

# The *Betterness* of Braamfontein

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## Abstract

*In this paper, we argue that the current environmental information system of Braamfontein is problematic as it is ethically unconsidered and overwhelmingly bias towards the interests of commercial stakeholders - over those of the residents, workers, students and visitors. While a business is justified to act in a conceited manner, we believe that information provided to the public in a public space needs to be more utilitarian, servicing the needs of the majority over those of the few.*

*A brief review of current literature pertaining to the thematic concerns of the paper is discussed. These themes include: Experiential Graphic Design (XGD) - as a field of practice; the role of meaning and sense making; the commoditisation of public space; and lastly Umair Haque's economic theory of 'Betterness'.*

*This theoretical review is followed by an analytical framing of Braamfontein as a problem ecology, primarily relating to XGD. The analysis applies the Firma Model, a meta-framework for design research, strategy and critique to holistically frame the problem, and thus identify concerns with the current information environment. Findings are discussed in relation to key concerns raised in the literature. The paper concludes by outlining key concerns evident in the current state of Braamfontein information environment and describes potential approaches for any future design interventions.*

**Keywords:** Information environment, Experiential Graphic Design, place-making, meaning.

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## Introduction

This paper is concerned with identifying an ethical approach to Experiential Graphic Design for urban spaces in Johannesburg. Experiential Graphic Design (XGD) is used in the context of this paper as a noun to include both digital and non-digital visual information systems and related content pertaining to a specific environment.

We will argue that an ethical stance is needed as the current approach to information design for urban spaces in Johannesburg is dominated by commercial enterprises that tend to have their own interests at heart. However, it is not the concern of this paper to critique business or the regeneration of the city but rather to argue that the city as a public space should serve all its residents better. This implies, from an XGD perspective that residents of Johannesburg should have access to information that is *meaningful* to them.

Our argument will introduce a range of theoretical positions that advance the notion of an ethical, altruistic approach to conceiving XGD. The theoretical discussion will be contextualised throughout the paper by referring to an analysis of Braamfontein, a historical suburb and business district of inner-city Johannesburg.

## Methodology

Methods used in this qualitative study include:

- A brief review of current literature pertaining to the thematic concerns of the paper namely Experiential Graphic Design, meaning, the commoditisation of public space, and lastly Umair Haque's economic theory of *Betterness*.

- A concise analytical framing of problems relating to XGD in Braamfontein. This analysis applies the *Firma Model* (Fenn & Hobbs 2015, p. 5): a meta-framework for design research, strategy and critique to holistically frame the problem within Braamfontein. The lenses prescribed by the framework are historical, political, societal, economical, cultural, environmental, the marketplace, the organisation, the users and the legacy of the problem.

The framing of Braamfontein will apply an array of research methods including reviewing literature, internet documents, observation, and generative activities<sup>1</sup> with people in Braamfontein. Both methods of data collection are used in the paper to support the argument that the current state of XGD in Braamfontein is fundamentally unethical in supporting the needs of the few, usually commercial organisations over those of the many - the people.

## Experiential Graphic Design

Experiential Graphic Design (XGC) is the design of immersive information environments to shape experiences that orient, inform, educate and delight users (Dixon 2015). XGD, as used in this paper, denotes the combination of wayfinding<sup>2</sup>, themed or branded spaces, retail design, signage, architectural graphics and various other forms of environmental<sup>3</sup> graphic design through the orchestration of visual aesthetics (typography, colour, form, etc.) and content that serve to create ‘environments that communicate’<sup>4,5</sup> (Dixon 2015).

## ‘Meaning’

David Weinberger in *Everything is Miscellaneous* (2007, p. 169) describes *meaning* as what ultimately ‘gives value to our lives’. Weinberger further explains that the relationships and patterns, people form, between things is what inevitably gives the ‘things of our world their *meaning*’. *Meaning*, if broken down to its core can be understood as the ‘unspoken’ or ‘unsaid’, which is principally what enables the ‘said’. *Meaning* thus provides the context for people to make ‘sense’ of things, of an environment, of their lives (Wendt 2014, p. 136).

Weinberger (2007, p.169) argues that designers, when attempting to communicate and structure information do not necessarily take the context of the *place* into consideration when designing for it. Due to its availability, designers inevitably tend to focus on the spoken, rather than the unspoken and *implicit*. Focusing on the existing manifestations of information and information systems in an environment assumes that previous choices were considered and appropriate. If there is any indication that this is not the case there needs to be an unfurling of the *implicit*, so as to make the explicit known (Weinberger 2007, p. 169).

In order to help reduce people’s disorientation, and to improve understanding and create *meaning*, a sense of *place* needs to be created. Andrea Resmini & Luca Rosati, in *Pervasive Information Architecture* (2011) describe *place-making* as the concept of building a sense of *place*, for continuity and the creation of a recognizable “being there”. In theory, externalising this *meaning* in an urban environment seems simple enough, but in practice the world is a complex place with many subjective interpretations of what is *meaningful* for the people who inhabit it. Understanding a societal context

<sup>1</sup> Generative activities allow for the producing of ideas, insights and concepts (Sanders & Stappers 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Wayfinding design is the systems approach to navigating users in a physical environment.

<sup>3</sup> Environment, in this instance can be understood as ‘the conditions, circumstances, etc. affecting a person’s life’ (Oxford Dictionary 1995, p. 387), a place of surrounding influences and physically bounded systems.

<sup>4</sup> Many ‘branded environments’ are utilizing XGD’s integration approaches to enhance experiences and create more *meaningful* interactions for the users in that place (Dixon 2015, [sp]).

<sup>5</sup> In XGD, the rich interactions between place and user is the result of the integration of different forms of information available in the build environment (Dixon 2015), which can also be understood as *pervasive* information architectures. Whilst many approaches to information architecture (IA) exist, the emphasis of IA in this instance will be on its information design, which is concerned with the ‘static design of large quantities of visual information’ (Resmini & Rosati 2011, p. 24).

is notoriously fraught with disagreement, ill-definition and indeterminacy (Rittel and Webber, pp. 155-169).

## Commoditisation of public space

A 'commodity' can be defined as something that is bought and sold (Oxford Dictionary 1995, p. 228), thus 'commoditisation' entails the culture of buying and selling. In urban regeneration models, the occurrence of commoditisation is a natural result of urban renewal initiatives.

Urban renewal models, which are initiated by various stakeholders, aim to, and are primarily concerned with maximizing economic growth and profits, thus posing an uninformed threat to the mundane needs of the people who occupy the space, but also threaten the historical and cultural heritage of the prescribed area. As Laura Burocco, in her paper, *People's Place in the World Class City: The Case of Braamfontein's Inner City Regeneration Project* (2013) suggests that in urban regeneration, the individual *place* loses its importance and interest is shifted toward an economic, business-centered environment.

Within public space, urban regeneration-driven interactions are shaped by global economic interests, local private and public stakeholders, and that the imposition of the Western urban model is fundamentally 'shaped by a liberal economic ideology, a consumerist culture and a polarized social structure' (cited in Shatkin 2007, p. 4).

In addition, 'attentiveness to urban living on the part of city government has encouraged strategies that aestheticize the city and have been accompanied by an increase in private groups' control over specific public spaces' (cited in Zukin 1998, p. 826). The exacerbation of this dilemma is the result of Public Private Partnership's (PPP's) neoliberalist experimentation by a marginalisation of the old industrial working class by the establishment of the new knowledge class (cited in Shatkin 2007, p. 4; Brenner et al 2010, p. 196).

Burocco (2013) argues that commoditisation and social exclusivity are inextricably linked, city improvement models 'have generated criticism due to their profit-oriented conception of redevelopment through the creation of commodified spaces of elite consumption, the intensified surveillance of public spaces and collateral exclusionary processes' (cited in Didier et al, 2012, p. 2).

## Umair Haque's economic theory of Betterness

In *Betterness Economics for Humans* (2011), Umair Haque argues that economics are founded on negative paradigms. A 'healthy economy', which in Haque's opinion should be criticized, is explained by eighteenth century economist Adam Smith, as an 'invisible hand', which today we understand as 'an economy where self-interested, profit-seeking corporations are free to sell products and services to consumers who are free to buy them, with the happy side effect of maximizing the volume of output'. The current economic paradigm is defined by three industrial age pathologies: *liberalise*, *privatise* and *stabilise* – these, Haque argues, do not maximise economic potential, practically speaking it rather limits human achievement, which creates a stagnant economy.

Haque (2011, p. 10) proposes that we need to redefine the term "healthy economy" and go beyond commerce defined by 'pervasive organisational and managerial disorders'. Haque further speculates, 'what if the great challenge for the enterprise in the twenty-first century is no longer manufacturing the alluring, spot-lit glamour of mass-produced opulence, but cultivating a more authentic plenitude that matters in human terms?' This paradigm is what Haque terms *betterness*.

In spite of this, Haque believes that the status quo does not allow for the unfurling of *betterness* - 'shareholder value creation, mass-production, hierarchical management, and disposable goods are less profitable, useful, worthy, and beneficial than ever' (Haque 2011, p. 12). Business is only one approach to human exchange, which is not user centered, and is also progressively detrimental.

Haque (2011) calls for a rewriting of human-exchange, the 'reimagining of prosperity for the twenty-first century'.

## Framing Braamfontein's information environment

In order to understand the *meaning* inherent in Braamfontein, a contextual framing of the environment was undertaken. The analysis and interpretation of our findings is organised using the *Firma Model*, under a variety of categories used to frame complexity (Fenn & Hobbs 2015) - ranging from the paradigmatic lenses of historical, political and societal, to the more immediate lenses of environmental, economic and cultural, to lastly the contextual lenses of the users, the marketplace, the organisation and the legacy of the problem.

### History

*History*, in this framework is *paradigmatic* in that it serves as the broadest influence amongst society. Johannesburg was founded as a result of the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which subsequently drove the development of its first mining settlement (Brodie 2008, p. 34). The 'Gold Rush' was Johannesburg's initial claim to fame as it initiated rapid economic growth within the city, making it a sought after destination, thus thousands of fortune seekers flocked to the gold reef to stake claims in the city's new representation of wealth.

Braamfontein, originally a farm called Braamfontein Township, was established in 1886 as an area strategically brought into existence for living (to house the influx of workers in the other formal mining villages) and working purposes (Burocco 2013, p. 37).

Up until the 1950's, the physical territory of Braamfontein had remained relatively similar, after which the suburb underwent two significant modifications: the first being the relocation of the seat of the City from the Johannesburg CBD to Braamfontein Hill; and the second, the rezoning of land from an initial 5 000m<sup>2</sup> to a much larger 163 000m<sup>2</sup>, which subsequently attracted commercial interest as a result of corporate property developments from the 1950's onwards (Burocco 2013, p. 37). However, in the political climax of the Apartheid years between the 1980's and early 1990's, and afterwards until the mid-2000's, the inner-city of Johannesburg underwent an urban decline. Braamfontein inevitably suffered as the economy eventually crashed, neglecting the area which was once an integral part of Johannesburg's economic system.

Sappi and Liberty, two of Braamfontein largest corporate investors, maintained their headquarters for the duration of the 20 year urban decay, whilst other corporates followed the pattern to decentralisation to the suburbs (Burocco 2013, p. 37). Today, these companies strongly impact the decisions made within the City Improvement District's (CID) redevelopment decision-making.

Over the last decade Braamfontein has become a regenerated living, working, and education spaces, making it a place of consumption and production, characterized by its historical buildings and sites such as Wits University, Constitutional Hill, the Braamfontein Cemetery, the Women's Jail, the Milner Park Hotel, the Joburg Theatre and the Civic Centre.

### Society

Braamfontein is primarily used for commercial, residential and education purposes. Its residents, workers and visitors reflect the general multi-cultural breakdown of South African society. The majority of residents are students, but an emergence of young upwardly mobile residents has also occurred.

### Politics

In terms of Braamfontein's political stance, it is an area that has often contested service delivery inconsistencies. Public and private agencies also strive to maintain strong connections between the

African National Congress (ANC) and its government sectors - whose various headquarters reside within the vicinity.

### **Economics**

In 2004, Braamfontein was branded in a bid to accelerate investment and further enable promotion of the space, as well as to secure current private investments (Sappi and Liberty Life). Along with the branding service, additional cleaning and security has been funded to create a new energy, which has subsequently created an interest amongst investors who are actively involved in purchasing property within the area, thus adding to the vibrancy of the city by opening shops, bars, restaurants and coffee shops.

Braamfontein's wayfinding system, developed in order to help orientate users of the space, is part of the Braamfontein Management District's ongoing branding efforts, which is seemingly speculative in its expectation for inclusivity.

The new imagery marketing strategy being sold to future investors benefits from the ongoing commodification of Braamfontein is a result of the urban renewal model being used in improvement districts worldwide, also known as the 'global city' model, is the result of the strategic identification of a moderately abandoned urban area, with the potential for exponential economic and cultural growth. Pragmatically speaking, this process of reform is undeniably exclusive and acts as an unsustainable mechanism of control that is developed and implemented by various stakeholders to satisfy current and future investors.

### **Culture**

Braamfontein has become a space of entertainment with many individuals (living in and outside of the area) spending their days exploring and enjoying Braamfontein's cultural hot spots. There is a very cosmopolitan street culture evident along Juta Street, says Burocco (2013, p. 54), while segregated along economic lines, it is fairly racially mixed

Other culturally prevalent spaces in Braamfontein include the Civic Centre and Alexander Theatre, Constitutional Hill, Wits Art Museum, Stevenson Gallery, and the Wits Origins Centre, etc. All of these spaces boast a significant amount of public interest.

In terms of its public art, Braamfontein is a node within Johannesburg's 'Cultural Arc', whereby a 'trail' of public art has been created between Newtown, Braamfontein and the Johannesburg Art Gallery (Brodie 2008, p. 95). This initiative had been driven by the JDA in partnership with the Trinity Session (a public art commission), and other artists such as Clive van den Berg – who is well known for the design of his gigantic eland at the corner of Bertha and Ameshoff streets.

### **The Environment**

The technological environment of Braamfontein consists of internet cafés, electronic devices, technology hubs (Tshimologong Precinct), selected access to WiFi, and the increase in the popularity of innovative mobile applications such as Uber and SnapScan.

Within the information environment, there has been an increase in Braamfontein's online cultural presence, there are countless social media sites dedicated to extending the conversation of Braamfontein's cultural significance. Much of the print media (pamphlets, user guides, and information booklets) being circulated around that space is designed for cultural enthusiasts eager to participate in the weekend consumer frenzy.

The physical environment of Braamfontein<sup>6</sup> consists of the Nelson Mandela Bridge, the main connection between the Central Business District, and Newtown. Braamfontein is also known for

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<sup>6</sup> The physical environment of Braamfontein is particularly attractive to private investors in that thousands of people commute to, through, from and around Braamfontein every day.

being a 'gateway' between various parts of the city, such as Hillbrow, which boasts historically significant buildings that have subsequently become derelict, and then on the opposite side, the northern suburbs, which clearly suggest social and spatial disparities. The main landmarks that territorially define Braamfontein are Constitutional Hill, the Nelson Mandela Bridge, the M1 highway, Jan Smuts avenue, and Wits University (Burocco 2013, p. 3).

In and around these landmarks is an array of high-rise buildings and old office blocks, within these buildings reside residential flats, apartments, commercial offices and bottom floor shops – such as coffee shops, restaurants, bars, retail shops and markets.

## The Organisation

*The Organisation*, an *immediate* area of concern, is, as Fenn & Hobbs (2015) suggest, the culmination of businesses, government organisations and non-profit organisations. 'Researching the organisation includes existing products, services and platforms (a website, for example), relevant processes, people and teams, systems and data, organisational and departmental objectives and strategies, brand, etc.'

Braamfontein is the epitome of the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) revitalisation efforts (Brodie 2008, p. 95). The JDA, along with other private and public stakeholders, have invested millions of rands in Braamfontein<sup>7</sup> in order to promote commercial interest in the space.

The section from Juta Street, De Beer Street, Melle Street and Jorissen are managed by public and private investors in an effort to maintain their control of Braamfontein's marketing strategy – enforced by the Braamfontein Management District. Burocco (2013, p. 129) suggests that this is assisting to enhance the perception around the topic of the city's socially transformative continuance – however, how much of this transformation is a consequence of public and private intervention, and how much is a natural evolution of the city? There has been a clear establishment of these organisation's economic interests and goals (Burocco 2013, p. 130) explains that this has become evident since there has been a significant promoting of a homogenous space of consumption, which in some ways contradicts, but corresponds to their idea of development value, which prioritizes exchange value over value of use.

## The Users

Lastly, our choice of selecting the *users* category is quite simple, *the users* are the end-receivers of a product of service. In this case, the user responsible for the 'delivery, administration, or maintenance' of the product or service is not included here, these individuals would be situated in *the organisation* category.

The majority of the users in Braamfontein are students who are primarily responsible for the increase in Braamfontein's residential use (Burocco 2013, p. 123). Most of these students fall into the study, live/study, work/study, or the live/study/work category, and attend either the University of Johannesburg or the University of the Witwatersrand. Other users include individuals who neither study, work nor live in Braamfontein, but visit the city to experience its street culture. The last sets of identified users are those who work, live, or work and live in the space. We can classify these users as: students, the working class, the creative class, and the corporate working class. While there is a definite cohabitating of multiple groups of users, interaction between these groups of users is poor (Burocco 2013, p. 132).

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<sup>7</sup> Private developers in Braamfontein include: South Point, Play Braamfontein and other small businesses, along with Sappi and Liberty Life; and then there are the public developers (who are seldom differentiated from private developers in that they are capable of 'mobilising and managing private resources') which include: Johannesburg Development District (JDA), Urban Genesis-BMD The Braamfontein Management District, the Department of Art Culture and Heritage, Constitutional Hill, and Wits University (Burocco 2013, p. 98).

Burocco (2013, p. 131) highlights that the primary users of Braamfontein are not considered in the planning processes of the marketing strategy. The majority of users within the space are students, however these students cannot afford the exorbitantly priced necessities that are provided by the regeneration initiative (Burocco 2013, p. 134). Another problem faced by students is that private investors are not particularly interested in focusing on students as their target consumers. Essential to this point is that there is a clear differentiation and further widening between the students, the creative class and the corporate class - the *ideal* consumers (Burocco 2013, p. 134). Burocco (2013, p. 120) stresses the issue that if urban regeneration positively affects certain individuals, it must be acknowledged that for other individuals this might not be the case. What results here is the unbalanced ability to enjoy a *meaningful* citizenship.

However, with the issues pertaining to the privatization aside, the increased socialisation of Braamfontein comes with it a new set of complexities, and naturally a new definition of the idea of purpose and *meaning* to the people who exist in the *place*.

### The Marketplace

The *marketplace* are the providers of products and services, and the way in which these products and services are delivered and subsequently experienced (Fenn & Hobbs 2015, p. 5). In the scope of this paper, the *marketplace* can be understood as the existing Experiential Graphic Design (XGD), which, while fractured and non-systemic is the natural competition for any alternative system.

This section comprises an analysis of photographs and observations of Braamfontein's current visual information layer (provided by the *marketplace*) by referring to the previously mentioned discipline of XGD, and its core components<sup>8</sup>: wayfinding and signage, interpretation, and place-making.

In terms of Braamfontein's current visual information layer, there are three very evident visual aesthetic styles, within these styles consist clearly distinguishable types of content. On the one hand it is clear in the style that an emphasis has been made to promote the area as a creative city, whilst the second style indicates the promotion of day-to-day goods and services for the lower-middle income class of Braamfontein, and then the third style, which is visibly concerned with its corporate image.

An example of visual information in Braamfontein is the abundance of guides and maps that have been printed as a result of the increase in traffic through and around the area<sup>9</sup>. Play Braamfontein, the area's main property developers (who reside in the creative precinct of Braamfontein, just off Juta Street) have their own informal map - 'A Guide to Braamfontein'.

In a recent workshop<sup>10</sup>, anonymous participants<sup>11</sup> were tasked with marking the routes and the areas in which they travel and spend the most time. The main information nodes depicted on the map were primarily related to private, commercial places of interest, with the exception of a few select cultural landmarks such as the Wits Art Museum (WAM). The participants mapped out their routes, and their own places of interest (Figure 1). The outcome of this mapping was that the places identified as important by the participants were not shown on the Play Braamfontein map. In fact,

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<sup>8</sup> Wayfinding' consists of visual cues, human-guides, maps, pathways and GPS systems, which are all solutions for creating mental models and maps of an environment (SEGD 2015, p. 5). Signs are conjointly used to orientate and guide people through environments. 'Interpretation' refers to the information of the place and how it tells a story, and subsequently creates *meaning* for the users of that environment (SEGD 2015, p. 15). 'Place-making' is concerned with the creation of a distinguishable, and somewhat original image for a site (SEGD 2015, p. 15). Ensuring that place-making exists within the framework for communication means that the intent of the communication is more than just graphic design, art, interior design, or architecture – which, isn't true place-making (SEGD 2015, p. 15).

<sup>9</sup> However, there is a lack of one clear consistent wayfinding system –both in the formal and informal visual information layer.

<sup>10</sup> The workshop was held in order to gain insights into the everyday users of Braamfontein.

<sup>11</sup> The participants were comprised of students who travel through, socialize, work, or live in Braamfontein.

the participants mapped routes and places that hadn't even been acknowledged by the map designers.



**Figure 1: Photograph of final mapping of routes in Braamfontein (2015)**

If we refer back to XGD's core components: wayfinding and signage, interpretation, and place-making, the Play Braamfontein map strongly associates with commercial places of interest within the creative precinct. It provides a clear guide for users within the creative precinct, but once individuals venture into other parts of Braamfontein, there is little to no information pertaining to possible places of interest.

The images within this section (see Figures 3-15) show the clear formal signage distinction between the different precincts within Braamfontein, and the inadequacies in the overall wayfinding system – which, from our observations is undoubtedly limited.

The wayfinding that exists in Braamfontein is limited, inconsistent and insufficient, which creates a somewhat disjointed trail of navigation, direction and orientation. The information provided on the available formal signage is also inadequate and not necessarily coherent with the information seeking needs of the primary users of Braamfontein, eg. places to eat, get internet access, shops, ATMs, etc.

The forms, media and materials of the signage in Braamfontein vary quite significantly, there's an evident process of form exploration within the corporate and creative precincts, where the signs have been designed in relation to their environmental context (Figure 2 and 13). The location of these signs are also strategically positioned, whereas the signage outside of the creative and corporate precincts are positioned wherever there is free space, and are usually surrounded by various other dilapidated, informal signs. These signs (both formal and informal), their buildings, the neighbourhood trees, and along with public artworks are what essentially navigates, orientates and directs Braamfontein users (Figure 15).





**Figure 2: No clear wayfinding system in one of Braamfontein's busiest areas (the creative precinct). The buildings are used to orientate users (2015).**

The overall place-making (the distinctive image of the area) in Braamfontein lacks the essential framework for clear, consistent communication because of the area's distinguishable branding and inadequate wayfinding efforts within the different precincts. What this inevitably does is that it interferes with the interpretation of the information - the telling of a story, and the *meaning* of the environment to the user.

The users of the space, and their information needs are clearly disregarded by private and public developers, and thus contradicts the idea of creating a 'sense of community', even though this is something that Adam Levy of Play Braamfontein strongly acknowledges as indicated in an interview with Burocco (2013, p. 42). Perhaps developing comprehensive communication strategies for the neighbourhood is not the private developers' responsibility, however, their vision of creating a 'sense of community', which is made apparent through public administration, should be evident in the occupied space and its surrounds (Burocco 2013, p. 42).

The *organisation*<sup>12</sup> of Braamfontein assumes that people travelling within the space will automatically be able to direct themselves without the assistance of some sort of unified, comprehensive wayfinding and signage system. This poses a problem for all three core components of XGD as users of the space may find themselves disorientated, unable to interpret the environment, which would then inevitably cause them to have a less *meaningful* experience of Braamfontein.

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<sup>12</sup> See 'The Organisation'.



Figure 3: The different bus signs on a street pole - one old, and one new (2015)



Figure 5: Wits University wayfinding system - consistent throughout the university (2015)



Figure 6: Generic sign providing orientation and directional information (2015)



Figure 4: Rea Vaya's attempt at a limited wayfinding system, which is scattered in and around Braamfontein (2015)



Figure 7: A much older sign directing users to a place that no longer exists (2015)



Figure 10: Rea Vaya wayfinding in the corporate precinct (Google Maps 2015)



Figure 12: Bottom floor shops with their walls covered in informal signs and advertising (2015)



Figure 13: Branson building, often used by users to orientate themselves (Google Maps 2015)



Figure 11: Ambiguous directional and navigational sign (2015)



Figure 15: Public art along Juta Street - these artworks have subsequently become the orientation, direction and navigation cues for users within Braamfontein. (2015)



Figure 14: Three different types of bus signs (2015)

## The Legacy of the Problem

Over and above our knowledge that Braamfontein is a socially mixed, living, working, and studying urban regenerated social space, the main insights gathered from the above framing are that public and private interests dominate the area by giving preference to commodified spaces, through urban planning and management - or lack thereof. And evidently that there is a current lack of contextual *meaning* of 'new' Braamfontein which is caused by social disparities within public and private space.

The impact of this occurrence on civic engagement is an inconsistent use of information that currently ceases to assist in the guiding and orientation of people in that space, and in which to communicate the historical and cultural value of the suburb. Not to mention that the commodification of the city runs at a cost, private investments are linked to the creation of unequal spaces of consumption that do not necessarily cater for the needs of Braamfontein's users, but instead focuses on the organisation's needs.

The legacy of the problem exists in the conversation surrounding the unethical creation of segregation along economic lines through the misappropriation of necessary information, which inevitably allows for social inequality and misguidance within commodified consumption spaces in Braamfontein.

## Conclusion

In summary, we argue that the current information environment of Braamfontein is problematic as it is ethically unconsidered, and is naturally inclined towards satisfying the interests of commercial stakeholders - ultimately inhibiting socio-economic prosperity.

The economic paradigm of *betterness* divulges in the significance of creating for inclusivity. This perspective, in relation to Braamfontein, is functioning as somewhat of an afterthought, which could inevitably continue the pattern of a systematic socio-economic expansion (urban regeneration), followed by an indefinite period of stagnation.

At the thriving rate in which socialisation is being experienced in Braamfontein, its current erratic information environment is clearly a problem space which requires urgent and mindful attention. Corporates and businesses within the area are justified to act within prescribed grounds, however, we believe that information provided (by the relevant stakeholders) to the public in a public space needs to be more utilitarian, servicing the needs of the majority over those of the few in a more altruistic manner.

This argument is supported through theoretical texts, as well as a case-study that explores the complexities of Braamfontein, and concludes through the use of a visual analysis to demonstrate the inadequacies of the information environment.

To resolve this ethical dilemma, we propose that Braamfontein requires a *meaningful* information system from which users can construct their own sense-making. The creation of this system should involve engagement with all stakeholders, including business and users. In order to design meaningful experiences for the users of Braamfontein, designers must engage with users to identify their experience needs and goals.

Steve Diller, Nathan Shedroff, and Darrel Rhea, in their book *Making Meaning: How Successful Companies Deliver Meaningful Experiences* (2005) provide a framework: the 15 Core Meanings<sup>13</sup> (Figure 16) that is used in identifying appropriate experience goals that support the creation of XGD environments. In this model, meaningful experiences are characterised by fifteen meanings categories, which sit at the core of human values. These needs have been chosen based on their universal significance - in that there is constancy in their relevance (Diller et al 2005). Any future

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13 Marc Hassenzahl (2010, p. 44) *Top 10 Psychological Needs* provides a similar framework.

design interventions that seek to improve the current erratic information environment of Braamfontein could benefit from applying the 15 Core Meanings or the Top 10 Psychological Needs framework in designing XGD for inclusivity and most importantly, betterness.

## THE 15 CORE MEANINGS

### Accomplishment

Achieving goals and making something of oneself; a sense of satisfaction that can result from productivity, focus, talent, or status.

### Beauty

The appreciation of qualities that give pleasure to the senses or spirit. Of course beauty is in the eye of the beholder and thus highly subjective, but our desire for it is ubiquitous.

### Community

A sense of unity with others around us and a general connection with other human beings.

### Creation

The sense of having produced something new and original, and in so doing, to have made a lasting contribution.

### Duty

The willing application of oneself to a responsibility. The military in any country counts on the power of this meaning, as do most employers.

### Enlightenment

Clear understanding through logic or inspiration. This experience is not limited to those who meditate and fast.

### Freedom

The sense of living without unwanted constraints. This experience often plays tug-of-war with the desire for security; more of one tends to decrease the other.

### Harmony

The balanced and pleasing relationship of parts to a whole, whether in nature, society, or an individual. When we seek a work/life balance, we are in pursuit of harmony.

### Justice

The assurance of equitable and unbiased treatment. This is the sense of fairness and equality that underlies our concept of "everyman" or Average Joe.

### Oneness

A sense of unity with everything around us. It is what some seek from the practice of spirituality and what others expect from a good tequila.

### Redemption

Atonement or deliverance from past failure or decline. Though this might seem to stem from negative experiences, the impact of the redemptive experience is highly positive.

### Security

The freedom from worry about loss. This experience has been a cornerstone of civilization but in the U.S. in particular, acquired increased meaning and relevance after 9/11.

### Truth

A commitment to honesty and integrity. This experience plays an important role in most personal, professional, and brand relationships.

### Validation

The recognition of oneself as a valued individual worthy of respect. Every externally branded piece of clothing counts on the attraction of this meaningful experience.

### Wonder

Awe in the presence of a creation beyond one's understanding. While this might sound mystical and unattainable, consider the wonder that Las Vegas hotels create simply through plaster and lights.

Figure 16: *The 15 Core Meanings* (Shedroff 2010)

Ideally, this problem framing and resolution will form part of the basis within which a design solution will be facilitated by the authors. This solution will be steered towards the creation of a cross channel approach used to align the information needs of the users of the space with the interests of the public and private stakeholders within Braamfontein. Future research in this topic by the authors will be a continuation of certain particulars within this paper.

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