
Images of Central Areas: A Comparative Analyses between South African and European Cities

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Abstract

Central areas depict distinct images of cities. Increasingly, it is seen that the significance of the designated central areas in many cities across the world has been relegated because of the up market developments in other areas of the cities, particularly in developing countries like South Africa. However, central areas could still become the nerve centres of the cities and contribute to their vitality and to the verve of residents. Thus, there is a need to explore to know what ails the central areas, what attributes are necessary and how to revitalize central areas of cities. Using comparative analyses of the images of central areas of different European and South African cities, and qualitative discussions with visitors, this study explores how the central areas of South African cities can be revitalized as well as how to make them more vibrant and attractive. The study was conducted by using images of central areas of cities like Pretoria, Bloemfontein, and Port Elizabeth in South Africa; and Vienna, Budapest and Cologne in Europe. It is revealed that despite the availability of similar features, the central areas of the South African cities are less vibrant, active and attractive than the European cities. The major reasons are lack of adequate accessibility, lack of safety and fear of crime, and lack of animated areas to enforce multicultural activities. Besides, they do not portray distinct attractive images in the minds of the people. The experience from European cities suggests that land marks, such as heritage and architecture have certain contribution, but accessibility to the central areas by different public transportation modes, prevention of vehicular movement in core areas, full pedestrianization and walkability, cleanliness, safety, sense of belongingness, and availability of animated areas for various activities, such as shopping, dining, meeting, entertainment and relaxing are major contributors to the vitality of the central areas. Thus, enhancement of accessibility by major modes of transportation, fully pedestrianization of the core areas, safety and creation of vibrant areas of multicultural activities in addition to creation of unique images are the prime requirements to make the central areas of the South African cities dynamic and livelier.

Keywords

Accessibility; Belongingness; Central Areas; Images; Vibrant

1. INTRODUCTION

A question often besieges the urban planners and professionals that -what makes a place great. To some scholars greatness of a place or city implies that it holds certain majesty, prominence and a distinct image (Hall, 1998; Savitch, 2010). Achievement of such a status indicates that the city is extraordinary and distinguished in a number of very important ways and attributes (Savitch, 2010). The attributes could range from economic and commercial prowess to cultural assets, to aesthetic environment, touristic attractions, to the transcendent propositions of philosophy and religion (Savitch, 2010). As Hall, (1998) philosophised that although period of greatness may vary, greatness is not a matter of mere luck rather is based on a consistent pattern that accounts for a distinct quality of environment. So, it is argued that certain particular attributes may bring a city into ascendancy and create an image of a great place. However, a central area of

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cities, which essentially form the core of the city, is the major contributors to their image and greatness. A close scrutiny of the great and global cities like Paris, Vienna, and London, in Europe, Tokyo and Seoul in Asia, New York in USA, Johannesburg in Africa, the city centres played a paramount role in creating an image of a great city. It is also apparent that many of the cities across the world have designated central areas depicting distinct images. Despite the availability similar elements and characteristics the central areas of different cities bring in different levels of vivacity and consequently create different types of images.

Particularly, it is evident that majority of the European cities have designated central areas, which perform crucial urban functions that include commercial, social and entertainment activities. Historically, these central areas have provided places that epitomize arts, culture, music, politics, social cohesion, and commercial activities. Of course, these city centres have degenerated over the years to certain extent, and new developments at other places of the cities have successfully created competing centres. Despite the competitions, the old city centres still keep their identity and functions and a large scale urban regeneration and renewal programmes have given them a new lease of life and vitality. In the same tune of European cities, majority of the large and medium cities of South Africa have a city centre. These city centres possess almost similar built form and elements of that of European counterparts (GDDPLG, 1997; DPLG, 1998, 1998; Cities Network, n.d)¹. They seem to have been once the nerve centres and places of significant actions in the cities. However, it is apparent that these central areas of majority of South African cities, which were once in the fore front of development and success, have been degenerated and relegated to background². Examples of such scenarios have been found in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth, Pretoria, Durban and Bloemfontein to a name a few. New developments that have sprung up elsewhere in the cities have almost replaced central areas of the cities and have successfully created new centres of activities. A close scrutiny of these central areas suggests that these areas have less significance now, despite having historical, cultural and economic importance. Then the questions rise are that what ails these central areas and how these areas can be revitalized. Although, some urban regeneration and renewal works have been carried out or being considered, explicit studies regarding the challenges that cause the decay of these areas and attributes and elements which could enable revitalization of these areas in the South African cities are found to be limited. Therefore, using comparative analyses of the spatial, socio-cultural and functional images of central areas of different European and South African cities, and qualitative discussions with visitors, local residents, urban planning and design professionals, and experts and other stakeholders this study explores, what ails the central areas of cities of South Africa, what attributes are necessary and how they can be revitalized. The study offers insights to the success factors and challenges that create the images of the cities, and the factors, which need to be augmented to revitalize the city centers of South African cities.

2. CENTRAL AREAS: URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND CHALLENGES

According to the German geographer Walter Christaller, settlements simply function as 'central places' providing services to surrounding areas (Goodall, 1987). Furthering on the hypothesis Le Corbusier professed that the city centres provide extensive commercial, recreational, educational and administrative services. It may be reasonable to assume that the central places resonate the urban monumentality and enclosed civic spaces. They provide richly varied vistas of a subtle kind, different masses of the buildings, asymmetrically arranged, and create an intense rhythm. According to Le Corbusier (1927:43) the whole composition found to be massive, elastic, living, terribly sharp and keen and domineering. Such places offer potential of accommodating different architectural and urban morphologies within a compact framework, diversity and neighbourhood interaction, and connectivity (Le Corbusier 1958: 210; Steyn 2012). Moreover, Christaller assumed that centres could be of varied sizes, and each centre supply

¹ Corroborated by urban planning professionals in South Africa

² Opinion of urban planning professionals and urban planning experts

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particular types of goods and services forming levels of functional hierarchy. For example, the larger the city, the larger the central area, deals with higher order goods and services and people are willingly get ready to travel to such palaces to acquire them. Similarly, they also perform social and recreational functions of different levels. Consequently, different images of these central areas emerge. However, on the contrary scholars like Jencks (2000: 326) criticised this notion of city building observing that the cities and their central area are built on the assumption that city- central area is a total work of art, whereas in reality it occurs through piecemeal growth responding to countless economic forces and decisions.

Development of central places and creation of an image of central areas are governed by certain socio-and economic attributes. Savitch (2010) advocated that 4 Cs (currency, cosmopolitanism, concentration and charisma) are essential to make a city great and create an image, which can apparently be true for the central areas of the cities. Currency has two implications-first, it connotes the value of something and its ability to carry weight in crucial circumstances, and second, it indicates that a place is up to date with the demands of time. Cosmopolitanism implies the place should have the ability to embrace international, multicultural or poly-ethnic features. Connectivity is an indicator of a place's importance to be rooted within the larger attribute of cosmopolitanism and have a kind of international and national outreach and connectedness (Taylor and Lang, 2005). Concentration embraces the dual ideas of demographic density and productive mass (Savitch, 2010). Charisma is an elusive concept as much of it is based on perception and mass attitudes. It can be considered as a magical appeal that generates enthusiasm, admiration or reverence, which is underpinned by the evocation of a feeling toward a person or an entity. So, Charismatic areas can be conveyed by icons and spatial forms (Eisenstadt, 1968). As demonstrated by Lynch (1960) commanding icons, and can create an image and a deep seated appeal. Thus, the challenges of development of images of the central areas in the contemporary era rest on these four Cs.

Moreover, according to, Logan (1976) and Molotch (1976), and Logan and Molotch (2007) urban space particularly central areas are socially and economically valued area. The growth of these places is predominantly governed by maximization of exchange values of the land, and functions that area created over the land in these areas. In other words, the location and functions are driven by the rent paying capacity of land, which implies that the urban function that would return higher economic values would be located on a competitive basis. This approach of development of central areas confirm to the theory of urban growth machine (Harvey, 2006; Heynen, 2006; Logan, 1976; Molotch, 1976; Logan and Molotch, 2007; Smith & Floyd, 2013).

Besides, there is a need for balance- promoting a dynamic balance between settlements and its ecological base in cities, as well as with respect to social and spatial dynamics; promoting freedom for people to choose as how to inhabit or interpret places within certain constraints that exist, and to establish necessary order. Also, this relates to a minimalist approach to design where design provides the minimum necessary constraints necessary in a particular context to achieve positive settlement form, rather than comprehensive control of all areas and all aspects of settlement (Crane, 1964; Dewar, and Uytenbogaardt 1991). Thus, establishment of a central area that can accommodate all the important socio-economic, administrative and recreational functions on a competitive basis and brings adequate economic returns, as well as have the attributes of currency, cosmopolitanism, concentration and charisma is an enormous challenge. Moreover, creation of an image of elegant, grand, atheistically appealing, safe and socially and culturally acceptable central area of city is a far greater challenge.

3. APPROACH OF THE STUDY

A qualitative research and comparative study was followed in this study. First, the urban design principles were critically reviewed and critical attributes of central areas of cities were identified from critical review of literature and case studies. Six important cities – three from Europe and three from South Africa were

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selected based on their importance and urban design images. Vienna in Austria, Budapest in Hungary and Cologne in Germany were selected from Europe because of the grandeur image of their central areas and urban activities they perform. Similarly, three important cities from South Africa such as Bloemfontein, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth were considered as they portray some kind of distinct images. Despite the differences, all the six cities have certain amount of similarities in terms of urban functions, size and mono-centrism. Each city has a well-defined city centre performing variety of urban functions and creates an image of its own. The investigator conducted a qualitative survey through digital photography and discussing with the tourists, visitors and local people by visiting these six cities himself. The discussions were conducted by using non structured interview methods and random sampling process to compile opinions and perceptions of respondents. The surveys were conducted during the period between April 2013 and February 2016. The responses were compiled on a snow balling process. A total of 126 respondents (total sample size N=126) were surveyed with sample sizes in each city varying between 18 and 25. The interviews and discussions were conducted in English. English was used as the interview language after pilot tests in each city surveyed confirming that that majority of the people in the concerned cities could able to communicate in English to certain extent. In this regard, upon arrival in the cities, the investigator himself first made small pilot surveys among the people to confirm whether the language is suitable for interviews or not. However, care was taken not to select respondents based on language. In case there was a challenge of communication between the investigator and respondents because of language barriers, assistance of local people was sought to act as interpreters. Besides, care was also taken to avoid any kind of prejudices and skewed propensity for selecting a particular segment of respondents based on language, race, gender and age. Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents of the survey. The respondents profile include 76.2% of respondents can speak two or more languages including English. However, respondents belonging to different languages such as English, German, Hungarian, Turkish, Slovak, Afrikaans, Sesotho, IsiXhosa, Chinese and any other are well represented from language point of view. About 37.3% of the respondents are whites and 33.3% blacks. Others include 15.1% Asians, 9.5% coloured and 4.8% Indians. Also, 56.3% are Males and 43.7% are females. Similarly, under age group, 19.0% belong to age group 15-24, 30.2% are of 25-36 age group. 23.0% are of 36-50 age group, 17.5% belong to 51-60% age group and 10.35 are of age group above 60. The profile of respondents indicates age, gender race, and language are well represented minimizing any sort of bias in the sample selection. The questions in the survey schedule include the perception of the respondents regarding the quality of various attributes as given in Table 2 and the ideas to improve the situation if it is necessary. The evaluations were made under four major urban design principles such as availability of visual and physical elements, liveability, social and cultural elements and productivity and sustainability, and the their various attributes and elements present in the central areas are given in Table 2. In addition to the survey, discussions were conducted with urban planning and design professionals, academicians, sociologist and people engaged in community development in South African cities to comprehend the various challenges the central areas in South African cities are facing and the required social measured and policy interventions essential to improve the quality and of these central areas.

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Language		Race		Gender			
Home Language	Share in %	Race Group	Share in %	Category	Share in %	Age group	Share in %
English	12.7	White	37.3	Male	56.3	15-24	19.0
German	15.8	Black	33.3	Female	43.7	25-35	30.2
Hungarian	6.4	Coloured	9.5	Total	100.0	36-50	23.0

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Turkish	5.7	Asian	15.1			51-60	17.5
Slovak	5.6	Indian	4.8			>60	10.3
Spanish	2.4						
French	1.6						
Afrikaans	16.67						
Tswana	7.1	Total	100.0			Total	100.0
Sesotho	7.1						
IsiXhosa	4.8						
Chinese	7.9						
Any other	3.2						
Total	100.0%						
Two or more language including English	76.2%						

The responses were analyzed qualitatively through interpretations manually relating to the various attributes. For the purpose of analysis, the responses are checked for errors, discrepancies and completeness. Then they were grouped under responses for different cities and finally accumulated under two categories such as for European and African cities separately. The difference and similarities in the opinions were accounted for and majority of similar responses were considered to delineate the quality of attributes and the difference opinions were scrutinized for their veracity.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Image of a central area of city depends on a set of attributes and associated elements. These attributes and elements can be grouped under four urban design principles underpinning the planning and design of the central areas of the cities. Thus, in this study the attributes and elements were grouped under four stands of principles such as availability of visual and physical elements, liveability, social and cultural elements, and productivity and sustainability. Table 2 presents the comparative evaluation of the various attributes under these four urban design stands and the images they portray in the central areas of the considered cities of Europe and South Africa.

4.1 Availability of visual and physical elements

The images of city centres were evaluated based on a set of attributes that include buzz, diversity, nightlife, public spaces, accessibility and pedestrianization, restaurants and dining, shopping, professional and administrative buildings, quality of buildings under availability of visual and physical elements, architecture, historical and heritage elements, new art installations, enhancement and promotion of the old heritage (Table 2). Figure 1 (a-f) depict different attributes of city centres of the three selected European cities. According to literature and responses from the respondents, it was found that all the three European cities are historical cities and so a number of historical, architectural buildings, museums, theatres, castles, and churches of Roman, Baroque, and Renaissance style are available. The heritage and historical buildings

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portray images of grandeur, and are well preserved and promoted. Cathedral Church in Cologne, St Stephen's church, and State opera building, in Vienna city centre are glaring examples (Florida, 2002; Storper and Venables, 2004; Field visual survey, 2016). Besides, a number of buildings of national and international significance such as UN Building in Vienna, and Parliament building in Budapest depict the images of place of prominence. Besides, the qualities of other buildings are found to be of high quality. There aren't signs of decay, rubbish, weeds or derelict buildings and places. Also, the areas hubbub with activities, people and visitors irrespective of the period of the day- particularly in evening times and weekends and holidays. Besides, a number of public places that are very attractive, beautiful aesthetically pleasing – mostly centrally located open spaces are available, where people can gather, sit, eat, chat, engage in carnivals and enjoy music or melodies without any feeling of restrictions (Figures 1 b and c). As asserted by some visitors these areas portray images of multi-ethnicity, and multiculturalism (Field survey, 2016; Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Vonolo, 2008). The cities also have adequate shopping and dining facilities offering high quality shopping and variety of dining opportunities. Shopping centres exhibiting national and international brands, and souvenirs, as well as restaurants and street food stalls offering variety of foods from different cuisines almost create a festal atmosphere, particularly during the peak hours of day such as in the evenings (Figure 1b). The city centres have also vibrant night life particularly in Vienna and Budapest. People are observed to enjoy the night life with active enthusiasm (Field survey, 2016; Chatterton and Hollands 2002). More importantly the central areas are very well accessible by all modes of public transportation such as subways, trams and buses. Pedestrian and walking have been given priorities. The core areas are observed to fully pedestrianized, which presents an image of safe, compact and comfortable environment (Figures 1b-f).

In the selected cities of South Africa (Figure 2) although certain historical and architectural buildings are present, they do not show splendour and grandness. The official and administrative buildings of provincial and national importance in some cases look rather efficient. The general buildings seem to send a feeling of mixed quality; while some buildings looks very good and well maintained, the others found to be degenerating. Central public places such as Hoffman square in Bloemfontein and Church Square and Union Building Square in Pretoria are available; however, they remain active for a limited period of the day (Figures 2 a and b). They are found be deserted and devoid of activity particularly after the early evenings. Although, a plethora of shopping facilities are available, dining facilities and night life are rather limited. Besides, the major challenge is accessibility; these areas are mostly by vehicles with limited public transportation facilities. Pedestrians and walking have not been prioritized (Figures 2 f and h).

4.2 Liveability

The attributes under liveability used to evaluate the city centres include comfort, safety, vibrancy, and walkability. As seen in the Table 2 and Figure 1, according to visitors the city centres in selected European cities offer mostly a well coming and comfortable environment. People feel comfortable to walk through, sit, stand, play, talk, read, or just relax and contemplate. The places are found to be devoid of unnecessary and unpleasant noise, traffic or pollution. They put forth a feeling of safe and secure atmosphere even at night whether in groups or alone. Roads and footpaths are found to be safe for adults and children to walk or ride their bicycles. The presence of various socio-cultural and commercial activities, gathering of people and interaction among them brings vibrancy to these places. Because of the pedestrianization of the core areas and availability of exclusive pavements for pedestrians in other areas as well as bicycle lanes make it easy to get around on foot, by bike, on wheelchairs.

However, in contrast, according to respondents the city centres of the selected South African cities are quite non-inviting. The facilities for people with various physical capabilities, the old and the young are also limited. Most importantly, a fear of criminal activities always persists. Individual feels scared to go alone

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particularly while walking in secluded areas. Besides, roads are found to be not safe for walking or ride bicycles as well as not for children and adults³ (Figures 2 c, d, and e).

4.3 Social and cultural elements

The attributes of socio-cultural elements include cosmopolitanism and openness, social cohesion, art and music, and life style (Table 2). As asserted by a number of respondents, the concerned European city centres are accessible to everyone- different groups of people and tourists from different cultures and ethnicity from all over world. The areas seem to be open, receptive and tolerant⁴. Feeling of segregation and exclusion is not generally experienced. Art, music, theatre and opera form an integral part of these places. Opera houses, art galleries, theatre buildings exhibit some of the cultural landmarks in these area. Melody, music and art in formal atmosphere or on the streets create an atmosphere of harmony. Also, a blend of modern life style and traditions are observed.

In South African cities, equally people from different cultures and ethnicity are usually found, as well as some kind of openness is experienced. However, not much social and community feeling is experienced and a shadow of segregation seems to persist⁵. Socio-cultural activities such as art and music are found to be limited, although in some cases theatres do exist, although such activities are limited to specific occasions only. One of the major highlights of these areas is that although modern life styles are accepted, flavours of traditional African life styles are experienced⁶ (Figures 2 b and e).

4.4 Productivity and sustainability

The attributes used for evaluation of productivity and sustainability are enhancing, connectedness, diversity, and endurance (Table 2). The European cities exhibit a sense of respect to the needs and aspirations of the community that lives and works there and create opportunities for people to prosper and local businesses to thrive⁷ (Figure 1 f). They also found to enhance the built environment visually, physically and functionally. These central areas also seem to celebrate unique characteristics—heritage, culture and community—that create a sense of place and identity Figures 1 b, and c). These areas are found to be well connected to surrounding areas, job locations, schools, shops, facilities and services. A range of transport options, including public transport, walking and bicycling are available (Figures 1 a, c, and d). They are also observed to be connected with the past—the heritage of a place—and with the community and its culture. It feels that they are connected with the natural environment too. It is found that each central area has its own character and qualities; they offer a rich range of experiences—how you move around and interact with others, what buildings and spaces look and feel like, and what things can be done. In spite of this diversity, it offers an overall harmony. Besides, considerations for current and future activities adaptation for future have been made. According to local people care has been taken to design to save resources like water, energy and materials, and minimises its impact on the environment⁸.

In contrast, South African city centres do not seems to depict the image of respecting the needs and aspirations of the people and community that lives ad work there significantly⁹. Although the built environment is physically, visually and functionally appreciable, does not portray any unique characteristics or create a sense of place or identity (Figures 2 c, d, g and h). They are well connected to surrounding areas,

³ Opinions of respondents

⁴ Opinions of visitors and tourists

⁵ Opinions of local residents

⁶ Opinions of visitors

⁷ Opinions of local people

⁸ Responses of local people

⁹ Responses of local residents

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job locations, schools, shops, facilities and services, but only by vehicular mode and public transportation is limited (Figures 2 c, d, and f). They do not also exhibit an impression of being connected with the past—the heritage of a place—and with the community and its culture¹⁰. Although it seems that these areas are somewhat connected with the natural environment. In terms of diversity and endurance, the cities display similar images of European counterparts but to a lesser extent.

¹⁰ Opinions of visitors

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Table 2: Comparative analysis of urban design attributes in place in Central areas of cities

Attributes	Elements	European context (Vienna, Cologne, Budapest)	South Africa (Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Elizabeth)
Availability of visual and physical elements			
Architecture	Architecture, historical and heritage elements, new art installations, enhancement and promotion of the old heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the three cities are historical cities. • A number of Historical, architectural buildings, museums, theatres, castles, and churches of Roman, Baroque, Renaissance style are available. • The cities observed to promote and conserve the old heritages. For example Cathedral Church in Cologne, St Stephen’s church, Vienna State opera building, Vienna, <p>(Florida, 2002; Storper and Venables, 2004; Field visual survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some and available • However not seen and <p>(Visitor opinion 2013-2016)</p>
Buzz	Crowded places, bars, and clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The areas have hustle bustle with a lot of people during the day and evenings. • During weekends and holidays it becomes more active. • Quality bars and clubs catering to all strata of people are found. <p>(Vonolo, 2008; Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The of di • Pretoria hust. • Bloemfontein Eliza • Acti to da (Field 2016)

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Diversity	People from different parts in the world, particularly linked to tourism and specific events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety and difference in activities are available • People from different parts of world of multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, and tourists are found <p>(Field survey, 2013-2016; Landry, 2006; Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Vonolo, 2008)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lin mult have peop coun gene • Not visit <p>(Visitor opin 2013-2016)</p>
Nightlife	Night clubs, and crowded places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A vibrant night life particularly in Vienna and Budapest are observed. The night life in Vienna particularly during holidays and weekends is significant. • The city centres of all the three cities have several night clubs and the areas are usually crowded. <p>(Chatterton and Hollands 2002; Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fe are a • Som Pret Bloe Eliza activ <p>(Field survey)</p>
Public spaces	Images of public spaces, for example parks, congregation places, Atrium, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The public places are very attractive, beautiful aesthetically pleasing. • Every city has very active number congregation places such as parks, carnival areas, open areas near the churches and public buildings. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ther avai in B Buil • They appr • How foun of vi activ spec

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			(Field survey)
Accessibility and pedestrianization	Accessible by different modes of travel and promotes pedestrianization in the core areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The city centres of all the cities are very well, accessible by public transportation such as subway trains, trams and buses. However most of the vehicular activities are limited to the edges of the city centres. The internal areas of the city centres are mostly pedestrianized. (Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cities are very well, accessible by public transportation such as subway trains, trams and buses. However most of the vehicular activities are limited to the edges of the city centres. The internal areas of the city centres are mostly pedestrianized. (Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)
Restaurants and Dining	Availability of both formal and informal, diverse, affordable and quality restaurants and dining facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of restaurants and dining places in formal, informal and open are available offering variety cuisine and food that includes local, Asian, Oriental, Indian, and Chinese, continental and so on. (Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of restaurants and dining places in formal, informal and open are available offering variety cuisine and food that includes local, Asian, Oriental, Indian, and Chinese, continental and so on. (Field survey)
Shopping	Centralised shopping centre and shopping opportunities every strata of society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of shopping facilities offering variety of shopping opportunities for both local and international brands are available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar shopping opportunities for both local and international brands are available.

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		(Field survey, 2013-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large retail (Field survey)
Professional and administrative buildings	Availability of national, international important administrative and professional offices and buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important administrative buildings of national and international stature such as UN office building in Vienna, and Parliament house in Budapest. (Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings such as UN office building in Vienna, Parliament house in Budapest, museums, etc. (Field survey)
Quality of buildings	Beautiful, quality and well maintained buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of buildings are of high quality and well maintained. • Many buildings are of grand scale and look majestic. • Normal buildings are also of good quality, either renovated or well maintained. (Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings observed in the city are of high quality and well maintained. • How dilapidated buildings are maintained in the city. (Visitor opinion 2016)
Liveability			
Comfortable	Comfortable and welcoming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The city centres are mostly well coming and comfortable. • It feels comfortable to walk through, sit, stand, play, talk, read, or just relax and contemplate. Not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The city of Johannesburg is comfortable and welcoming. • There are many places to sit, read, or just relax and contemplate.

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		<p>much unpleasant noise, traffic or pollution is experienced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One can feel to be a part of the part of the community. • The places also offer facilities for people with various physical capabilities, the old and the young. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<p>with capa your</p> <p>(Visitor opin 2016)</p>
Safe	Feels safe, Free from criminal activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The areas make a feeling of safe and secure atmosphere even at night whether in groups or alone. • There aren't signs of decay, rubbish, weeds or derelict buildings and places. • Roads and paths are found to be safe for adults and children to walk or ride their bikes. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fe alwa • Indi to go walk • Road walk well adul <p>(Visitor opin 2016)</p>
Vibrant	Vibrant with people around	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are other people around always. • Places to meet, interact, play, explore, recreate and unwind are available. • People usually enjoy themselves and each other's company. • They offer opportunities to visit, experience, or live in. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peop day • The place parti • They oppo expe • They vibra

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			(Visitor opinion 2016)
Walkable	Enjoyable, easy to walk and bicycle around	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The central core areas are mostly pedestrianized. • They prioritise people walking or riding before vehicles. It is easy to get around on foot, bike, wheelchair, pushing a pram or wheeling luggage. • Buildings and streets feel like they're the right size and type for that place. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pedestrianized areas are mostly walkable. • It is easy to get around on foot, bicycle, wheelchair, pushing a pram or wheeling luggage. <p>(Visitor opinion 2016)</p>
Social and cultural elements			
Cosmopolitanism and open	Accessible and acceptable to different groups of people, and tourists, open to mixed culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The city centres are accessible to everyone. • Different multicultural and multi-ethnicity groups of people from all over the world and tourists are found. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People from all over the world are found in the city centres. <p>(Visitor opinion 2016).</p>
Social cohesion	Receptive, tolerant and community feeling, devoid of feeling of segregation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The areas seem to be receptive and tolerant. • No feeling of segregation is experienced. • However, they do not provide any sort of community feeling. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all areas are receptive and tolerant. • Despite the fact that some areas are receptive and tolerant, there is still a feeling of segregation.

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			(Visitor opinion 2016)
Art and music	Places of art and music both formal and informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art, music, theatre and opera are integral part of these places. • Opera houses, art galleries, theatre buildings form cultural landmarks in these city centres. • Often people individually or in groups found to play music on the streets creating a harmonious atmosphere (Field survey, 2013-2016).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thea availi how limit and (Field survey)
Life style	Ways of life, traditional, acceptance of modern life style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A blend of modern and traditional life styles equally exists. (Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013- 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alth are a tradi are c (Visitor opinion 2016)
Productivity and sustainability			
Enhancing	Enhances the local economy, environment and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These areas observed to respect the needs and aspirations of the community that lives and works there, create opportunities for people to prosper and local businesses to thrive. • They also found to enhance the built environment visually, physically and functionally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The depi the n peop lives sign • Alth is p func not

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These central areas also seem to celebrate unique characteristics—heritage, culture and community—that create a sense of place and identity. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016).</p>	<p>char of pl (Visitor opin 2016)</p>
Connected	Connects physically and socially	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These areas are well connected to surrounding areas, job locations, schools; shops, facilities and services, and a range of transport options, including public transport, walking and bicycling are available. • They are connected with the past—the heritage of a place—and with the community and its culture. • It feels that they are connected with the natural environment. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Afric conn areas shop by v • Publ • They impr with place com • Alth areas with <p>(Visitor opin 2016).</p>
Diverse	Diversity of options and experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is found that each central area has its own character and qualities, offer a rich range of experiences—how you move around and interact with others, what buildings and spaces look and feel like, and what things can be done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No s qual • How rang activ • Som lack

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of facilities, services and activities are available. • In spite of this diversity, it offers an overall harmony. <p>(Visitor opinion and Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	(Visitor opinion 2016)
Enduring	Enduring, resilient and aesthetically pleasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The areas are visually and aesthetically pleasing as well as practical. • Considerations for current and future activities adaptation for future have been made. • They have been designed to save resources like water, energy and materials, and minimises its impact on the environment. <p>(Discussions with local people, Field survey, 2013-2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These similarities of E... a les <p>(Discussions survey, 2013)</p>

Source of attributes: Storper and Venables, 2004; Temelova, 2007; Vonolo, 2008; Gehl, 2016, accessed www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/agenda/cities.cfm;

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Figure 1. Photographs showing different attributes of Central areas of Selected European cities

(Source: Photographs by the author and Google images, March, 2016)

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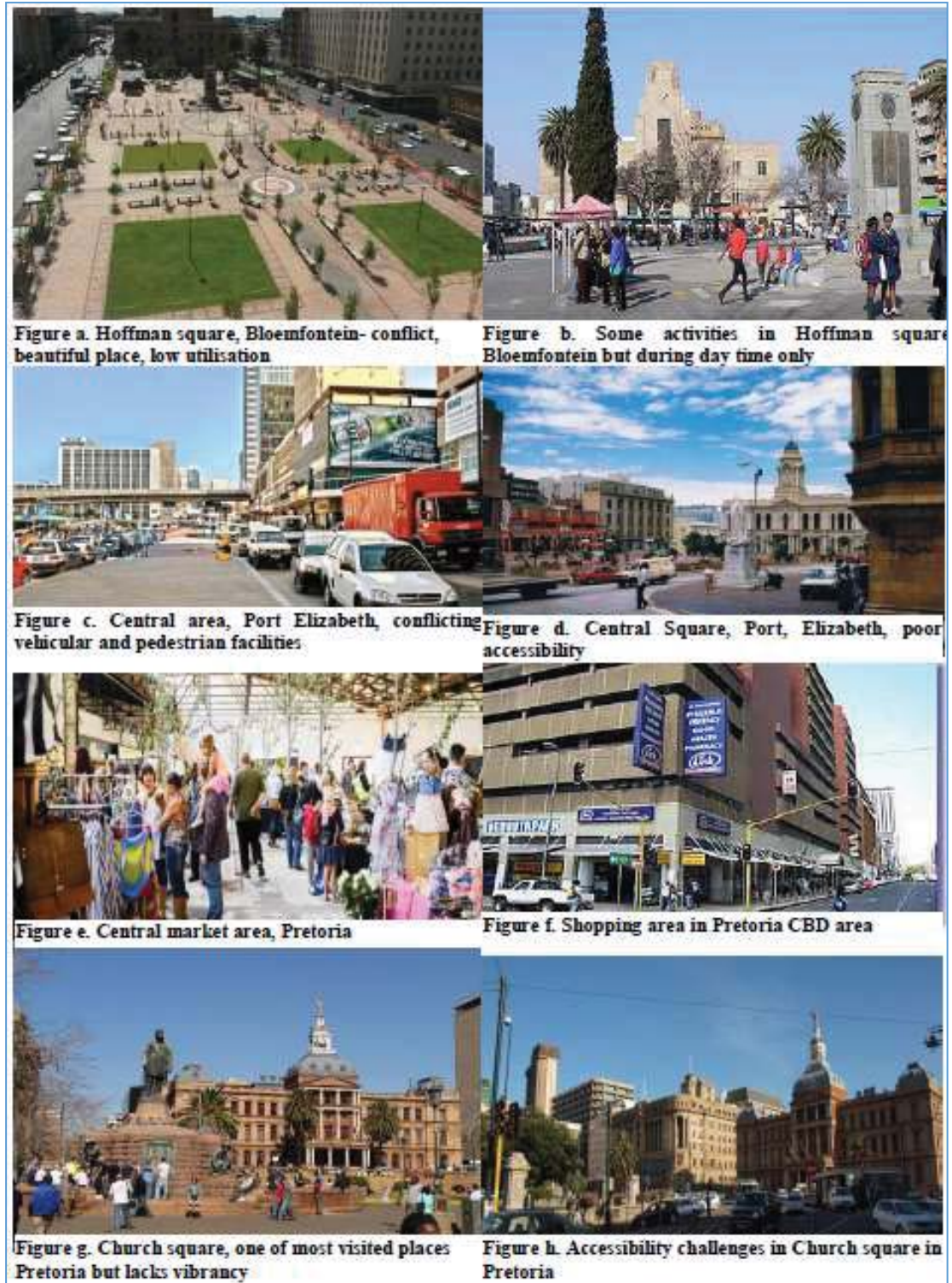


Figure 2. Photographs showing different attributes of Central areas of Selected

South African cities

(Source: Photographs by the author and Google images, March, 2016)

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5.0 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Central areas form the heart of cities. They create specific images based on which the cities are identified, besides performing plethora of functions. However, it is seen that city centres of South African cities despite having almost similar built form and elements of that of European counterparts; they have been relegated and found to have lesser socio-economic and cultural significance. Once regarded as being the nerve centres and places of significant actions in the cities, they are in the process of degeneration¹¹. Major socio-economic activities are being shifted to newly developed areas leaving the city centres in dire straits. However, looking at their historical importance, urban functions and significance to the people of the city, they need to be revitalized or reinvented. Thus, an investigation was warranted and consequently a comparative analysis considering three well-established and beautiful European cities and three important cities in South Africa was conducted. Pretoria, Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein city from South Africa in aggregate were compared with the different attributes of central areas of three European cities such as Vienna, Budapest and Cologne. A qualitative survey research method and discussions with local people, visitors and tourists were conducted for this purpose.

A critical examination of various attributes revealed that the central areas of the European cities portray an image of quite vibrant and exciting places offering opportunities for economic and socio-cultural activities. In contrast, the city centres of South African cities despite having similar built forms lack the same vibrancy and in the process of apparent degeneration. Activities are being shifted, a sense of fear of crime and segregation persist¹². They are only accessible by vehicular modes only and do not provide a comfortable atmosphere to majority of people- particularly to old, young and those who want to walk and ride bicycles¹³. They do not create an image of social cohesion and community feeling¹⁴. An argument may emerge that these central areas have been built appropriate to the life style and cultures of the people of the cities, however they do not create any such explicit identity similar to their European counter parts. The challenges observed are lack of safety, fear of crime, sense of segregation, creation of symbolic elements and accessibility. The experience from European cities suggests that land marks, such as heritage and architecture have certain contribution, but accessibility to the central areas by different public transportation modes, prevention of vehicular movement in core areas, full pedestrianization and walkability, cleanliness, safety, and availability of animated areas for various activities, such as shopping, dining, meeting, entertainment and relaxing are major contributors to the vitality of the central areas. Moreover, according to some respondents particularly young people, enforcement of safety, making free from criminal activities, enhancement of accessibility by major modes of transportation- particularly public transportation, enabling walkability and fully pedestrianization of the core areas, engendering multicultural activities suitable to all sections of society, and creation symbolic elements identifying history, culture and heritage of cities would perhaps aid in creation of unique images and make the central areas of the South African cities dynamic and livelier¹⁵. In this context, an exploration of available policy frameworks for renewal of city centres in South Africa suggests that currently there is no national policy framework to contextualize or support the renewal of urban centres in South Africa. However, principles supporting urban renewal were included in both the Urban Development Framework and the Development Facilitation Act (city network, n.d). Besides, draft policy frameworks have been developed in different aspects like Policy for Non-Motorised Transportation, (2008), National Urban Development Framework (draft), (2009), and policy frameworks initiated by the Department of Provincial and Local Government with an aim at revitalising and renewal of the urban centres in South Africa. Notwithstanding of the policy frameworks, certain proactive measures by the Municipalities and community development and social organizations such as creation of pedestrian facilities as in Bloemfontein, encouraging cycling in Johannesburg and Cape Town, strengthening of Public transportation in Cape Town, Johannesburg and

¹¹ Opinions of Urban planning and design professionals

¹² According to the local city residents

¹³ Opinions of Urban planning and design professionals and academicians

¹⁴ Opinions of sociologist and community development professionals

¹⁵ Opinions of the respondents of the survey from South African cities

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Port Elizabeth are steps in the right direction; however there lies potential concerns for adequacy, efficiency and reliability. Besides, such measures need a cultural and life style change that premises upon the social acceptance, receptiveness and positive attitude towards the change, which are perhaps the vital elements need to be addressed simultaneously with any physical and spatial transformation measures¹⁶.

The limitations of the study pertain to the choice of the limited number of cities and similarities among them. A diversified set of modern cities may provide more critical insights. However, at the current state the study offers a critical examination of the various attributes under different urban design strands and their status in both European and South African context, based on which strategies for central area revitalizations measures can be taken.

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¹⁶ Opinions of urban planning professionals, people engaged in community development and social development experts.

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