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FACULTY OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN.

PROGRAMME: MASTERS IN URBAN DESIGN

Title of Dissertation.

An assessment of the quality of the public realm in Beitbridge Central Business District.

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ABSTRACT

The quality of the built-environment has been a subject of concern that came into prominence around the 1920s when modern architecture produced identical cities that lacked identity. In the 1960s, the outcry about the declining quality of the public realm was more pronounced despite the recognition that a quality public realm develops a sense of place that people value and are attracted to living in it; it promotes social and economic development and is the most important aspect that gives a city its image. When viewed as a public good, the public realm may be developed to create an inclusive city, given the ever increasing urban divide that especially characterizes developing countries. Despite the known benefits of a high quality public realm, few if any studies that have addressed this topical issue in the developing world. Given this gap, the purpose of this dissertation is to determine the quality of the public realm in Beitbridge town center and the efforts made by responsible authorities towards the construction of an inspiring high quality public realm. Given the importance of the town as a regional inland port; border and southern gateway to Zimbabwe, and its rapid physical growth; there is need to find practicable and innovative means that will not only enhance the image of the youthful town, but makes the outdoor space functional. The justification of this study is premised on this argument. The research is case study based, employing both descriptive and explanatory research designs. Data have been collected through use of interviews; questionnaires; and observation and character appraisal of the built environment. The findings of this research reveals that the responsible authorities are working towards the regeneration and creation of a quality public realm but still a mismatch remains between the existing image of the town and the societal expectations from the town; a town that represents the face of the country. Largely, the problem lies in the relationship among physical elements in the outdoor spaces. In order to improve the quality of the outdoor spaces, a massive public realm audit followed by detailed street and open space designs must be considered first as a traditional approach in creating and regenerating the public realm. Collaboration, stakeholder consultation and use of modern computer technology in the planning and design process is emphasised. It is recommended that the local authority, take a holistic approach to the public realm; tap locally available resources; improve development control processes and create bye-laws that will guide development in the public realm. The central and provincial government should play a both an action-oriented and facilitatory role in this regard.