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'STEMMING THE TIDE': REVITALIZING THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT OF CAPE TOWN

N. DEWAR

ABSTRACT

Rapid and radical change has become the *leitmotiv* of South African society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This change is reflected in the changing structure, form, and functioning of the country's metropolitan areas and not least, in the Central Business District (CBD) or 'downtown' area which is particularly important to the city for a variety of reasons. Current trends in the CBD are deemed to be problematic by city managers and the business community. Indeed, 'worst case' scenarios predict the demise of the CBD in terms of its current status as the pre-eminent locus of decision-making, retail and business activity in the city and as the major contributor to urban finances. In many respects the Cape Town experience mirrors those of central city areas in other major South African cities. Cape Town is used as a case study to identify forces and processes impacting upon the form and functioning of the CBD and to identify relatively recent dynamics that give cause for concerns regarding its viability. A variety of physical planning and policy initiatives instituted to counter current trends and to 'shore up' the CBD are explored. Although premature to judge their efficacy, a tentative prognosis is advanced.

Introduction

Since the first election under universal franchise in 1994 a new geography of the South African city is being forged, one that is not readily accommodated in the models of the western industrial or 'first world' city. One facet of this is that many central business or 'downtown' areas in the major cities of South Africa are experiencing dramatic changes and can be considered to be 'under threat' in terms of their long-established form and functioning. Indeed, many recent articles in the popular press have couched issues and events concerning these areas in terms of their being engaged in a fight for survival (*Cape Times*, 1996; *Sunday Times*, 1999a; *Sunday Times*, 1999b; *Cape Argus*, 2000). In endorsing an opinion of Marcuse that the post-apartheid city in South Africa would be distinguished from its previous character only insofar as market forces would impose a new apartheid, Beavon (2000: 1) observed that:

not only was the central business district of Johannesburg in decline, but by the late 1990s the surge of new shopping facilities, office blocks, hotels, and entertainment facilities in the former 'whites-only' northern suburbs of Johannesburg had increased the quality of life far beyond what the white citizens of the city had previously enjoyed under the apartheid regime. So massive has the growth been that what might be termed the new 'Johannesburg-in-the-north' may well be able to lay claim to some sort of 'world city' status, but it is also in danger of effectively becoming a neo-apartheid city and not part of what Bishop Tutu has styled the 'rainbow' nation.

In 1996 the Cape Chamber of Commerce was constrained to observe that, 'regretably, standards in the city centre ... have deteriorated sharply during the transition to the newly elected democratic council and decisive and urgent steps are necessary to redress the situation' (*Cape Argus*, 1996).

Change in the historic central business areas of most large South African cities can be located both in the dynamics of globalization processes that are shaping the geography of major cities worldwide (Friedmann, 1995; Sassen, 1996; Smith, 2001) and in the specificities of the operation of the local and national political-economy. Becoming involved in the global economy, after a long period of enduring partial sanctions and relative isolation during the 'apartheid years', necessitated Cape Town seeking to enhance its competitive advantage, the 'selling of the city' (Lash and Urry, 1993) and taking advantage of the propensity for flexible capital accumulation by attracting foreign

direct investment. Its new operating environment is one of fluctuating financial exchange rates, export promotion, a shift away from the industrial/manufacturing sector towards the service sector as a generator of economic growth, rapidly changing communications technology and changes in retail operations towards the delivery of branded goods, many of which are imported and/or franchised and which possess an international image. All these have impacted upon older established economic and social practices in complex ways. Significantly, the evolving web of economic and social relations is embedded in place, in the 'territorial organization' of the city (Gertler, 1992). Not least, it is manifest in the functioning of the central business district.

Nevertheless, having recognized the global scale of many key formative processes, it is also necessary to recognize how these have been mediated by locally and historically contingent forces as they penetrate downward (Pacione, 2002). Local context such as the urban economic base, social structures, political organization, tax regulations, institutions, and competing interest groups exert a powerful influence on urban change. Stated differently, the particular history and geography of a place, the legacy of previous relational webs which have organized its economy, its social and political life and its physical structure can create barriers to adjustment just as institutional history may create opportunities (Amin and Thrift, 1995).

This paper draws on these themes to develop a case study of Cape Town examining factors collectively placing the central business district (CBD) 'under threat'. It recognises the historic and geographical uniqueness of the city but argues that many of the factors influencing its current predicament are generic to other metropolitan CBDs in South Africa and have also been experienced, in different degree and kind, in many countries worldwide (Pacione, 2002). The focus of the paper is on initiatives to overcome perceived negative trends and to re-establish the CBD as the pre-eminent office and retail node in the city.

The Central Business District of Cape Town: historical context

The current status of the central business district of Cape Town cannot be understood without brief reference to the history of the city, particularly to significant political, social and economic influences that shaped its growth and development. The CBD occupies the site of the first permanent European settlement in South Africa when a settlement was established

by the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company) under the command of Jan Van Riebeeck in April, 1652. The site was dictated by the presence of a fresh water stream providing irrigation and a harbour sheltered from the south-east gales.

However its location proved to be very a-central to lines of later settlement expansion. For approximately two centuries the settlement grew slowly in a confined 'amphitheatre' surrounding the historic core with the population numbering some 20 000 in 1840 (Bickford-Smith, 1990). The scale of development was limited to the range of pedestrian movement and animal drawn vehicles. Settler penetration into the hinterland was inconsequential and the historic centre remained the predominant provider of goods and services to the population of its citizens and immediate region. It was not until 1806 when the town was taken by a British expeditionary force for strategic reasons during the Napoleonic war that it began to assume greater significance. Discovery of diamonds in the northern Cape in 1867 and gold on the Witwatersrand in 1884 to 1886 impacted fundamentally on the growth of Cape Town as diamond and gold 'rushes' to the interior were precipitated. 'As the inland railway line was expanded to serve these rapidly expanding interior foci of activity, Cape Town changed in a generation from a victualling station with a limited hinterland to the major port of a vast sub-continental hinterland and of an embryo nation' (Davies, 1965: 8). Residential expansion was predominantly toward the east and south of the original core following the tracks of the first railway lines. Throughout this period too, and despite the formation of incipient village centres along the two major movement arterials that provided very low order goods and services to adjacent residents (e.g. Rondebosch, Claremont, Wynberg, Goodwood, Bellville), what is now the CBD remained the predominant commercial and business centre, the focus of urban activity.

Urban development of Cape Town also reflected epochs of technological developments in the transport industry (Cape Metropolitan Council, 1998; Davies, 1965). These included:

- an initial history of non-motorized transport (1652 to the late 1800s);
- a rail-dominated public transport era (late 1800s to the mid-1900s: a rail line was built to Stellenbosch in 1860, to Wynberg in 1868 while a number of tramway services were inaugurated to a number of suburbs from 1860);
- car-oriented suburban development (since the mid-1900s);
- the demise of the passenger steamship era during the 1970s and Cape Town's subsequent loss of status as the 'Gateway to Africa' (superseded by Johannesburg in the era of air transport).

The most significant impact on the scale of urban development and the lifestyles of the citizens was that of the motorcar which vastly increased personal mobility. This was compounded by construction of an extensive system of freeways commencing in the 1960s. Both factors were important determinants of 'large-lot' urban sprawl to the north, east and south of the CBD. Aggressive implementation of the National Party's 'apartheid' policy, particularly throughout the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the relocation of Coloured citizens to new townships on the 'Cape Flats' in the south-east of the city (Western, 1981). Race separation had always existed to greater or lesser degree in colonial Cape Town. Social practices, deriving from a mode of production founded on slavery evolved into colonial social relations of domination and subordination that became embedded in political ideology (Davies, 1986). Practical expression of this reached its zenith after 1948 when it was

Figure 1: The location of the CBD relative to the Cape Flats, the harbour, Foreshore, District Six and City Bowl.

Source: Constructed from various sources.

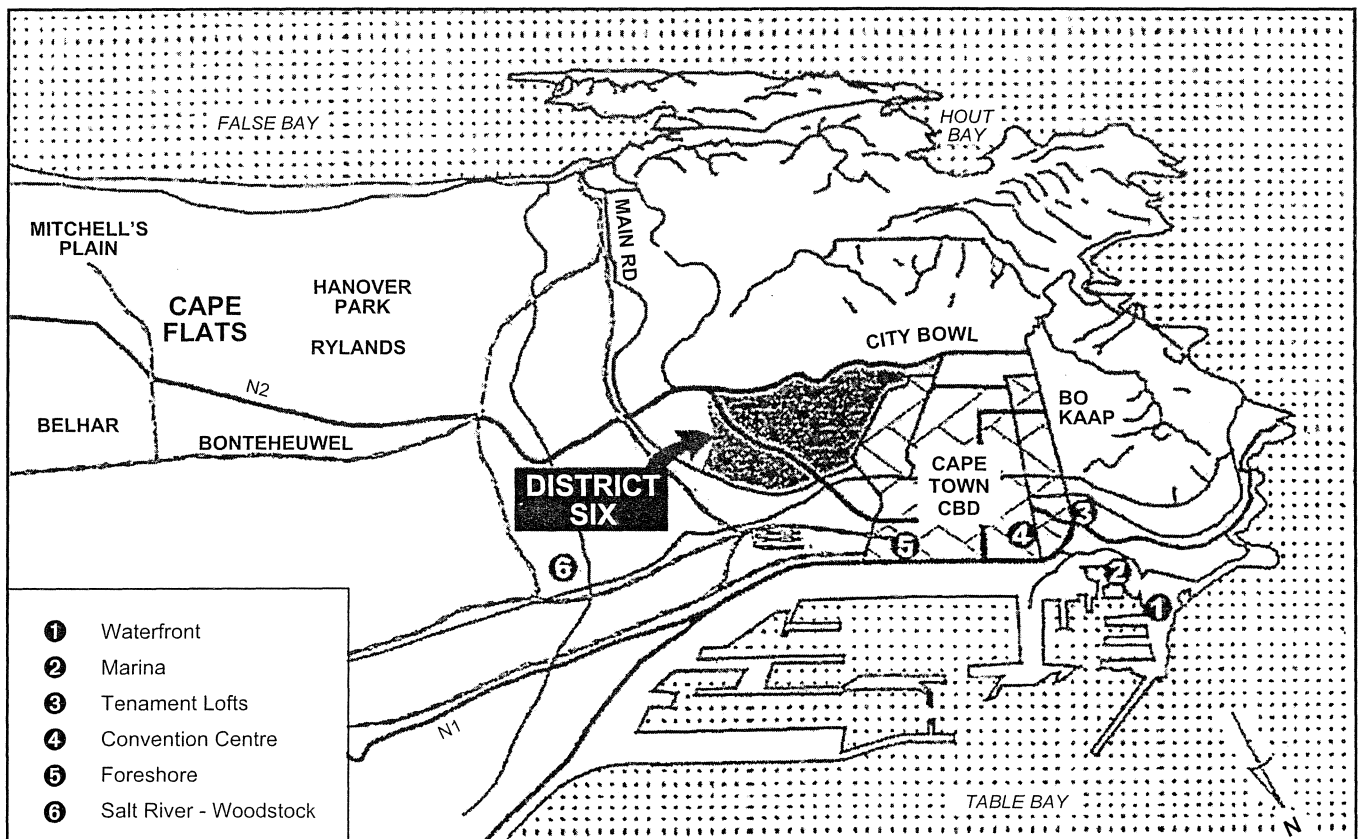
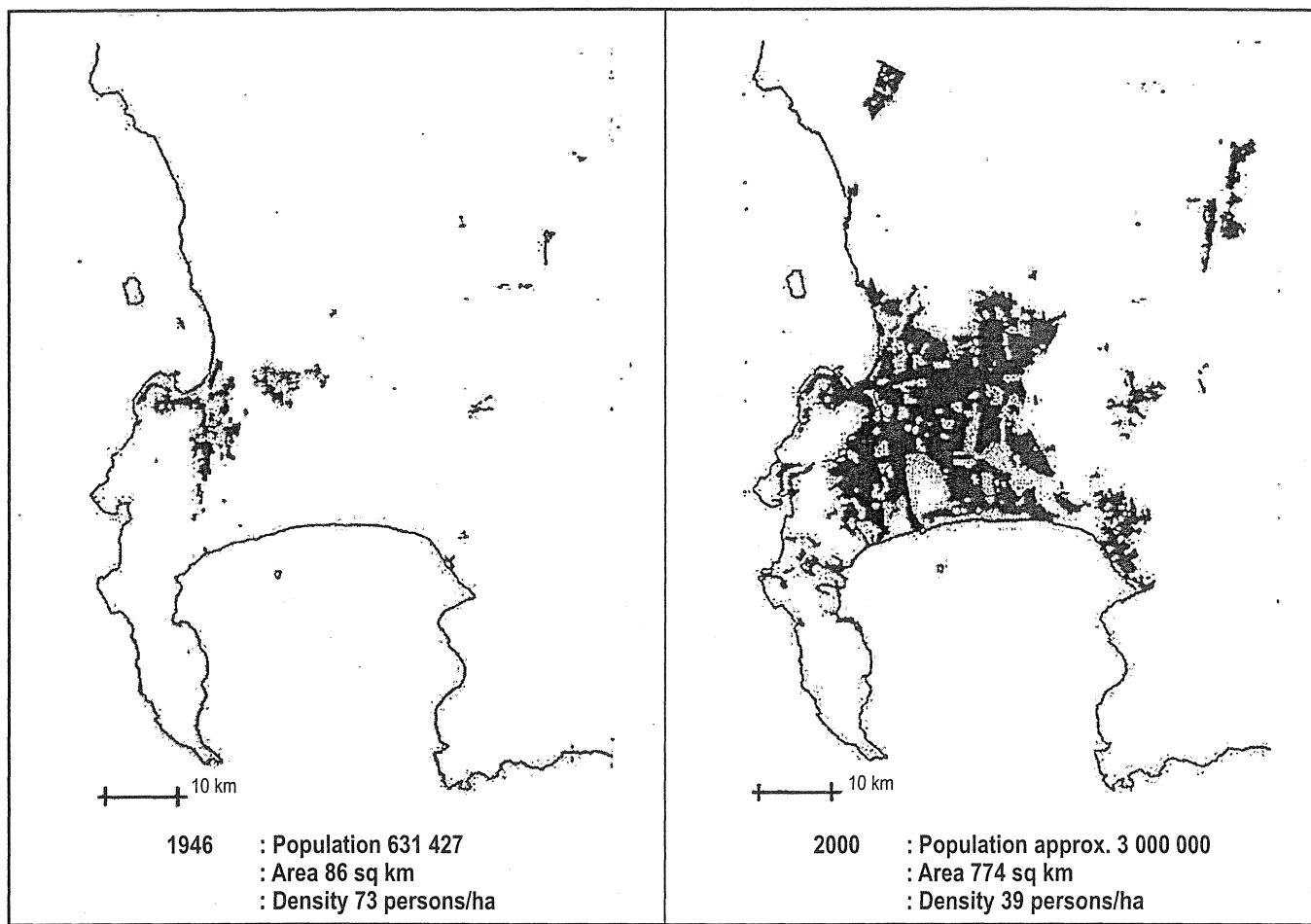


Figure 2: Urban sprawl in metropolitan Cape Town 1946 - 2000.

Source: Gasson, 2000.



formalized in comprehensive legislation under the National Party. Perhaps the most notorious of all the acts proclaimed was the Group Areas Act of 1950 that made provision for the geographic segregation of race groups. One direct consequence of this in Cape Town was the relocation of thousands of relatively poor Coloured and black families from newly designated White areas to new suburbs and townships on undeveloped land on the Cape Flats (Figure 1), east of the existing spine of development abutting the railway line from the central city to Simon's Town. The rate and scale of urban development was unprecedented. The immediate effect of this was to exacerbate urban sprawl, to increase travel distances, to concentrate poverty in the south-east sector of the city, to dilute effective buying power and to lower economic thresholds. This, in turn impacted negatively on business activity.

Of particular relevance to the present discussion was the removal, from 1965, of some 33 500 (people) from District Six (Figure 1), an area immediately abutting the CBD on the east (Western, 1981). Thereafter the dwellings were demolished in terms of the Slums Act leaving an extensive tract of vacant land awaiting development. In the face of widespread opposition, the area gradually became a symbol of oppression and injustice. As a result of external pressure, potential developers shunned the area and it remained undeveloped for the following 25 years, save for the construction of a technikon and some tenement houses by the state. Its immediate effect on the CBD was to remove a substantial source of buying power (Dewar, 2001).

Another significant determinant of sprawl was rapid urbanization throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The bulk of migrants were low-income blacks from the eastern Cape

particularly after the abolition of influx control legislation in 1986. This compelled the authorities to assemble large tracts of relatively cheap land for the provision of low cost housing and to consolidate and formalize shack development. In the main, this occurred on the south-eastern periphery of the city. The township of Khayelitsha which now accommodates over half a million inhabitants did not exist in 1984. Figure 2 illustrates the degree to which suburban growth of the city has occurred to the south and east of the CBD which, being the focus of major transport arterials, has become increasingly a-central to the daily functioning urban system.

Another significant consequence of car-induced mobility and the direction of urban growth insofar as it affected the CBD was the proliferation of planned shopping and office complexes in interceptor locations (Figure 3).

These served significantly to lower the market range of retailers in the CBD and to change the number and type of establishments located there, particularly at the high order end of the market. To a marked degree retailers began to serve the market needs of the captive working population in the CBD. It also served to create an oversupply of retail and office space thereby lowering rentals and stimulating decentralization of these functions. Concomitantly, the nature and location of entertainment was changing: prior to the advent of TV in the 1960s, cinema was a major source of evening entertainment as were music performances in hotel lounges. With the increasing popularity of TV the major cinemas closed to be replaced by smaller 'multiplexes' in the shopping centres. Under the impress of political and economic sanctions during the apartheid era, many hotels in the CBD also closed. In the same period, men-

only restrictions in bars were repealed and they quickly yielded to more convivial British-style pubs, which tended to locate near their clients in the suburbs.

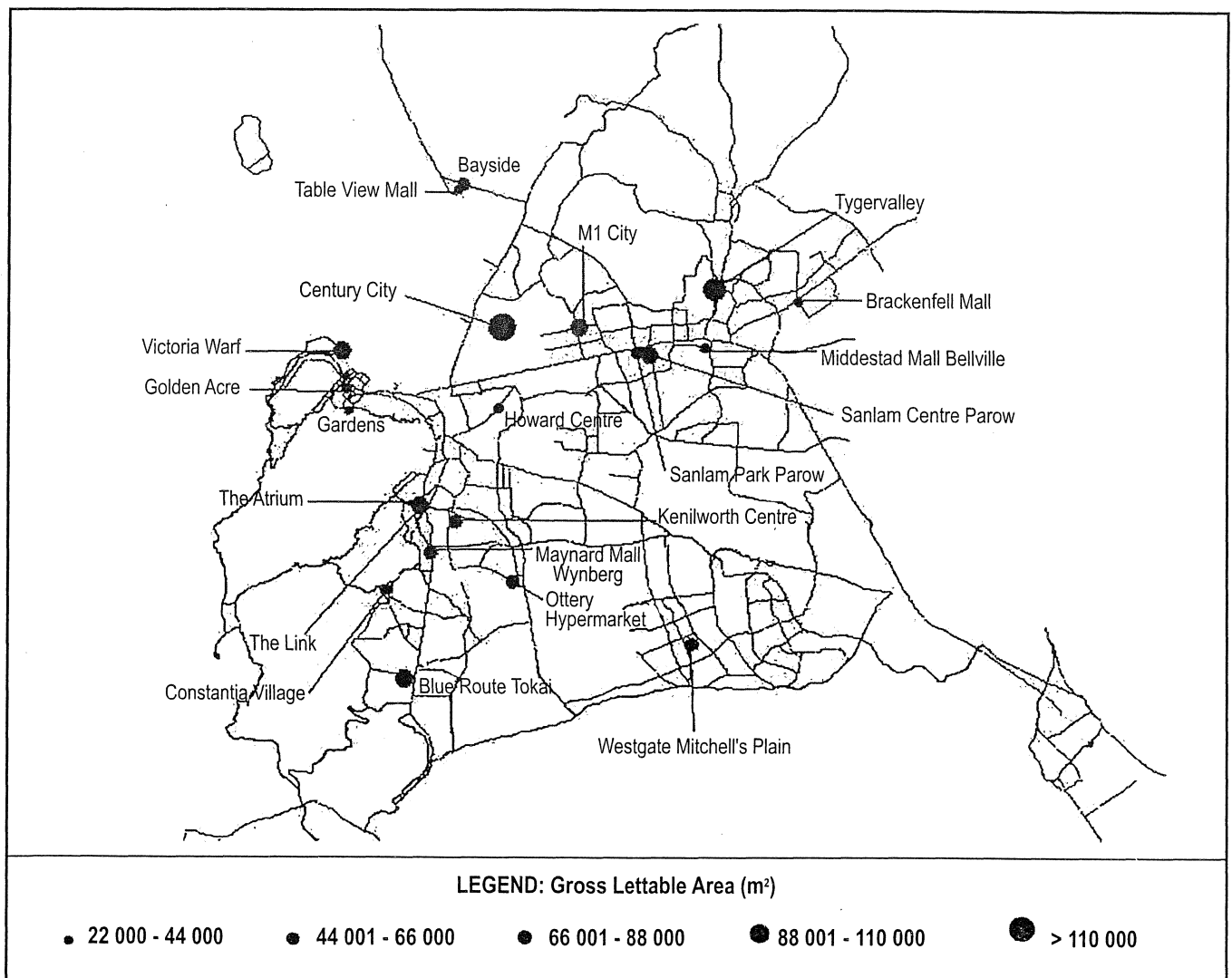
A further feature of development relevant to discussion of the CBD was the expansion of the harbour between 1936 and 1945. This enabled reclamation of some 98ha of land using fill from the harbour excavations and provided the possibility of innovative planning for northward expansion on the CBD. However, planning and design of the Foreshore supervised by a specially constituted Foreshore Board, proved to be highly inappropriate and unsuccessful. It was conceived in 'monumental' terms to celebrate Cape Town as the 'Gateway to Africa'. City blocks were large and wide, multi-lane streets pandered to the motorcar. 'Dead frontages' and lack of human scale, in marked contrast to that of the historic core, deterred pedestrians while buildings built in the 'modern idiom' where form followed function, proved to be unattractive and out of character with the rest of the CBD. Exacerbating the unattractiveness of the area was the location of a functioning coal-fired power station on the main axis linking the docks to the historic core. Further, 'harbour fences, unsightly buildings and elevated freeways have finally alienated the city from the sea. There are no places where people can enjoy the pleasurable opportunities of the harbour and the sea within easy walking distance of the CBD' (City of Cape Town, 1995: 19).

The current significance of the CBD to the city

Given its long history of development as the dominant node of business, legal and governmental activity in the city, the CBD contains 29 per cent of all formal businesses in the Cape metropolitan area in 2000. It represents a major concentration of employment generating 27 per cent of total employment (232 000 jobs), and 21 per cent (some R39 bn) in turnover (City of Cape Town, 2001). It constitutes a considerable stock of public and private investment and a well-established network of functional linkages, thereby providing considerable agglomeration economies. As such, it is a repository of high land values and an important source of revenue, contributing 21.6 per cent (R181 377 845) of the metropolitan area's rates revenue (Canning, *pers comm*). It also remains the predominant transport hub in the city bringing approximately 240 000 commuters daily by private vehicle and public transport (60% and 40% respectively), of whom 75 per cent are in the middle and upper income brackets. This constitutes a potential 'captive market' of considerable proportions. Being the location of the headquarters of major national and multi-national companies as well as housing parliament, the provincial administration and the city council makes it an important source of information and an important centre of decision-making. These factors, combined with the fact that it contains buildings and precincts of considerable cultural heritage significance, has served to

Figure 3: Major decentralized planned shopping centres in metropolitan Cape Town.

Source: Cape Metropolitan Council, Economic Development Directorate.



create the image of metropolitan Cape Town to an important degree and to imbue it with prestige value and marketing potential. As a result it contributes significantly to the attractiveness of the western Cape as a tourist destination. Finally, it continues to function as an important retail, service and business centre offering a wide range of high- and low-order functions to the city.

Decline of the CBD as a business environment

Prior to 2000, the historical dominance of the CBD came under pressure from a number of countervailing forces. Some had been in operation for decades while others were an immediate consequence of rapid and substantial socio-political changes following installation of the first black majority government in 1994.

As indicated earlier, new planned shopping centres, strategically located relative to freeways and offering the attraction of guaranteed parking, security, shelter from the elements, high levels of cleanliness, maintenance and aesthetic appeal (to many) have been a feature of urban expansion since the 1970s. One significant effect of the infusion of these centres across the wider city has been to undermine retailing in the CBD.

Compounding the situation, circumstances within the CBD itself were changing: as Rode (2000a: 8) observed:

Since the early to mid-1990s South African property owners have been watching with trepidation invasion of crime and grime into their previously first-world business districts and residential areas. And if that wasn't enough, the new South Africa brought in its wake the hiking of property taxes in some instances and the lowering of municipal service standards in most cases.

Although the tempo varies, the end result is predictably the same: significant value diminution. This is so because of a very simple real estate law: bad drives out good. It works like this: Across-the-board declines in real market rentals and growing vacancies eventually result in the degradation of an area because renovations or upgrades now become financially unviable. After all, no landlord in his right mind is going to throw good money after bad. Such a trend of course diminishes the local authority's ability to raise taxes and deliver services, leading to a vicious down spiral. This is vividly illustrated by the recent history of the Johannesburg and Pretoria CBDs, among others.

Since 1998, 225 500 square metres of new shopping centre space has been built outside the CBD (Rode, 2000c: 14) leading to a marked oversupply. Concomitantly, street front shop rentals in the CBD remain above the average paid by retailers in decentralized shopping centres (Figure 4).

In many cases CBD retailers had decentralized because increasing numbers of developments caused a situation where retailers were reluctant - even afraid not to establish stores, even at the expense of their current operating system. Many retailers reached the point where the market itself was not growing to keep pace with the number of stores offered, yet the number of stores - driven by the pressure to be part of new developments - continued to grow. Thus, the performance of CBD outlets ultimately had to be affected by higher operating costs and therefore lower margins; 'reports that new developments are doing particularly well is unsurprising. Very few reports, however talk to the performance of other existing stores from whom market has been inevitably drawn' (Cape Town Partnership, 2001: 7). Not only large retail operations were affected - many small and medium-size enterprises

Figure 4: Real street front shop rental index.

Source: Rode's Database.

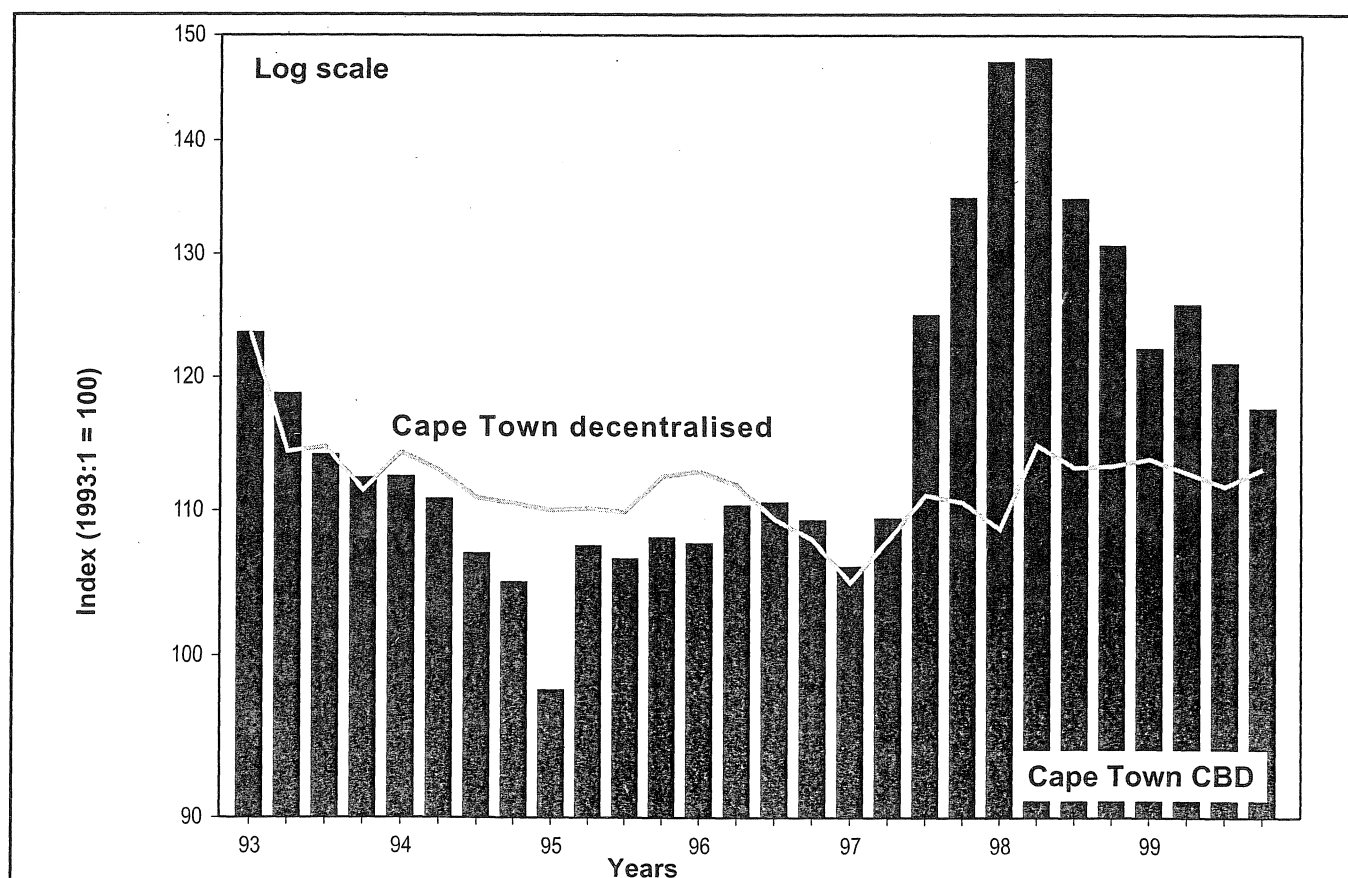
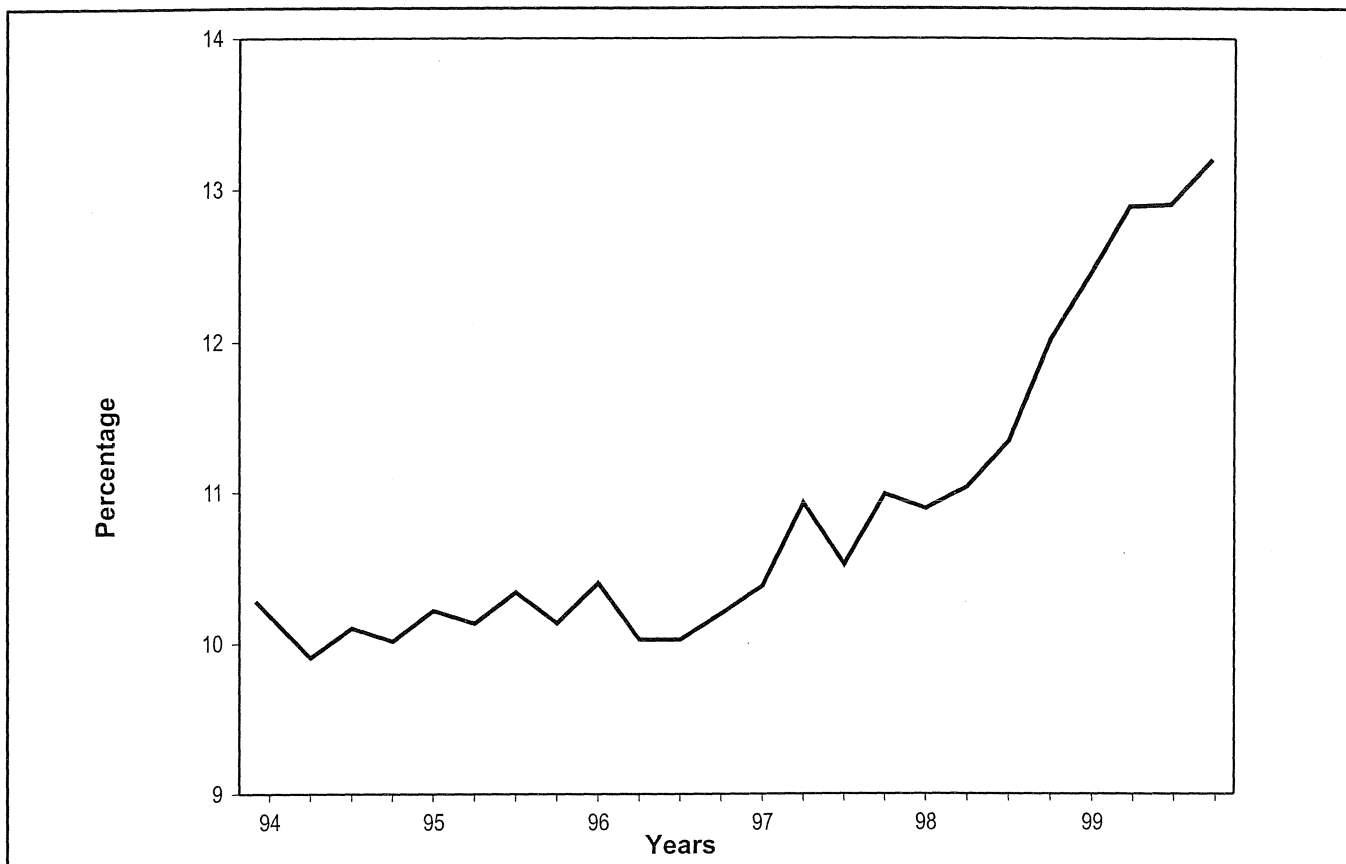


Figure 5: Cape Town CBD capitalization rates in 2000.

Source: Rode's Database.



(SMMEs) suffered because they relied on large volumes of office workers to sustain their businesses, they were less able to carry any consistently reduced trading levels, and they relied on the presence of larger retailers as knock-on for their business volume (Cape Town Partnership, 2001).

A further indication of the diminishing attractiveness of the CBD was that lower order retailing, targeting a lower income market, superseded higher order shops, particularly in the vicinity of the railway station and major bus terminus. Informal trading also proliferated. Over time this initiated a 'domino effect' of a qualitative decline in the area leading to an increasingly negative perception of it as an attractive shopping environment and accelerating business closures and/or flight to the suburbs.

Prime office rentals have increased significantly over the past decade, undermining revenues and acting as a deterrent to corporate location. Office space vacancies increased from 5.8 per cent in May, 1998 to 10 percent in December, 1999 (Rode, 2001). The significance of increasing rentals for retail and office space does, of course, need to be considered from the perspective of lessors and lessees alike. High rents reflecting limited available space in the face of high demand would normally be attractive to developers seeking to maximize returns on capital invested and new building development could be expected. However the capitalization rates¹ for offices in the CBD have been rising steadily since 1994 (Figure 5). This reflects a lack of investor confidence in the CBD and is reflected in the fact that a minimal amount of new office development has occurred in the CBD since 1994 while many new developments have appeared in the wider metropolitan area.

The cyclical relationship between supply and demand, the rate of new building development, and rent levels is recognized

in this argument. Expectations of a future upswing might be anticipated. Against this is the argument that a significant long-term downward trend in the vitality of the CBD business environment could not be considered irrevocable. Certainly short-term developments in central Cape Town were not considered propitious. It is indubitable that throughout the 1990s decentralization of offices and retailing has been the dominant trend in metropolitan Cape Town. The available indicators discussed above were sufficient to provoke concern among those who have a vested interest in the future of the CBD.

A variety of reasons can be attributed to the decentralization of offices: access to clients in the wider city was facilitated by the construction of freeways in the 1960s; branches or agencies could more efficiently serve more localized markets in the sprawling suburban population; suburban locations offered lower land prices and the opportunity to develop 'custom built' and landscaped office parks with high amenity value; the quaternary sector (i.e. compilation, beneficiation, interpretation, and dissemination of information) was growing rapidly and, because of information technology innovations, client contact was not a location determinant; and many operations were largely self-contained, internalizing their functional linkages (e.g. insurance companies) or agents could more easily access domestic clients. Internal dynamics can also be observed: the 'economic heartland' of the CBD is shifting towards the Foreshore from the historic core area abutting the Company Gardens and Parliament where buildings are perceived to be too small and antiquated and parking costs are high (some R 800 per month). Speculative debate in the mid 1990s of Parliament moving to Gauteng or Pretoria with the potential for the sudden loss of important linkages underpinned rumour and compounded the trend of office relocation.

Other factors also compromised the status of the CBD as a business environment: unlike European cities, there was a virtual absence of the residential function in the CBD - a function of zoning and high costs. Economic thresholds generated by a resident population were effectively non-existent. As a result, strong daytime - night time contrasts existed - most activity occurred during office hours (except for relatively limited night club and restaurant entertainment). This was compounded by the fact that the hotel function was poorly represented within the CBD, largely because, under apartheid, South Africa's geo-political status had resulted in trade sanctions and a variety of boycotts, including tourists. Increasing numbers of homeless persons, beggars and street-children compromised the social environment. Mugging and car theft was on the increase (a widely held perception that could not be quantified because of the non-publication of official police statistics). Some 350 self-employed 'parking attendants' and car washers frequently harassed and intimidated motorists. A survey undertaken for the Cape Town Partnership averred that informal parking attendants were 'holding the central city to ransom' and estimated that they were costing retailers R300 m in lost business (Farr, 2002: *pers com*).

To a greater or lesser degree, much of central Cape Town is subject to different forms of blight - physical, frictional, functional and economic. Physical blight became manifest in general dilapidation of buildings (wiring, plumbing, gutters, paintwork, etc.) and physical deterioration of precincts caused by pollution, litter, and dirt. This was exacerbated by the incursion of informal street traders and indigents who did not utilize waste removal receptacles sufficiently and who had few readily available toilet facilities. By occupying pavements over extensive distances, informal traders also caused frictional blight by inhibiting a free flow of pedestrians past formal retail establishments, frequently forcing them into the road. In a business district historically scaled to pedestrian movement with relatively narrow streets and short blocks, the motorcar itself became a cause of frictional blight. In a society in which respect for the law has diminished considerably, double-parking or parking in loading bays or in prohibited zones was commonplace, inhibiting vehicular movement and impeding legitimate business activity. Only two per cent of metered parking fees were paid (Farr, 2002: *pers com*); lack of off-street parking in parking garages compounded the problem.

Functional blight caused by the obsolescence of built stock has already been alluded to. The erosion of long-established production, service and market linkages due to decentralization was another manifestation of functional blight as was vacancy and the inability of small enterprises to compete with large discount chain stores. Economic blight in the CBD became manifest in lowered profitability, falling land values, the invasion of lower order activities, and decentralization of shops and offices.

Restrictive regulations also inhibited redevelopment. The CBD contains a considerable number of historical buildings, particularly of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. These have been recorded in an inventory of 'The Buildings of Central Cape Town' (Cape Provincial Institute of Architects, 1978) and incorporated into a stringent conservation policy by the City Council. This policy, in turn, reflects strictures contained within the Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999). In terms of the act, buildings are categorized in three grades of conservation-worthiness and limitations are placed on the nature of development permitted. Initially, any planned alteration or demolition of buildings more than 60 years old must be referred to the South African Resources Agency for approval and/or negotiation. This can be very inhibiting and time-consuming

for potential developers. Moreover, given the information technology revolution of the past decade, many older buildings are relatively obsolete in functional terms making rewiring and upgrading, particularly for modern information technology, an expensive option.

Revitalization of the CBD

The above conditions obtained in spite of, rather than because of, City Council actions. Decline of the CBD was more insidious than dramatic. Realization of this regress can be traced back in newspaper articles to 1980. Essentially what was lacking was the political will to be proactive and to confront the issue aggressively and holistically. The wider city was confronted by a plethora of other pressing problems and, particularly in the 1990s, inter-party local government debate was frequently virulent and racially charged. Many City Council initiatives directed toward enhancing the image, status, and functional efficiency of the CBD pre-dated 1994 but these were essentially *ad hoc* and uncoordinated. Significant developments included,

- a system of underground malls linking the railway station with major department stores,
- pedestrianisation of St. George's St. in conjunction with the creation of an open market in Greenmarket Square,
- redevelopment of historic precincts (e.g. Dunkley Square and Heritage Square),
- restoration of the Cape Town Castle, and formation of a unit within the Council to develop and implement policy concerning heritage resources conservation,
- development of the adjacent Waterfront (Figure 1), an historic working harbour combined with retail, office and residential functions, in conjunction with a private sector interests (the Victoria and Albert Company) which attracts millions of visitors every year,
- Restoration of the 'Bo – Kaap' (a.k.a the 'Malay Quarter') now a designated conservation precinct (Figure 1),
- Attempts at redevelopment of District Six (Figure 1) that would result in the infusion of thousands of new residents, greatly increasing buying power in the area. Restitution of the land and the planning of an entire new suburb abutting the CBD has a long and contentious history prior to 2000 (Dewar, 2001) but it is now nearing finality.

Almost contemporaneously, a powerful 'new' paradigm was diffusing into urban planning theory and practice, that of sustainable development. The concept gained currency after publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development's report (1987) *Our Common Future* (the 'Brundtland Report') and was given practical expression in 'Agenda 21' the result of the deliberations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Chapter 28 of the Agenda was concerned with the role of local authorities and communities in organizing sustainable urban development processes through the establishment of 'Local Agenda 21' (LA 21). A key principle of LA 21 was the involvement of civil society in policy formulation² and the establishment of partnerships to achieve strategic goals. Prior to adoption of the Constitution Act (108 of 1996), the change of the form of governance from a historically entrenched one of 'control by professionals' to a more pluralistic mode was slow and hesitant. Suggestions concerning selective privatization of management functions were rejected by the then Cape Town City Council as being too radical.

The concept was revived in 1997 when a group of concerned businesspeople met to discuss the problems facing the CBD. They recognized that investors required, *inter alia*, economic growth in the region; competitiveness in the cost of doing business; a high level of business confidence; availability of infrastructure and skilled labour; a predictable operating environment particularly with respect to local authority policies, regulations, zoning and planning; a pro-business attitude in the local authority; and a safe and clean operating environment (Farr, 2002: *pers com*).

Meetings, which included representation from the Cape Town City Council and the South African Property Owners' Association (SAPOA), continued in 1998. These were greatly informed by the 'turnaround' of downtown New York under Mayor Giuliani where private sector input in a 'Times Square Business Improvement District' and a 'zero tolerance' approach restored the status of the central city. In June, 1999 the Cape Town Partnership, was established as a special purpose vehicle to achieve similar goals in Cape Town. This was institutionalized as a non-profit 'Section 21 Company' with its Board representing the City of Cape Town, the Cape Metropolitan Council, the South African Property Owners' Association (SAPOA), the Cape Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the South African Black Technical and Allied Careers organization (SABTACO), Business Against Crime, the Cape Town Heritage Trust, the Cape Town Tourism Bureau, and city improvement associations. Its overall goal was to establish and to market Cape Town as a globally competitive city by using the CBD as an exemplar and guaranteeing world-class performance standards. Elements of the Coventry City Improvement District in England were also adopted in the business plan of the Cape Town Partnership.

At the outset, the Partnership identified two important deficiencies in the New York Model *viz.* the New York local authority had progressively transferred service delivery to the private sector resulting in lack of coordination and variable performance standards; and, voluntary private-sector 'buy-in' was unsatisfactory resulting in uneven 'pockets' of service delivery across the city. In Cape Town, the consent of 51 per cent of ratepayers, and of contribution to rates revenue was required to make the Partnership a legal entity and to make it mandatory for all to participate. In Cape Town the voting 'buy-in' to the proposal to establish a city improvement district exceeded 80 per cent. Reciprocally, the Partnership represented all ratepayers within its area of jurisdiction. It was financed from a levy of 9.5 per cent of rates paid by all businesses. A second crucial element of the public-private partnership was to affirm the responsibility of the City Council to provide the public goods and services prescribed by law (i.e. the Provincial Proclamation Gazette, No. 5152 of 1997) and to negotiate 30 levels of guaranteed service with the City Council, Provincial Administration, Police, etc. which included cleaning, protection, parks and bathing, and public infrastructure. Quantifiable benchmark standards relating to the nature, extent and frequency of servicing (e.g. emptying litter bins twice per day) were agreed upon and entrenched in a formal contract, as were specific remedies in the event of a breach of contract. In the event of the Council defaulting the Partnership was obliged to inform it and thereafter provide a stipulated period for the problem to be rectified. If the problem was not satisfactorily resolved, the Partnership then had the authority to outsource the task to private consultants at the Council's expense. This ensured that publicly funded services remain constant. With the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (service contract), Cape Town became the first city in South Africa to institute a legally binding improvement district. Johannesburg is the only other South African city to have pursued a similar initiative but its efforts were less comprehensive. Significantly, no legislation was

passed that was contractually binding on the local authority and its revenue base was limited because it could rely only on voluntary financial contributions.

The more specific objectives of the Partnership were to,

- apply/adapt international 'best practice' lessons on inner city renewal to combat present problems (e.g. upgrade facilities and services; enhance security; ensure a clean environment);
- improve the operational and physical environment;
- improve movement and accessibility;
- facilitate economic growth, business investment and development;
- market and promote the CBD;
- manage informal trading;
- reduce bureaucratic 'red tape' associated with service provision and regulations;
- encourage growth of SMMEs in the CBD;
- encourage conservation of the built environment (e.g. building maintenance; street furniture; landscaping);
- develop and promote tourist and leisure activities;
- facilitate economic growth, business investment and development;
- address social issues (e.g. homelessness, street children, vagrancy, informal trading);
- revive the flagging image of the CBD.

Key indicators were agreed upon to monitor the success of the Partnership e.g. vacancy, purchase and letting prices of property, different types of crime, the incidence of litter, homelessness, pedestrian volumes, trading density, volume of sales, new investment.

Efforts to resuscitate the CBD intensified after 2000 (the Chief Executive Officer of the Cape Town Partnership was appointed in November, 1999). Plans exist to 'revamp' the central station and adjacent post office. This involves construction of office towers, a hotel, apartments, a retail mall, underground parking and a covered informal market. An urban design team has also completed plans for restoration of the historic Grand Parade, which is flanked by the Castle and the Victorian-era City Hall. A new convention/exhibition centre, which is expected to inject considerable vitality and money into the CBD opened in June, 2003. It has already secured over 135 conferences, 100 of which are international, in advance bookings. This has been integrated with the Arabella-Sheraton hotel. Research by the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business projects that the Centre will create about 29 000 new jobs (direct and indirect) and contribute R25-billion to South Africa's gross domestic product over a period of 10 years (Cape Town International Convention Centre, 2003). 'International delegates spend an average of R2 000 per day and the international conferences at the CTICC in 2003 represented at least 31 810 conference delegate days' (Elzinga, 2004). The direct economic value of events already secured is calculated at R 1.3bn. Moreover, research shows that 1/3 of all international delegates attend pre- and post conference tours while 20 per cent of the delegates usually bring an accompanying person. One out of three delegates returns to the convention destination within four years for a family holiday, adding to the economic impact of international conferences (Elzinga, 2004).

A newspaper article speculated that, 'while the Foreshore might be the current darling of investors, CBD businesses are hoping that the anticipated prosperity brought in by the convention centre and other businesses will eventually spill over into the rest of the city centre' (*Cape Argus*, 2002b). A canal has been constructed linking the convention centre to the Waterfront. This will carry water taxis (cf. Amsterdam) and will be flanked by restaurants, shops and plazas. It will constitute a functional link that is expected significantly to increase pedestrian volumes in both areas.

Reintroducing the residential function to the CBD has been a priority. This is consistent with comment from the President of the South African Institute of Architects, 'we need to stop thinking of Cape Town as a CBD, we need to see it as a city, alive and vibrant all the time' (Van Wyk, 2002a). He argued that 'if a building is in a position to be converted into residential, then thought must be given to it. The owners will still be making money in rentals. With the city's abundance of educational facilities and chain stores, it made sense for people to live in the city' (Van Wyk, 2002b). These observations were made in the context of a continual increase in office vacancies (Rode, 2003). A draft Metropolitan Council urban design report has identified a number of buildings that might more profitably be converted to residential use. The CEO of the Cape Town Partnership recently predicted that, 'the CBD of Cape Town will, in the next three years, be transformed into a haven for inner city dwellers with a range of projects in the offing to turn office property into residential flats' (Farr, 2002; *pers. com*). Many previously derelict warehouses and light industrial buildings in the sector between the CBD and the waterfront have already been converted to New York-style loft apartments, which are in great demand. Other investors have been encouraged to convert obsolete office buildings to apartments within the CBD itself and a number of new hotels have located in the inner city. A stable residential area marked by a strong property market in the 'City Bowl' (Figure 1) also exists immediately to the west of the CBD contributing to investor confidence and considerably raising economic thresholds.

'Crime and grime' was an issue that received immediate priority. Declining levels of personal safety and security were identified as being major deterrents to visitors and investors alike. Damage to the tourist potential of the region was also anticipated. The negative impact of vagrants, street children, beggars, informal parking attendants, car washers, and the homeless has already been alluded to. To obviate this, the partnership now employs 160 security personnel (including foot and horse patrols and five patrol vehicles). The Cape Town Central Improvement District (CID) now manages kerbside parking with 25 parking attendants and 25 parking enforcement officers to augment City Council resources. A command – and – control centre with a dedicated security manager and staff financed by the CID now functions at the central police station. The centre is integrated with formal police activities and a sophisticated closed TV system. Between 2000 and 2002, crime was reported to have declined by 60 per cent. Ninety six per cent of this was of a 'non-serious, non-violent nature' (CID, 2002). Although outside its immediate terms of reference, the Partnership has addressed one significant social problem by donating R 400 000 in 2002 and R 540 000 in 2003 towards a street childrens' care and assessment centre.

Considerable effort has also been made to improve the physical environment through landscaping, greening, infrastructure development and maintenance, and removal of graffiti and unsightly posters. A recent initiative involves improving access routes for conference delegates, tourists and office workers between the Convention Centre, the railway

station and the Civic Centre. Median islands on the main Foreshore axis (the Heeringracht) will be enhanced with paving, tree planting, street-furniture, and construction of a water feature recalling the original Dutch 'gracht' or channel that ran from the Company Gardens to the sea. The Gardens themselves have been upgraded and are managed by the CID with a view to optimising their public utility value (e.g. by providing lunch-hour concerts). Greenmarket Square has also been the subject of a beautification and management plan (Cape Town Partnership, 2003) as has the Old Town Square. Augmenting regular Council refuse removal services, the CID supervises the removal of 40 extra tons of litter every month within the CBD.

The Cape Town Partnership's role extends beyond negotiating with the Metropolitan Council and policy formation. It has created a Revitalization Trust Fund to assist the establishment of small and medium-size commercial enterprises. It has also established a Retailers' Association to re-establish the CBD as a retail environment. Its major function is to motivate and attract retailers with quick, reliable marketing information and development facilitation. For instance, it has identified niche precincts in the CBD and is establishing operational linkages with the Association for the Promotion of the Western Cape's Economic Growth (WESGRO) and the South African Property Owners' Association (SAPOA) (Cape Town Partnership, 2003). A pilot project extending trading hours to 21h00 on Friday and 17h00 on Saturday of the last weekend of every month is intended to market the CBD. Festive season entertainment and promotions also fell within its ambit.

A variety of financial instruments have been designed to increase investment options and to decrease capitalization rates bringing to an end the erosion of property values and attracting new investment: a Building Development Fund has also been established to contribute toward the renewal and maintenance of buildings with historic or architectural value within its jurisdiction. Complementing this, the national budget has made provision for incentives to invest in inner cities. Rental income tax has been reduced from 25 to 18 per cent as have retirement funds. In addition the transfer duty exemption level has been raised from R 100 000 to R 140 000. To restore decaying areas, a rebate of two per cent of the cost can be claimed over 5 years while construction of new buildings can claim a cost write-off of 20 per cent in the first year plus five per cent per annum over the next 16 years. As a result of a Council property revaluation, rates tax on commercial properties has declined some 50 per cent in 2003 (*Cape Times*, 2003a). Reacting to these, Farr (cited in *Cape Times*, 2003b) commented, that the Partnership had corresponded with its network of business contacts both locally and abroad, that the responses to the Minister's announcement had been 'really pleasing' and that investors 'will definitely be taking advantage of the incentives offered'.

A Development Division within the Partnership is responsible for facilitating economic growth, business investment and development more broadly. The CBD has been subdivided into 'niche' precincts (*Cape Argus*, 2003a) identified as having different needs and marketability and requiring their own development solutions. For instance the somewhat blighted eastern precinct has been designated as a future 'e – City' concentrating the information technology sector and the film industry and other functionally linked activities; the Foreshore precinct would constitute a new retailing hub while the 'West City' would predominantly be the focus of 'Manhattan-style' apartments.

In an attempt to increase mobility within the CBD and its immediate environs and to integrate with a city-wide public

transport initiative a shuttle bus service is planned. Particularly for the estimated 144 000 people who arrived by public transport in the city daily, there had been no mode of transport between the railway station (also the main bus and taxi terminus) and the rest of the city. Movement had been severely constrained. 'The saving in time from both the public interchange to their place of work, and in moving from one area to the other during the working day cannot be underestimated' (*Cape Argus*, 2002a). Routes, which will traverse proximate suburbs (Mouille Point, Green Point, Tamboer's Kloof, and District Six) have been planned and buses purchased. The service would be privately owned and managed in accordance with specified operating conditions. Tenders are currently being sought. Strategically located parking garages are also proposed which, it is envisioned, would lead to a reduction of 8 000 cars daily in the CBD. Convenience shopping outlets would locate at these movement generators.

Results

In three years since the inception of the Partnership, R5.8 bn in new investment has flowed into the CBD (Cape Town Partnership, 2003). The cumulative total of all investment (i.e. new developments, new leases, new purchases, upgrades and renewals) is approximately R 11.5 bn (*Cape Argus*, 2003c). Of this, 88 per cent was domestic fixed investment. Business has been retained in the CBD and capital flight has dropped sharply (Cape Town Partnership, 2003). In November, 2000, there were 200 vacant retail shops in the CBD. This number had declined by 67 per cent by December, 2002. A study commissioned by the CID (Market Decisions, 2002) revealed a considerable demand for groceries and upper-end clothing. While office vacancies, particularly in older building stock, are still on the increase despite the remedial steps being taken by the CID, "real office rentals seem to have ignored the fall in occupancy levels showing real increases for two successive quarters" (Rode, 2003: 47).

Five major 'blue chip' investors (Woolworths, Pick 'n Pay, Clicks, Mr Price, and Spar) are injecting approximately two billion rand in refurbishments and new locations. An Irish company is redeveloping seven properties (bounded by Adderley, Wale, Burg and Church streets) in the historic core of the CBD. The historic buildings will be retained but their interiors will

be extensively remodelled. The development will include a luxury hotel, 200 residential apartments with parking, and quality retailing (e.g. jewellers, fashion apparel, delicatessens, wine shops) on the ground floor. Other developments approved in the CBD include (Figure 6):

- a boutique hotel (cnr. Riebeeck and Loop streets);
- 'the Adderley', comprising shops, offices and 706-bay parking bounded by Adderley, Longmarket and Parliament streets;
- a community arts project involving a performance theatre, and an arts and media library (in four buildings adjacent to the District Six museum in Buitenkant St.);
- a trademark office building (on the old power station site);
- a converted seven-storey office building to apartments (on Greenmarket Sq.);
- a mixed-use development including 88 apartments (cnr. Buitengracht St. and the Western Bvd.);
- a 700-bay parking garage in lower Bree St. combined with office and retail space.

A Council precondition for approval of plans with most of these developments has been the construction of on-site parking.

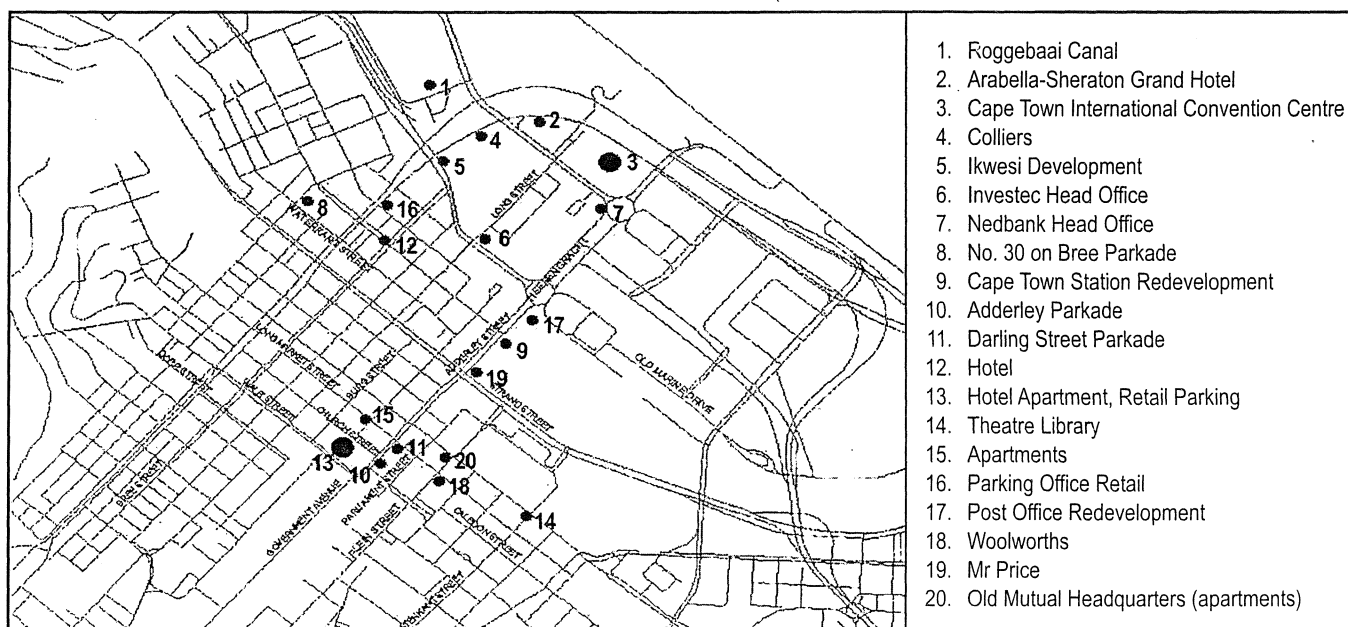
In the Cape Town CBD it appears that capitalization rates could soon be levelling off – an initial indication that the city improvement district (CID) may be bearing fruit (Rode, 2003).

Conclusion

In the historically short span of three years it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions concerning the success of the CBD in 'holding the line' in rapidly changing circumstances. However, trends would appear to be clear and inescapable. The importance of the CBD to metropolitan Cape Town has been recognized by the ANC-led metropolitan council notwithstanding their priority commitment to reduction of poverty and inequality through resource redistribution. In her inauguration speech, the executive mayor averred that 'I will continue to work very closely with all sectors, including the excellent Cape Town

Figure 6: Approved investments in Cape Town CBD post-2000.

Source: Constructed from various sources.



Partnership, which has done so much to bring renewed vigour to our CBD' (Mfeketo, 2003). A wide range of initiatives has been put in place to 'stem the tide' of functional deterioration experienced in most central city areas in the country. Success has been based on a wide variety of strategic initiatives, the most significant of which include, developing a visionary strategic plan and priorities; guaranteeing 'first class' service delivery through a public-private partnership that ensures contractual obligations; enforcing by-laws; upgrading and maintenance of public infrastructure; rehabilitating functionally obsolete buildings, often into new uses; conserving historic heritage resources; effectively managing anti-social behaviour and contributing towards resolution of important social welfare problems; combating crime and enhancing security; creating a relatively clean, aesthetically attractive environment through greening and urban design; regulating and controlling public spaces; regulating informal trading activities; providing sufficient parking (short-term and long-term); providing safe and efficient public transport (a goal); aggressively marketing the CBD to investors; facilitating development through the use of financial instruments and the provision of information to potential investors; achieving the 'right' tenant mix; reducing bureaucratic 'red tape'; and involving all stakeholders in the consultation process.

Energetically pursued initiatives such as these were motivated and defended as being consistent with key elements of Local Agenda 21 for urban sustainability, in particular the creation of public-private partnerships. These were recognized by the Mayor who observed that,

the revitalization of Cape Town's CBD and inner city has been widely recognized as a South African success story. This is largely due to the efforts of the Cape Town Partnership which has brought together the public and private sector in a dynamic partnership which each month celebrates new successes as CBD investment rockets and City Improvement Districts (CIDs) in different parts of Cape Town deliver better services to businesses and residents (*Cape Times*, 2003c).

The attractive investment environment created moved the Chief Executive Officer of Howard Holdings, an Irish multinational company that has invested significantly in the city to observe:

I have visited Cape Town many times and have been very impressed by what has been a remarkable turnaround in the CBD. We have had a great deal of experience and success in investing in property developments in CBDs of cities that have blossomed as a result of urban renewal, and we are absolutely committed to this project. Dublin's project, the Temple Bar district, has achieved spectacular success in urban renewal, and Cape Town is showing every sign that it will be one of the world's finest (Gormley, 2003).

However, policy implementation has not been entirely conflict-free. Vigorous political debate centred on issues of social justice and human rights. Particularly when metropolitan government was controlled by the Democratic Alliance, African National Congress (ANC) councillors vigorously attacked arguments that the CBD was in crisis as being racist and elitist. They held that Cape Town was an African city, not a European one and that historically and geographically specific social and economic processes should take their course. Individuals, particularly the marginalized, should have the constitutional right to pursue whatever income opportunities they could given that the rights of dignity, freedom of movement and association were inalienable. To them, rigorous regulation, policing and

control were reminiscent of the oppressive race-based discrimination and control of the apartheid era. Priorities should be job creation, black empowerment and the provision of social support mechanisms. In more measured terms, the present mayor (Clr. Mfeketo) recently remarked that '.... this success (that of the CBD) will only be empty until we address the challenges of creating jobs and poverty' (*Cape Times*, 2003d). Practical effect was given to these sentiments in December, 2003 when the Mayor rejected a proposed Promotion of Safety and Prevention of Nuisance bylaw intended to curb vagrancy, loitering, begging and anti-social behaviour and instead proposed a 'caring council that seeks to find appropriate solutions to social issues'. The polarity of the debate was subsequently given expression in a retort to the press from a Democratic Alliance councillor:

Once again the Mayor seems to have missed the point ... Cape Town is, and has always been, a caring city ... People donate money, food, clothing and medication, support NGOs and offer work opportunities. Obviously there must be programmes to help people off the streets and to reintegrate them into society. But we must be realistic ... Street people, like all South Africans, have rights and are entitled to the protection of the constitution. But these rights are balanced by responsibilities. Anti-social behaviour like public drunkenness, fighting, foul language aggressive begging and the use of public places as toilets or for sex is not acceptable and infuriates even the most tolerant residents, particularly when it is taking place on their doorsteps. Criminal activities and anti-social behaviour must be dealt with by the police and the courts. Anti-social behaviour must be outlawed and dealt with appropriately, using imaginative solutions such as the alternative sentencing programme ...' (Walker, 2004)

It must also be recognized that the CBD does not exist *in vacuo* and that developments, international, national and, particularly, in the wider city, will continue to impact upon it. Rode (2003: 10) cautioned however, that although capitalization rates could soon be levelling off, 'it would be premature to make a conclusion on a possible turnaround on only one quarter's performance. Hence the next few quarters' showing will be watched with bated breath'. For many observers, as to whether the CBD has 'stemmed the tide', 'the jury is still out'.

END NOTES

1. The capitalization rate is the rate at which investment analysts will discount future anticipated cash flows (income). Stated differently, it constitutes the internal rate of return and is weighed against what the investor wants to achieve. Thus it is the property equivalent of the anticipated earnings of equity based on the investor's perceptions/prediction of a building's ability to earn income. It is not the prevailing interest rate but, to emphasise, is a prediction made by the investor with many variables built in e.g. future supply and demand, and projected macro economic circumstances. Calculated, it is the net operating income for Year 1, assuming the entire building is let at open-market rentals, divided by the purchase price (ignoring VAT, transfer duty and income tax). It can be interpreted that, when the capitalization rate rises, willingness by investors to initiate new developments will decline. A cautionary note: Rode (2001: 6) has observed that 'capitalization rates for CBDs (excluding the Cape Town CBD, are of little use. This is because capitalisation assumes that the future cash flow will grow, at a constant growth rate, in perpetuity. In our decaying CBDs this assumption does not hold'. The capitalization rates used here are set by an expert cap rate panel comprising major owner and leading brokers who know their market segments intimately.
2. All this is not to ignore the significance of related developments especially the United Nations' Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996 at which NGOs and other civil society organizations were prominent in framing the ensuing 'Habitat Agenda'. 'The Habitat Agenda established explicit links between key city-issues such as poverty, social exclusion, gender equality and issues of governance and the management of human settlements (Allen and You, 2002).

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