

CONCEPT



Over many decades, the South African Government's segregation policy created an extreme lack of basic infrastructure, mainly in the Black townships. The resulting unemployment in turn led to crime. Both of these factors are connected with the spread of HIV/AIDS. All these socio-economic problems affect high percentages of the population, and are a daily reminder of the continuing deprivation of that period.

A vast and comprehensive multi-faceted effort, launched by the Democratic Government and Non-Governmental Organisations⁽¹⁾, has somewhat slowed the process of deterioration, although as of now, it can only be viewed as part of a long and complex chain of interventions towards rehabilitation.

The concept of the Community Art Centre springs from an effort to provide a further link in this chain. It attempts to explore an architecture that will encourage people to gather together in a place in order to share simple art activities, and in doing so, to equip themselves with skills. At the same time, local artists will have access to facilities which will enable them to express themselves.

Art is an integral part of everybody's needs, as can be seen while walking through Alexandra's street. There is a positive feel about the place

(1) Alexandra renewal project 2004. Proceeding Revised Summit 2004.

in the sense that something can be created from one's experience of daily life. This experience can be instrumental in uplifting people who have become used to the idea that just coping with daily life is of necessity a struggle. The concept for this Art Centre was thus born from a desire to cater for the positive and uplifting role which art can play in people's lives and from the recognition that there is an acute shortage of art activities in townships.

It is envisaged that the Art Centre will become an integral part of various community services, which will complement each other by offering different activities for various groups of people of differing ages. It is hoped that in this way, the Centre will become an active and vibrant node for its community. Its location will enable it to be not only an Art Centre for the artists but, in addition, a nexus where the community will be able to experience a daily "street art" which can be developed and presented by means of indoor or outdoor workshops, activities and exhibitions.

As the Art Centre is connected closely to a residential neighbourhood to the north, those residents would in time become an important part of the art activities, both through participation and by active promotion through a network of art shops.

At a further stage of growth, awareness and participation, the neighbourhood could well be characterised by artists living and working there.

In the light of the massive unemployment and lack of art activities, the Centre would concentrate on providing practical art skills for its community.

Short and long term courses would be available for people who want to acquire these skills, through different workshops that are offered by the Centre.

The benefits of acquiring art skills, combined with the creative experience of art itself, could be a major response to the actual needs of the community.

Since the Centre is located on the edge of the Jukskei River, it aims to promote environmental awareness within the community.

As part of the attempts (launched by the Alexandra Renewal Project [ARP]) to create a more environmentally friendly way of daily life, the Centre would emphasis four main aspects: First, water storage and purification; Second, positive re-use solid rubbish that is dumped in the river; Third, combating air pollution and the increased negative usage of fossil fuels for house

heating and cooking; Fourth, use of solar energy for personal needs.

The environmental centre would enable school learners and other participants to experience educational methods which encourage awareness through enjoyable activities such as art creation from river rubbish, testing of water from different sources and so on.

In these ways the Art Centre would be used as a focal point for art activities in the macro-view of the township, while still being intimately connected to its surrounding neighbours through the facilitation of emotional and creative upliftment.



Figure 27
Sewing workshop - "learn to earn" Centre - Khayelitsha, Cape Town