
Monica Albonica

BRAAMFONTAIN

REGENERATION PROJECT:

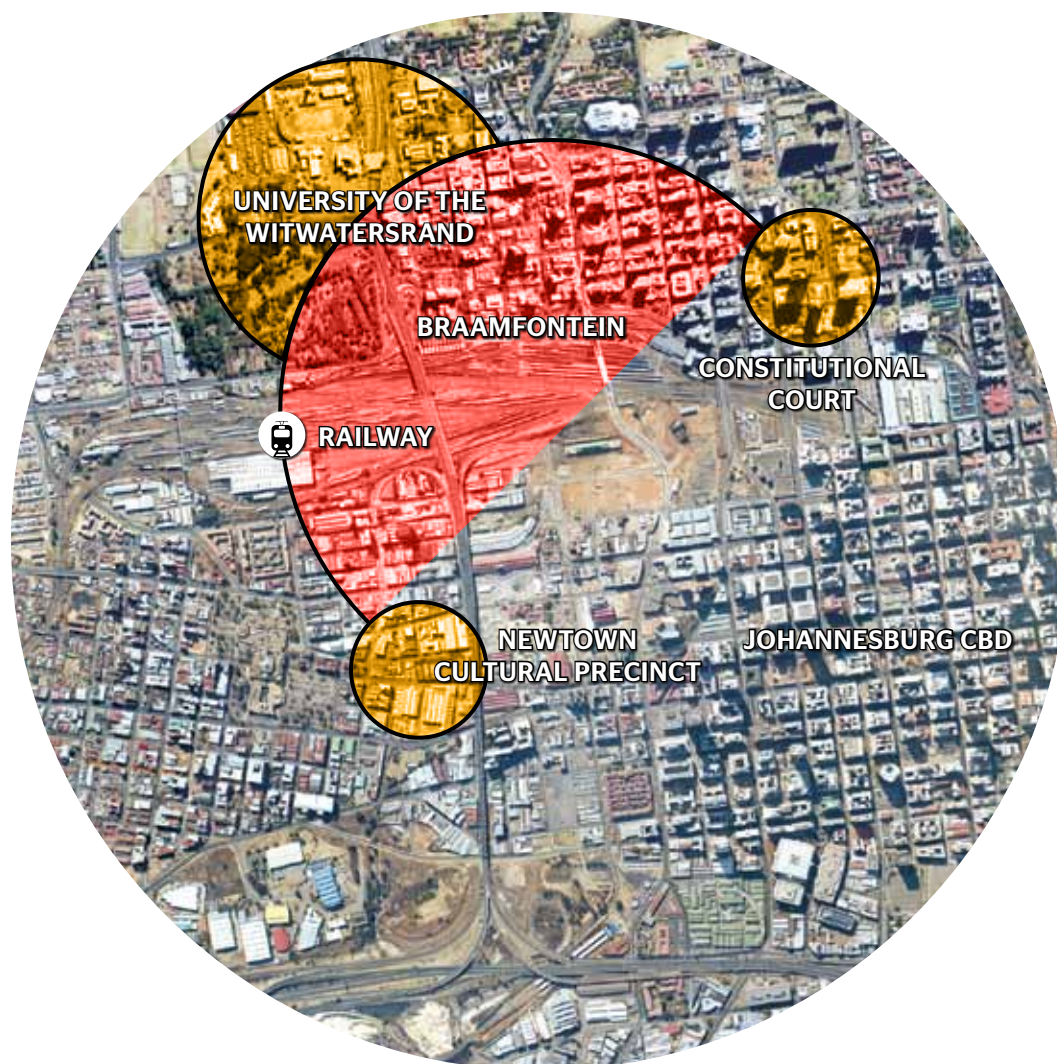
RESCRIPTING PUBLIC SPACES

BIOGRAPHY

Albonico Sack and Mzumara (ASM), established in 2003, is built on the solid experience of the partners, obtained through involvement in the design, implementation and management of architectural and urban design projects over the past 19 years. CC Members include: Monica Albonico MUD (Wits) B Arch (UNC), Nicolas Sack B Arch (Wits) Arch (SA) MIA, Martin Mzumara MUD (Wits), BA (Hons) Arch (Leic), Dip (Bldg), MIA, Arch SA, MSABTACO. The partners have a longstanding commitment to social upliftment through the practice and product of their profession. This has informed the strategic focus of the firm.

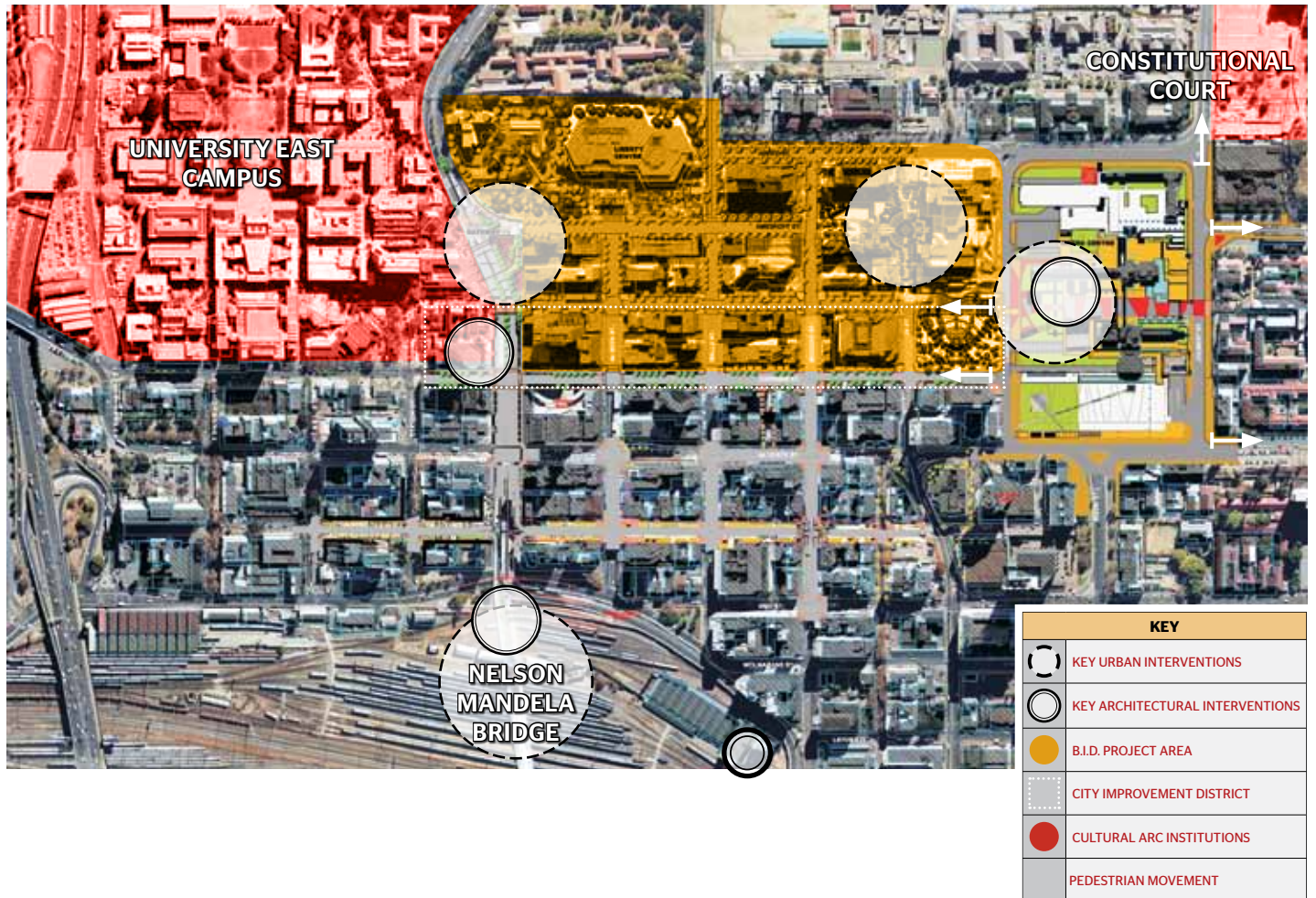
Monica Albonico, Principal at Albonico Sack Mzumara, Architects and Urban Designers (ASM), studied Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, National University of Cordoba. She completed a Masters Degree in Urban Design at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. She has taught at the University of Witwatersrand, the National University of Cordoba and the National University of Buenos Aires. She is a founding member of PLANACT - a Johannesburg-based non-governmental organisation involved in the formulation of urban development policies and community based projects, and a founder member of TIPU - an urban projects research unit based at the University of Cordoba, Argentina.

→ **This photo-essay presents details of the Braamfontein** regeneration project which focuses on the recovery of the streets and lost spaces, encouraging people to use and enjoy the public environment. The predominance of cultural, educational and research institutions, as well as non-governmental organisations in Braamfontein, suggested a new identity for the area, namely the ‘knowledge centre of the smart city’. Primary foci of this project were to rescript public spaces and in so doing, to create a system of linkages corresponding to the concept of the ‘Cultural Arc’, a conceptual construct that draws an imaginary line connecting institutions and destinations from Newtown to Constitution Hill.



The Cultural Arc

The Braamfontein Regeneration Project forms part of a larger city wide initiative to link the disjointed cultural establishments of Johannesburg with a conceptual 'arc', these are the Constitutional Court, the University of the Witwatersrand and Newtown Cultural Precinct. Braamfontein forms a large part of the heart of this initiative. It is reinventing itself as an extension of the university, and is seen as a melting pot where regardless of economic or racial circumstance people unite under the common banner of education and use it as a platform from which to regenerate the inner-city of Johannesburg



Rethinking Braamfontein

Braamfontein is an area of Johannesburg that accommodates diverse interests including local government, non-governmental organisations, the corporate sector and small businesses, retail outlets, entertainment venues, public and private educational institutions and a small residential component. It was the predominance of cultural, educational and research institutions, as well as NGOs, in Braamfontein that suggested a new identity for the area as the 'knowledge centre of the smart city.'

Approach

The approach to the project was innovative and multi-layered. It was conceptualised through a collective process: stakeholders were brought together in an interactive forum to allow for divergent and overlapping interests to be explored. A primary focus was to rescript new public space and in so doing to create a system of places and linkages responding to the concept of the Cultural Arc.

Rescripting Public Spaces

The Braamfontein Regeneration Project aims at the recovery of the street and lost spaces and encourages people to use and enjoy the public environment. The economic thrust informing the implementation of various projects was to upgrade, regenerate and consolidate development while also reinforcing and stimulating investment opportunities.

Architectural Interventions

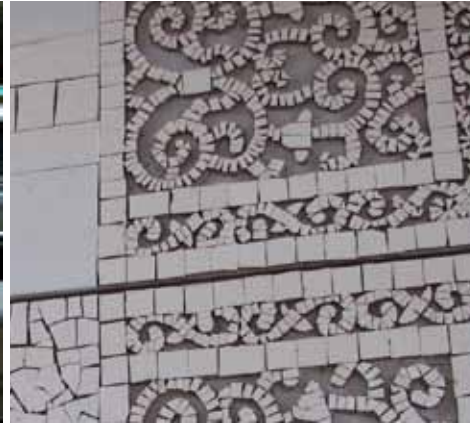
Three key architectural interventions were identified. These are in various processes of implementation as catalysts to make permanent this regeneration of Braamfontein and to activate the Cultural Arc. The first intervention is the Nelson Mandela Bridge, completed in 2003 and which feeds directly from the affluent northern suburbs into the city. The second intervention is the Wits Art Gallery which represents the first step in dissolving the security barricades around the university and reintegrating it with the city. The third is the Metrolink Reception Centre.



A series of tree like sculptures dot the length of one of the streets.

Benches and bus stops designed for the project are well utilised on a daily basis and are part of a broader branding strategy unique to this area of the city.

The recently completed Eland sculpture stands over the Gateway Square.



Metro Link Reception Centre

The Metro Link Reception Centre is a sub-project of the Braamfontein Regeneration Project. Its purpose is to provide a public interface and legible entry point to the Metro Centre. This is intended to improve the delivery of services to the public by concentrating all access to information about services into a single user-friendly front desk facility. An aim is to reduce the need for members of the public to access the existing building; to optimise existing infrastructure and to improve the connection between the Centre and surrounding facilities in Braamfontein.

Placement: We decided to use the mound on the west of the site and configure the building to integrate with the landscape and act as a bridge to the existing metro complex. Our intention was to detach the new building so as not to have to modify the existing building, while removing all barriers to entry by integrating it with the surrounding public environment.

The site is on a very well-used pedestrian route between Hillbrow and Braamfontein and the public engage with the new facility literally by walking over it. The existing knoll of birch trees was preserved and new landscaping was configured to complement and enhance the architecture.



Pedestrian ramp traversing the Metro Link Reception Centre, connecting Braamfontein and Constitution Hill/Hillbrow.



Design: it was important for the Metro Link Reception Centre to have a strong and distinctive identity, to enable it to hold its own against the massive scale of the existing complex. Given its purpose as the main customer relations facility, it needed to provide an open and welcoming look and feel. The architectural treatment is therefore transparent. The building forms a window through which the activities on the inside can be viewed from outside and those on the inside remain aware of the urban environment in which they are situated.

The interior is conceived of as a generous public concourse which is fitted out with state-of-the-art data and electronic information systems. Ease of access and a pleasant and friendly atmosphere were important goals to achieve.

Materials were selected with a view to durability and longevity. There is also a preference for natural material in the slate flooring and wall cladding and the timber joinery.

Double glazing has been installed on the shopfront type windows to reduce both the winter and summer temperature extremes and minimise the need for heating and air-conditioning.

The art works selected and commissioned, adorn the building with commentaries, contemporary views and reflections on and about the City of Johannesburg.

BELOW:
View towards the Reception Centre forecourt, defining new public space and interaction with the information hall.

OPPOSITE:
Window to the city - new Metro Link Reception Centre, providing direct 'one stop' services to the public.



