

4.0 THEORETICAL EXPLORATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Theory is a discourse that describes the practice and production of architecture and identifies challenges to it. In this project, the researcher will attempt to integrate different philosophical thinkers, thoughts from different professions on which some architectural concepts in this project will rely.

4.2 NEEDS AND COMMUNITY

The main aim of this discourse is to address community's needs and problems; therefore it is important to understand human needs in life.

Architecture deals with aspects of human life and in order to be effective in fulfilling its purpose, it is duty bound to understand the psychology which drives human behaviour.

In order to meet the community's everyday needs, an architect's goal is to be a professional interpreter of the peoples needs into form and space:

“What is so badly needed is for architects, and developers who employ them to be more sensitive to the deep-rooted feelings of ‘ordinary’ people and to find ways of integrating their opinion and needs into the creative process from which new buildings emerge” (Charles, Prince of Wales, 1989:12).

The Construction Centre will therefore, interpret the community's needs by having a variety of spaces.

In order to define these spaces, there is a need to know the community's everyday life activities in making of spaces.

Henri Lefebvre, French philosopher, attempted to define his ideas of everyday life and the nature of space, mainly in urban environments. Many architects have tried to apply his philosophy of “Everyday Life” into architectural realm:

“What is the goal? It is the transformation of life in its smallest, most everyday detail” (Lefebvre: 1947: 29).

Lefebvre was very active and influential in the French urbanism in the 1960's and the 1970's when he called for more centrality in the city, street life, residential participation and opportunities for spontaneity

In terms of the “Everyday life” philosophy, the centre will create different types of closed and open spaces for its function. It takes into consideration daily activities happening within the intersection and create similar but varied spaces platform for additional activities. A few principles of this philosophy to be used in the design:

1. Strengthen the existing pedestrian movement instead of creating a new system.
2. Catering and improving art and crafts activities instead of inverting new ones.
3. Connecting and widening surrounding community spaces into the centre instead of creating unique and isolated spaces.
4. Using local materials instead of imported ones.

5. Reinforcing the informal housing and trade into formal housing and trade around the centre and intersection.

4.3 BUILDING AND SPACE

Once the spaces are defined, then there is a need to design an appropriate building on spaces created. Building for people goes with good architectural practices,

“Most of the buildings erected today are built within a different realm. They are merely meant to be buildings, not architecture...” (Gehry:1993:36.).

Frank O.Gehry, an architect answering a question of his impression of architecture today in an interview for Fashion Television.

So what is the difference between merely erecting buildings and creating architecture? A simple definition of architecture could then be formulated as the construction of buildings for people. However, people do not perceive buildings as mere brick walls and concrete slabs, rather as living environments with dimension character space as we can notice it in informal housing structures, it is their home their building. Therefore,

“Architecture is space” – Louis Khan (Fisher and le Roux, 1998:152)

It is essential that in pursuing the creation of architecture to perceive it, essentially as the creation of space. In order to understand the essence of the space, it is important to consider it in the way that the user would

experience it. For example, the relationship between interior and exterior, open and enclosed, path and node become defining factors of the nature of the design.

This approach towards architecture leads to the conclusion that architecture is in fact not merely the building, but rather the space created within /around the building. The importance of spatial responsiveness in architecture goes beyond the barriers of the mere walls that enclose it.

The success and relevance of that space is subject to the needs and nature of the community that it serves. It should serve as a vehicle of unification within the community and it should play an important role in the establishment of a healthy community identity. Therefore, a building is a symbol within the community if it responds to the environment and space it occupies well. The proposed building will respond positively on the corner as a landmark within the community and serve or solve community’s needs.

4.4 CULTURAL ART AND BEAUTY

For the building to be an identity of the community it must identify itself with the culture of the community. Culture is the very old traditional and historical inheritance to many people. Jennifer Bloomer (1993) established the original of beauty to humankind as cited in De Lange (1999):

“The connection of beauty to Eros, eroticism is historical and clear. Cupid is the son of Venus; Eros is the prick of shame. In twentieth century there is certain aesthetics of apparatus of prosthesis, of the instrumentalization of, sado-masochism. Of the image of technology. But venustas has disappeared from formula. Haphaestus (the husband of Aphrodite) has supplanted Eros”. (Jennifer Bloomer, 1993:80 cited in De Lange (1999).

Beauty has, in patriarchal societies, throughout the ages been assimilated with women; and yet beyond that to the shame of nakedness. It is the naked woman that presents the memory of the first breath and the interconnectedness of humanity. By covering Venus man is attempting to hide the embarrassment of his own creation. He is smoothing out the synclines and anticlines of his own being. But it is precisely in the sublime and involuted spaces of nature that real beauty originates. Perhaps the naked woman exacts a too explicit memory.

Fashion provides a simple and comfortable, if shallow, structuring of the principles of an acceptable perception. The principles of fashion, like beauty, rely heavily on memory, but it is not a memory of being.

Having lost himself in fashion (the propriety of aesthetics), man has not only lost beauty but also his sense of nature that initiates his own existence. There is no information from the parts as to the wholeness of the creation cycle.

Although Hegel, the famous philosopher argues that a philosophical work has to be devoted to aesthetics, the philosophy or science of the beautiful, must exclude natural beauty. More precisely, artistic beauty is superior to natural beauty as the mind that produces it is superior to nature. One must therefore say that absolute beauty, the telos or final essence of the beautiful appears in art and not in nature as such (Derrida 1987:25).

In architecture, in a similar manner, the contemporary fixation with the façade as some sort of dressing for the building is an acknowledgement of the embarrassment of its form and space, the politics of its evolution and the economics of its making.

“For a building to be beautiful it must bear the picture writing of its own origins” Bloomer (1993:80) concludes.



Fig.36: Façade of the BAT Centre with art, murals and bright colours (SA Digest, 1997:25).

Indeed the incorporation of pictures and writings on buildings has increased the importance and appearance of the buildings in its surroundings. Therefore, in some of the Centre façade there will be artwork which will enhance the beauty of the buildings and will use heights as a tool to act as landmarks and an important part of the building.

4.5 POSTMODERNISM AND TRADITIONAL ART

The Centre will be designed with modern architecture and materials but Modern architecture because of mechanization has led to a disregard of natural, human, and environmental concerns which is contrary to art advocates in the past (classical) architecture. The result culminated in sterility, endless repetition and dehumanisation. The international Modernist rejected any symbolic meaning in favour of pure functional efficiency.

Postmodernist were quite willing to continue the technological breakthroughs of modernism, but they desired to add colour, decoration and sculptural and painterly embellishments that would give a structure some special iconographical meaning.

The Postmodernist also chose to respond to the desires and needs of their pluralistic society. Architects have once again become the partners of painter, sculptors and maisaicists. For the postmodernist, decoration is not to be a mere architectural embroidery, but a basic part of a larger architectural statement.



Fig.37: Traditional maisaic, art and craft inside the Mpumalanga Legislature (Malan & McInerney, eds, 2003: 27).

Well placed sculptural groups, frescoes or mosaics can create points of interest in an overall design as well as give definition to exteriors and interiors that serve as symbols of human involvement.

The Centre's buildings will be of Post –Modern architecture, though with biased to critical regionalism. Local arts, crafts and decorations will be incorporated in the buildings to encourage the sense of ownership and beauty of the buildings to the local community.