

48 Stakeholders ■

49 Ubuntu ■

50 Community Asset management ■

50 Life Time Design ■

# Community Architecture

## Stakeholders

The biggest frustration in working with Community Architecture has to do with the organizational structures. The different stakeholders, including government, NGO's, the development agency and the financing institutions all bring their own agendas to a very delicate scheme. Most of the time these organizations are interested in quick, visual results. This approach is inappropriate since in Community Architecture a structure for the development and running of the facility is extremely important. These structures are best if they originate from within the community itself, and this requires finance, training and lots of time. The most successful community projects are those in which the community had been involved from a grass roots level and in which they have developed a strong sense of ownership. Example : Bagatla Museum and the Nyanga community Centre (P. Riche, 2004).

Balancing the different agendas, expectations and requirements of all the different stakeholders is not an easy task. Further complications are found especially in projects with limited resources. The professional becomes entangled in competing interests, within the community itself and between the community and the funding agencies (Jo Noero). Establishing relevant interests is not such a simple exercise. Individual agendas, conflicting personalities, and opposing interests creates a rather murky environment.

To date Community Architecture has been subjected to a very volatile and sensitive political situation. Schemes have failed due to jealousy (Thulumtwhana by P. Riche), political factors (First Zolani Community Centre) and because the community had not been involved.

Parks and gardens an element of community expression and remembrance. The public open space has to be designed as such a element

## Ubuntu

In our modern capitalist society a strong segregation along economic lines are being established. This division has become accepted as the norm and people live their lives along its division. A re-evaluation of the situation illuminates aspects of economic segregation that are some of the leading contributors to societal ills. In the African context such segregation has never existed. Both the rich and the poor lived in one community. This spirit of community is translated as Ubuntu.

“Ubuntu” refers to the organic relationship between people, their spiritual heritage and the natural environment. “Ubuntu” recognizes that humanity plays an integral part in the natural world. Humanity thus carries a large responsibility towards the environment. This responsibility is not the prerogative of a select few, but the whole community, as it is the community who exist within the bio-sphere. Natural resources are thus shared in an equitable manner. “Ubuntu”, in contrast to the market economy, measures a human’s worth in terms of social, cultural and spiritual criteria (M. Maklome 2002, p47-51)

## Community asset management

The area of Community Architecture is ridden with many areas of hidden potholes. While it has been illustrated how extremely important community involvement is to the success of a project, too much community involvement can create resentment and resistance within the community. If the community feel that they are given the responsibility to plan, build and manage facilities which are perceived as being the responsibility of the government, they will strongly oppose the project. The community will not tolerate a situation which they perceive to be exploitive. The crux is to allow the community the freedom to choose their level of involvement. Enthusiastic and dedicated participation is only possible with voluntary involvement (Jo Noero).

Experience in Community Architecture has shown Jo Noero that community management, while being a laudible concept, very seldom works. One of the reasons for this is that communities often lack the necessary resources and skills due to poverty. In addition, many people hold the state responsible for support, and thus deny any personal responsibility for the project (Jo Noero).

Establishing expectations in a community can be very risky. When the goals and objectives of the project are not clearly communicated, and when these aren't met, a feeling of distrust and resentment is created, which might result in the failure of the project (Manza Saidi)

However, the training and employment of local community members to maintain the facility creates a job opportunity and local income. If successful this can provide better results than external agencies, who would often operate remotely from the site and who would be unaware of real needs.

## Life time design

The social, economic and political environments are in a continuous state of flux and adaptation. It is impossible to predict future needs and uses with accuracy. Needs are often idealized to such an extent that the subsequent uses of the facility are vastly different than those envisioned originally (Jo Noero). The solution is to design a building that recognizes that at any given time it is only a step along the evolution of the facility. Rather like a living organism, the building needs to adapt and grow according to stimuli from the environment. Designing the development along a number of phases allows for greater adaptation and a greater ability to respond to the situation.

## Conclusion and Application to Design

Architecture for communities naturally implies community involvement. The time of “architect knows best”, has passed. Experience has taught the profession that community centres which were planned and constructed without the involvement of the community rarely succeeded. The involvement of the people from the community also creates the possibility for strife. The term community does not imply a group of people homogeneous in thoughts, morals, needs, expectation and ability. The involvement of stakeholders from outside the community, such as state departments and funding agencies add more diversity and conflict potential to the process. However, according to systems thinking diversity increases an organisms ability to adapt and survive. This can be seen at the Stanza Bopape Adult Training Facility (discussed as a precedent). The board of directors consists of individuals widely different in training and background. The result is a diverse pool of resources and knowledge. The key element is the end goal to which the whole process is directed. Varying expectations and priorities can cause a project to stale or fail (P Rich 2004). This project is fortunate in that both the local congregation as well as the church counsel have expressed the same goal, that of becoming more involved with the plight of children in need.

Jo Noero has cautioned against high expectations by the designer in the level of community involvement which can be expected. The same thought was mentioned by P Riche. Low skill levels, a lack in resources and political expectations have been previous factors leading to difficulty. This project has a different dimension to it, which has a better chance of preventing the communities from expecting government responsibility. This dimension is the involvement of the local congregation. The relationship between a congregation and their church building normally is one of pride and ownership. Many congregations had to actively generate funds to afford their buildings. This sense of identity and personal involvement generates an ethos of involvement and responsibility. Unlike a conventional community facility, church buildings are the sole responsibility of the congregation. This facility will be the expression of a congregation and the larger church body’s involvement with the plight of the people.

Skill levels in the local community will be used strategically to increase the level of community involvement and responsibility. Skills such as welding, brick making and elementary carpentry have been identified. The welding and brick making are skills located at the Stanza Bopape Adult Training Facility, while the carpentry skills are displayed by the micro industry in the manufacturing of prefabricated wall panels which flourish along the sidewalks of main roads throughout Mamelodi. The manufacture of building elements can thus be contracted to these individuals. Thus the local industry and experience would be supported as well as the involvement of the local community.

Infill construction and detail work can also be delegated to the relatively low skilled local community since the vital elements such as foundations, structure, roof and services will be installed by a skilled contractor because these involve a higher level in skills, experience, ability and resources.

Ubuntu and the expression of equality in diversity calls for places which accommodate activities and people diverse in economic status and culture. The facility should avoid any stigmatation as a place for only poor and ill people to go. The centre should appeal to diverse people while avoiding excluding others by using an architectural language which is too strongly associated with a specific group. This is achieved within the design by avoiding such iconastic and cultural detailing which can too strongly identify the centre with one particular group. A complete avoidance of meaning however creates a sterile environment. The solution is to return to the basic meaning in elements, akin to the methods employed by the structuralists and Heidegger. They created an architectural language which in stead of expressing culture and religion, focusses on the commonality, the basic principles.