup>. The original occupancy estimates made provision for 2400 residents. Documents from that time describe a total of 813 living units made up of the following configurations:

- Small bachelor flats = 21 units
- Large bachelor flats = 178 units
- 1 Bedroom flats = 268 units
- 2 Bedroom flats = 323 units
- 3 Bedroom flats = 23 units

The raised podium contained all the essential services for city living, commercial enterprises, service centres and a community hall. This podium was intended to become the new elevated public space, and provided residents with swimming pools, tennis courts and a garden area. The semi-basement provided parking for almost 897 vehicles.

Schubart Park had a completely walled-up boundary with the street edge, implying absolutely no interaction with the



THE REMAINS OF PRESENT-DAY SCHUBART PARK, SHOWING THE OPEN-AIR CORRIDOR THAT USED TO CONTAIN COMMERCIAL SPACES.

ZVÝŠKY SÚČASNÉHO KOMPLEXU SCHUBART PARK, VIDITEĽNÝ JE OTVORENÝ KORIDOR, V KTOROM SA NACHÁDZALI OBCHODNÉ PRIESTORY.

Source Zdroj: Jaco Pretorius, 2014

street level. Thus, the result was the building turning its back on the street and the greater context. A central, open-air boulevard had a collection of shops and other ancillary facilities, yet these recreational areas and essential stores only served the residents of the housing complex. Residents had to travel significant vertical distances to access these public spaces<sup>19</sup>. This isolationist approach to the operation of the development seemed counter-intuitive and would eventually account for the depopulation and subsequent failure.

### Legacy of a Failed Utopian Vision

Ultimately, the state department had strict control over the allocation of accommodation, and carefully vetted the applicants. The ideal tenants were the new emerging young middle-class residents. Preference was given to government employees, families, and young professionals<sup>20</sup>. Renters would pay rent according to their personal income<sup>21</sup>. Access to the site was strictly controlled and, naturally, racial segregation was enforced, while allocation to certain apartments were made available by strict assignment policies based on minimum salary requirements<sup>22</sup>.

Initially the public reception for Schubart Park was positive, and some records suggest that there were waiting lists for accommodation, with an average waiting time of 6 years. It could even be argued that the residents had a sense of pride in their new community<sup>23</sup>.

Schubart Park was constructed in the spirit of modernism coming to the aid of the people: a utopian vision of modest housing that affords access to luxuries and privileges within the inner city that were long reserved only for the wealthier residents. Yet the application of this concept essentially falls short of its utopian vision. The architectural intervention conflicted with the traditional city centre: the lack of further development in the immediate surrounding context offered little attraction

to the residents and effectively created an isolated community within the city centre<sup>24</sup>. It would not take long for the area to become synonymous with a high crime rate and violent offences. A sociological case study, published in the *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* in 2009, analysed the perceived quality of the superblock residence, subsequently investigated the perceived experiences and sentiments of the occupants, and found that the later residents had negative sentiments towards the complex<sup>25</sup>. Some of the reasons cited include the change in the political climate, the forced integration of races, and a general lack of proper maintenance in later years – all factors that contributed to the eventual decline of the facility. As poorer residents were accommodated more frequently, an exodus of wealthier families and individuals was noticed. It can also be interpreted that as the initial excitement and “newness” of the project came to pass, residents were stuck with isolated residences, high up in the air. The only opportunity to engage with neighbours could occur if residents met in the common areas at the lower ground level.

Perhaps it could be considered that South Africans are not necessarily adapted or willing to live in high rise buildings. Even the founding fathers of the city, the pioneers who left the Cape Province in 1850, were not familiar with high-density urban environments, being primarily farmers and smallholders. Though Johannesburg saw the steady rise of numerous skyscrapers, in Pretoria, by contrast, many families lived in neighbourhoods or suburban areas where a domestic-scale dwelling was surrounded by gardens<sup>26</sup>. This meant there was always a distinct lack of tall structures in Pretoria, thus most residents were unfamiliar with high-density and high-rise living conditions. It should also be noted that there were height restrictions in place, enforced by legislation that discouraged the erection of tall buildings<sup>27</sup>.



**DETAIL OF THE CONCRETE TOWER  
BLOCK AND STRIPPED STEEL  
FAÇADE.**

DETAIL BETÓNOVÉHO VEŽOVÉHO  
BLOKU A ODSTRÁNENEJ OCEĽOVEJ  
FAŠÁDY.

**Source** Zdroj: Cornelius van der  
Westhuizen, 2022

From the inception of the proposed development, the project was faced with internal issues working against the proposed concept. There was constant conflict between national government and the local municipality, as is evident from the minutes of the council meetings<sup>28</sup>. A general uncertainty about the State and welfare of the project, as well as a lack of uniformity and prescriptive planning damned the project to failure before it could really be developed. At some point during the early 1970s, a town planning group was appointed to develop a cohesive masterplan for the Pretoria West zone. However, this practice is no longer operational, and their documents have long been lost to the bureaucratic black hole.

It is also clear from some of the source materials that there was a lack of conviction, or for want of a better expression, a general reluctance on the part of the city council and the Pretoria municipality to commit to any development proposals, whether in funding the development or for planning purposes. Additionally, there existed issues of the approach to land use and land values in South African society, which preferred to maximize land value, and not necessarily give attention to proper and intensive town planning<sup>29</sup>.

It would not take long for this supposed utopian project to experience sociological issues. By the 1980s, there was a general relaxation of the separation of races within South Africa. In

1994, with the advent of a new, democratic government in South Africa, the strict segregationist policies within the complex had been completely removed, and the apartment complex's demographics changed drastically. In 1999, the Pretoria City Council took over the administration of the superbloc housing complex but began to privatize some of their services<sup>30</sup>. In due course, the newly created municipal entity, the Housing Company Tshwane (formed 2001), took over the complete administration and operation of Schubart Park in 2005<sup>31</sup>. Unfortunately, poor service delivery and non-existent maintenance of the buildings plagued the beleaguered community. During the period 2005 – 2011, further issues included the suspension of many municipal services, such as proper water supply and garbage removal<sup>32</sup>. The situation of the living conditions at that time can be best described as inhuman. At the same time, compared to the original occupancy of 2400 residents, it was estimated that nearly 10 000 people were now occupying the buildings<sup>33</sup>.

The municipality blamed the lack of proper maintenance of the infrastructure on the tenants and cited the neglect on lack of payment for services. In response, the residents reacted with violent protests and setting fire to parts of the buildings. By 2011, the municipality had suspended all water and electricity supply to Schubart Park<sup>34</sup>. In effect, the municipal council starved the residents in the building and created an unsafe living environment due to the absence of basic services. Several legal battles in the High Court, a mere stone's throw away from the apartment complex, ended in September of 2011, when the court ruled that the remaining residents had to evacuate the buildings. The municipality and building administrators were, nonetheless, ordered to provide the evacuated residents with adequate temporary housing<sup>35</sup>. However, this court order was not fully enforced the first time around, and after the initial evictions, a significant number of squatters returned. The removal of the residents would lead to some violent clashes with the municipality. During this time, the building was almost completely vandalized. Façades, doors, windows and even the HVAC system



were fully dismantled or subsequently destroyed. Since then, the building has been condemned and has been declared unfit for human habitation. All that remains today is the concrete frame structure.

## Conclusion

Perhaps, the most glaringly obvious shortfall of Schubart Park was not only the constant uncertainty and reluctance on the part of either the State or the local government to commit to any prescribed and planned path forward. Nor is it the lack of an all-encompassing finalized and well-documented planning scheme that could be produced by professionals. Rather, the greatest shortfall was the absence of communication between the primary stakeholders (the administration of the Transvaal), and the intended target audience (the emerging young professional workforce). This can be at best described as an authoritarian project that had ideals but lacked communication and public influence, and thus was doomed to fail. Even today the skeletal remains of Schubart Park loom ominously over the western sphere of the old city centre. The current owners, the municipality of Tshwane (the name given to amalgamation of the greater Pretoria region and the surrounding municipal areas) is reluctant to commit to any real rehabilitative schemes on the structures, because not only would it mean that the previously evicted tenants would have to be accommodated within the new project, and receive this accommodation at reasonable costs, but it would also mean expensive reconstruction works on something that is not a feasible concept.

At this time, uneven development was prevalent in the urban structure during the 1970s. Investments and developments were primarily focused on the eastern quadrant of the city. Hence, a concerted effort to develop a new city centre in the western quadrant was undertaken, giving an overall balance to the greater urban structure. It is possible, I would argue, that Schubart Park could have been more successful if the greater urban context of the *Goedehoop* urban precinct came to be realized. As of today, the housing estate stands in isolation, an edifice in the landscape.

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