



MARKET VERSUS MALL

Catalysing public debate through new media technologies

Doung Anwar Jahangeer



The Warwick Junction precinct, in Central Durban, is a major transportation hub: 560.000 people, most of them poor, pass through it daily. There, the Early Morning Market offers ingredients for a basic meal for a family of five for as little as ZAR 15 (USD 2). When late in 2008 the city of Durban announced its plan to replace the Market with a western-style privately owned shopping mall, the proposed re-development came as a shock.

Ms. Valima Pillay, 77 years old, is a trader of fresh produce at the 99 years old Early Morning Market situated in the centre of Durban, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. She arrived to the market as an orphan at a very young age, and was raised in there by the farmers and traders of that time.

“My mother and father died, I didn’t have nobody....this is my mother and father, this is my piece of bread, I am not moving anywhere”, she explained, passionately referring to the market in an interview videotaped by *dala*.



Ms.
Valima
Pillay
speaks
out.
Photo ©
dala

Ms.
Pillay is
not
alone.
Hers is
also the

sentiment of 675 stallholders and a few thousands dependents, such as the vegetable porters and the subsidiary allied traders, since the city of

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Durban announced the start of preparations to demolish the 99 year old heritage site to replace it with a 400 million ZAR (South African Rand) shopping mall. Durban is a rapidly growing city responding to the challenges of a post-apartheid South Africa. The contemporary landscape is a collage of different territories cut up by athletic infrastructures. The urban sprawl is the mirror of the mass rural landscape. Century-long extensions of nature and city archaeology constitute an amalgam. The periphery and the expanding suburban planes absorb large-scale facilities, urban sub-centres and industrial complexes. The image of the city is a static scenic sequence, with signs and objects passing by the periphery. Its morphology, of a charming beauty, is different from the traditional city but not necessarily a less attractive culture. It is within this dynamic urban context that *dala*, a non-profit organisation founded by Doung Anwar Jahangeer (architect), Rike Sitas (social scientist) and Nontobeko Ntombela (artist/curator) has emerged.

Engaging in the practice of art + architecture for social change, *dala* initiated the CityWalk initiative in 2001: a 7 km. walk that dissects the city psycho-geographically through one of the major existing informal pedestrian routes, and thus evidences the prevailing cultural and economic divide. The CityWalk opens a window for local and international society to take a peep at a state of inbetweenness often looked at but hardly seen. The intention is to expose an existing parallel reality, and hopefully to create a shift in our minds in the way in which we perceive 'the other'.

The walk starts from the informal settlement of Umkhumbane, Cato Manor, and proceeds via a shopping mall in suburbia, along the major highway, through the heart of the city and on to the port. The Early Morning Market has been integrated into the walk, and *dala* has developed very good relationships with the traders.

The Warwick Junction precinct is a major transportation hub: approximately 560.000 people pass through it daily. The majority of these people are poor, and the Early Morning Market is the only place that caters for them in Central Durban. Here one can buy ingredients for a basic meal for a family of five for as little as ZAR 15 (the equivalent of USD 2). When at the end of 2008 the city of Durban announced its plan to replace the Warwick Early Morning Market with a western-style privately owned shopping mall, the proposed re-development came as a shock.

*The
Warwick*



Junction. Photo © dala

Such proposal is a classic example of modern town-planning theories organised in line with capitalistic ideologies, which are replacing socio-cultural energies that define spaces in the city. The organic richness is very rapidly being 'sanitised' by a homogeneous surface, a fragmented space lacking character. The shopping mall that the city is proposing is a utilitarian architecture with rational motives -easing traffic congestion in the precinct during the 2010 soccer world cup, where architectural space will become physical space rather than lived space.

In our practice in *dala*, we are acutely aware of the need to diverge from the notion of buildings as enclosures and physical objects, and to find an alternative of an all-encompassing space, which the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991) refers to as "social space". Adrian Forty, a professor of architectural history in the UK, expands on this concept of social space, arguing that it is "perceived" through the social relations of everyday life, "conceived" by thought and "lived" as a "bodily experience", while it integrates the social actions of individuals (2000).

It would seem that the Western mindset, through the agency of colonialism, still dominates the South African urban realm. The behaviour of Durban's city manager, Dr. Mike Sutcliffe, seems to be reinforcing the marginalization of Africans -blacks and indians, in this instance- by alienating them from their livelihoods and by having excluded their participation in this urban process. As it is, the African city is often characterised by a layer of anonymity, and now its identity is being further weakened by the effects of neoliberal globalisation and by the Western/Modern imposition of norms of urban theory. The danger of this developmental attitude in a South African context is that such urban planning strategies/theories were manipulated to display authority, oppression and control as typified in the Apartheid era.

The traders complain that they have not been consulted, but rather presented with something that's a fait accompli. Durban's municipality has changed their approach to democratic participation, which in the past had been exemplary. In addition, no tendering procedure was followed, no Environmental Impact Assessment was done, and no application was submitted to the heritage council (following public exposure, the municipality is now hurriedly trying to rectify these issues).

The Warwick traders were not included as shareowners of the development, the municipality was not hearing their voices and the public was unaware of the situation inasmuch as the media were not covering the issue. In this context, *dala* decided to use new media technologies to capture the 'voices of the people' through a series of short documentaries, which were posted on YouTube. The films were then used as a catalyst for discussion in classrooms at tertiary institutions.

An educational programme saw 2nd-year design students and 4th-year brand strategy students conducting research into the area. These interventions in turn became a catalyst for public debate – both locally and internationally. Since then, the matter has been exposed and the issue has been personalised – the traders are no longer statistics on a municipal fact sheet, they are people with histories and futures.

Subsequently, *dala* has facilitated a public art project with artists in southern Africa with the *KZNSA Gallery* focusing on creatively unpacking the relationship between the notions of a market and a mall. The presence

and participation of artists in this struggle has had a profound effect on the traders and affiliated social movements, and we are seeing a re-linking of arts and activism in South Africa.

As it stands today, the matter of mall versus market is in court. There will be another hearing at the end of October 2009, in the context of widespread and mounting support for the market. We hope that there can be a more inclusive process to this development, and that the concept of a mall can be revisited.

For the other Early Morning Market films on YouTube go to

<http://www.youtube.com/user/lauqeual#p/u/11/gdU7vWraGJI>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/lauqeual#p/u/9/NZdJ7KETyOU>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/lauqeual#p/u/2/Oak-nkGtb1o>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxEmtZv6rd8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TaWMVGPJIA>

Doung is a practicing architect, artist and educator.
Having worked as an architect, he has become increasingly fascinated with the notion of 'architecture without walls', investigating the 'spaces in between'.
He has recently been awarded a large public commission for a public sculpture at Ellis Park.
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Forty, A. (2000) Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture. London: Thames and Hudson.
Lefebvre, H. (1991) The Production of Space. Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.

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