Part 1: Introduction

Throughout the following document, the ‘community’ will be mentioned many times. It is therefore important to define what is meant by ‘community’ and its role in everyday life. (See Appendix 1) According to Ferrinho (1980:5), a community can essentially be described as a group of people with one or more element in common. These elements bring about the formation of a bond between these people, and the more common elements there are, the stronger the bond will be. The human race is essentially one large community, broken up into many smaller communities. Each community has specific qualities that differentiate it from other communities, and individuals are part of many different communities throughout their lives as their needs change.

According to Maslow (in Walmsley, 1988:59), there are six main needs in life. (See Appendix 2) He believes however, that higher order needs cannot be fully realized until lower order needs have been met. This is true to a certain extent, but these needs are not mutually exclusive; the world does not work precisely according to a hierarchical triangle. Every human being has basic concrete needs like food, water, clothing and shelter, and basic abstract needs such as self-reliance, happiness and human dignity. Whilst people are striving to fulfil their concrete needs, their abstract needs are sometimes neglected. Such needs are, however, integral to development and growth.

Hamdi (2004:15) says that “human wellbeing is as important to economic growth as growth is to wellbeing”. Abstract needs must therefore also be satisfied in order to achieve the equilibrium necessary for ideal development. A hungry stomach or the need for a safe place to sleep will usually come before the need to express oneself through painting, but this does not render the need for art invaluable. In fact, many people use creative avenues of expression as a means of dealing with their lack of lower order needs. Any intervention therefore, that satisfies both types of needs is ideal, and such a solution will doubtless be better than one which meets concrete needs only.

Figure 19: An illustration of the various needs of all human beings
(Author, 2008)
How then can the University contribute to the provision of needs in general? The introduction of an educational 'curriculum' which is accessible to all people and empowers them so that they are able to fulfil their own needs could be a first step. According to Illich (in Alexander et al, 1977:101), institutions should be channels to which anyone wishing to learn has access without credentials or pedigree; public spaces in which peers and elders outside that person’s immediate environment now become available. What is needed is an area of exposure; a place of encounters; a platform for community development.

Another ideal opportunity presents itself in the zone of barren land surrounding the university heart. A possible solution would be to shrink the actual campus and encourage densification of the university within these boundaries. The outer space could then become a transition zone between the residential areas and the campus; an in-between space which functions as the stitch that knits together the university and the community. It is in this open space that the university and the public become of value to one another; where they can come together to learn and grow, thereby creating a fully integrated community.

Part 2: The importance of designed public open space

2.1) The building of communities
Carr et al (in Oktay, 2002:263) believes that public open space provides an integral place for people to carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community together. In densely populated areas, like Mamelodi, public outdoor spaces are sometimes the only places where people can come together and share the same 'room' regardless of background, age, ethnicity or economic status. Such spaces reinforce communal bonds and promote social equality and democracy; they are a necessary part of everyday life. These spaces "...promote a sense of place, become a source of community pride, and offer opportunities for people to play an active part in caring for the local environment" (Tshwane Open Space Framework, 2005:96).
2.2) The protection of the environment
The promotion of environmental awareness is an integral element of landscapes today. We are currently experiencing a *global crisis* which will have disastrous consequences for all humanity if it continues unchecked. It is our responsibility to educate people about the sustainable use of our natural surroundings. Gallagher (1993:214) explains that all people need restorative experiences with plants, water and trees — things that will always be — universal elements. The landscape plays an integral role in fostering a global appreciation of the importance of these universals to our well-being, and this is a vital step in securing their future. In order to make an impact, people need to understand the power of nature, and for this to occur, they need to experience it, interact with it and question it. They need to become a part of it, not only for the sake of environmental conservation, but also because “nature is a human need” (Gallagher, 1993:202).

2.3) The restorative value

“"In the stress of urban living, overcrowding, traffic, overload of stimulation, lack of peace and quiet, all take their toll. In walking from one place to another one must discriminate, screen out extraneous stimuli, and pay attention only to those signals that are relevant to the journey. The mental faculty that performs this screening becomes fatigued. Vegetation serves as a shock absorber for the human sensory system assaulted by the smells, sounds and sights of the city. It does not present a challenge to the senses, does not have to be screened out, but provides an opportunity for rest from the constant mental alertness” (Kaplan in Francis & Hester, 1990:246).

According to Gallagher (1993:202), “nature excites our senses, restores our nerves, invites us to play, enhances our social bonds, and supplies meaning and metaphor to our lives.” It is thus evident that human beings need public parks and natural settings in order to function optimally within their current frenetic lives. A public space encourages communal bonding, supports the fact that everyone is part of the bigger picture, and reinforces the idea of Ubuntu, i.e. you are human through other humans.

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2. Global crisis:
This crisis includes interdependent problems such as global warming, climate change, ozone depletion, vanishing biodiversity and many more. Coupled with the earth’s growing scarcity of resources and its decreasing ability to support its ever-increasing population, the future looks bleak. Our communities and the larger human enterprise rest upon the often-invisible foundation of natural systems, and if we do not rethink the manner in which we use these natural systems, we will alter them forever (Dumanoski, 2001).
2.4) The creation of a catalyst
Through the creation of beautiful and functional green spaces, we may also inspire others to do the same, thereby creating an enhanced living environment for all and encouraging community interaction and participation. South Africa can learn from the approach of the Guarapiranga Urban Rehabilitation Program in Sao Paolo, which aims to assimilate slums into the city by providing well-maintained, high quality and innovative community spaces that, in turn, promote private investment in homes, businesses and leisure activities. These spaces encourage social and civil integration, and environmental decline is gradually replaced by the perception of progress (Hindes & Osman, 2005:60).

These designed public open spaces therefore function as catalysts which encourage development and growth. Aesthetically pleasing and dignified environments are not the exclusive domain of the affluent. They are equally as important in disadvantaged communities where they can make a big difference to the quality of life of the people in these areas, as well as to their feelings of identity and self worth.

Part 3: The importance of identity

Identity is about belonging; about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location; the stable core to your individuality (Weeks, 1990:88). According to Thompson (1996:674), identity is “the quality or condition of being a specified person or thing”. It is informed by the relationships that occur between different people as well as between people and place.

Krupat (in Dixon & Durrheim, 2004:457) supports this by stating that “an individual’s sense of self arises in part through his/her transactions with the material environment” thereby suggesting that such environments “do not simply serve as settings for individuals’ activities, actions or behaviours but are instead actively ‘incorporated’ as part of the self”. Korpela (in Dixon & Durrheim, 2004:458) agrees and says that only once these physical settings have been actively and imaginatively incorporated can individuals create environments where self-coherence, self-worth and self-expression can be pursued.

Places with a specific identity are therefore integral to the formation of personal identity. Places allow people the freedom and confidence to be themselves, they encourage interaction with other people and in so doing inform personal identities even more. As Walmsley (1988:68) says, “places become reservoirs of significant life experiences and thereby lie at the centre of a person’s identity and sense of psychological well-being”.

Figure 25: Public park - Guarapiranga - promotes community integration, pride and a sense of ownership (Hindes & Osman, 2005:61)

Figure 26: Camden Town, London - The shops, people, clothing, decor - everything speaks the same language and has the same identity (Author, 2008)
“Identity can and should be the basis for long-term, successful place-making; a process that nurtures local distinctiveness and pride in place” (Cumberlidge & Musgrave, 2007:144). This is backed up by Pugh (2000:334) who is of the opinion that both spontaneous and formal improvement can be enhanced by encouraging the expressiveness of life, art, design, and other such humanly commitments. People attribute meaning to a place when they can see themselves and their daily lives in the design; when they can identify with specific elements. This is further enhanced if they were personally involved in the creation of these spaces.

Part 4: Community involvement and participation

According to Swanepoel & de Beer (1996:24-29), there are eight principles of community development:

- Principle of participation (involve EVERYONE - poor, rich, educated, not. Everyone has something to contribute);
- Principle of abstract human needs (provide for both concrete needs AND abstract needs);
- Principle of learning (there is no teacher, everyone learns from everyone else);
- Principle of empowerment;
- Principle of ownership;
- Principle of release (do not aim to bring relief, but rather to free people from their trap. Once free they can gradually improve the situation themselves);
- Principle of ‘adaptiveness’ (flexible experimentation and a willingness to learn on the part of everyone involved);
- Principle of simplicity (big sophisticated complex projects limit the scope for learning and participation).

Figure 27:
Participation of the community in the design and construction of Thokoza Park, Soweto provides an aesthetic that people can identify with (Author, 2008)

Community painted murals in Ivory Park, Ekhuruleni foster a sense of pride and ownership (Author, 2008)
In the author’s opinion, the principle of participation is one of the most important principles. If it is followed, many of the other principles will occur naturally. For example, if the community is allowed to participate, they will automatically learn new skills and teach one another things, thus empowering themselves and others, and creating a sense of ownership at the same time.

This process of participation reawakens a spirit of community and encourages bonds between different people, between people and their environment, and between people and themselves. It serves to liberate feelings of self-worth, self-fulfilment and pride, in both the place, and in the people themselves and their achievements. These methods attempt to build a community that holds the capacity to initiate its own changes, and to continue developing and transforming itself.

This redefinition of design and planning as part of the process of enablement is the only way of proceeding with the changes that are necessary on the UP Mamelodi campus. Hamdi (2004:xvi) says that we can only begin to make progress and to grow when we are secure enough in ourselves, individually or collectively, to be interdependent; when ‘I’ becomes ‘we’ and when ‘we’ is inclusive of ‘them’. It is for exactly this reason that the concept of community needs to be encouraged and built-up; communities together have more resources, more voices, and more hope than one man alone.

Community involvement and participation also acts as a means of education. An education that encourages new experiences, stimulates conversation and thought, and fosters an appropriate, integrated method of learning.

Ferrinho (1980:83) states that “the school does not only exist to perform an academic task, divorced from the surrounding world of living reality, but exists also to meet the felt needs of the people. When a school and community interact in this way, the community activates the school, and the school activates the community.” This is precisely the approach needed to reactivate the UP Mamelodi campus - a facility that is context appropriate and provides for the everyday educational needs of its surrounding community. After all, much of a person’s education occurs outside and separate from the formal courses in which he/she is registered, and only a university which stimulates curiosity, and prompts casual encounters and conversation will produce a true education in the broadest sense (Keast, 1967:13).

Alexander et al (1977:232), some thirty years ago, discussed the need for a university which would treat the learning process as a normal part of adult life for all people in society. This vision, however, was not realised, especially not in places like Mamelodi where it is needed most. As Gallagher (1993:128) says, “we find that what started out as ‘a way’ has somehow turned into ‘the way’. It seems that once the environmental particulars of a modus operandi work their way into the nervous system, they help close our minds to better options and incline us towards knee-jerk reactions”.

A society that emphasizes teaching, breeds children, students and adults who are passive and unable to think or act for themselves. Creative, active individuals can only grow up in a society which emphasizes learning instead of teaching (Alexander, et al, 1977:100). This statement is backed up by Hamdi (2004:xxv), who criticizes the fact that “knowledge is valued more than experience or understanding. He explains that rationality and factual evidence are more rewarded than creativity because they are easier to measure”, and that these things are a “barrier to learning”.
Creative, self-motivated learning as opposed to prescriptive teaching is therefore the key. Walmsley (1988:12) says that “human beings are naturally inquisitive animals. They seek out and assimilate information above and beyond what is necessary for day-to-day living. This inquisitiveness enables individuals to elaborate on their model of reality as well as to test its reliability”. This is the type of learning we should be encouraging; one which helps people to help themselves. We need to bring back the idea of open education - schools without walls, where knowledge is “discovered” by the learner through group interaction, the blending of different subjects and skills, and questioning, rather than teacher-centred instruction where knowledge is “presented” to a learner via lectures, textbooks and testing (Cuban, 2004).

Appleyard (in Walmsley, 1988:21) notes that there are three distinct sorts of environmental knowledge, namely operational knowledge which allows you to go about your daily life, remembering what route to take, where to find things, etc. Responsive knowledge which comes about as a result of individuals responding to a striking feature in the physical environment (extends beyond the visual to include sounds and smells). And inferential knowledge, which does not come from direct experience, but rather from the ability to extrapolate beyond what is actually known and to make probabilistic inferences about things that have not yet been experienced. The landscape should therefore aim to accept the operational, stimulate the responsive and encourage the use of the inferential.

Coombs and Ahmed (in Ferrinho, 1980:82) discuss three modes of education – informal, formal and non-formal. Informal education is spontaneous and relies upon television, personal contacts, etc. Formal education is highly institutionalised and programmed, i.e. conventional schools. And non-formal education is organized, but the content varies with the needs and demands of the learners. A true community school should be able to successfully integrate these three types of education, and this is what the UP Mamelodi campus must aim towards.

Figure 29: Sensory stimulation using fresh and dried herbs - interactive educational experience. Sussex, England (Author, 2008)

Figure 30: Interesting facts and tips for medicinal use increases the educational value. Sussex, England (Author, 2008)