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Landscape of Meaning and Memory in Marabastad

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Landing

10 February 2009

rough lanes.toot toot! market. clothes. food. mangoes. potatoes. smell of roasting peanuts. mielies. music. speakers for sale. All Star sneakers. shop keepers' curious expressions. people bustling up and down the street. meat market. mopani worms. stray kitten. bottle store. drone from mosque's minaret. Mirammen temple. pink walls. orange Putco buses. blue columns. fabric shops. pigeons. barbed wire. views of Schubart and Kruger Park.

"I walked down Jerusalem Street, past a Hindu Temple, towards the prayers of a mosque, from which a deep voice was resonating."

Figure 1. Landing in Marabastad (Author, 2009)

Abstrak

Hierdie navorsingstuk ondersoek hoe die simboliese ruimte van publieke ruimtes, en dus ‘n spesifieke plek se unieke betekenisse, herinneringe en assosiasies, die ontwerpproses van ‘n landskapingryping kan inspireer. Die navorsing wys hoe die gemeenskapsidentiteit van ‘n woonbuurt verder verryk kan word deur sy landskappe, en meer spesifiek, deur hul inherente herinneringe. Dit toon verder aan dat onderlinge verbintenisse in die gemeenskap gesmee kan word deur die gebruik van stedelike publieke ruimtes. Publieke ruimtes vorm vrugbare grond vir die ontspringing van verskeie gebeurtenisse wat op hul beurt geleenthede bied vir onderlinge interaksies en dus vir die smee van menseverhoudings.

Die omgewing wat bestudeer is, is Marabastad in Suid-Afrika, wat in die Apartheidsjare onderworpe was aan verskeie gedwonge uitsettings. Die gemeenskap was hierdeur ontwortel en hulle was verplig om in gebiede te woon wat volgens ras afgebaken was. Die huidige ontwikkelingsplanne vir Marabastad suggereer dat vorige inwoners die geleentheid gebied sal word om na hulle vorige woongebiede toe terug te keer. ‘n Nuwe residensiële komponent vir Marabastad is verder ook voorgestel, waaruit dit blyk dat ‘n nuwe gemeenskap ook teenwoordig sal wees. Hierdie nuwe gemeenskap sal bestaan uit mense wat mekaar nog nie ken nie, asook uit ‘n kombinasie van mense wat kennis dra van die gebied se geskiedenis al dan nie.

Om interaksies tussen die lede van hierdie gemeenskap te ontlok, stel die outeur ‘n landskap ontwerp voor wat die vorm sal aanneem van ‘n publieke ruimte vir Marabastad. Die fisiese landskap ontwerp is geprikkel deur die herkenning van die betrokke gebied se herinneringe. Gelyktydig is die herinneringe aan spesifieke gebeurtenisse ontbloot, asook geleenthede geskep vir nuwe herinneringe en verbintenisse aan die landskap. Hierdeur is Marabstad se traumatiese verlede bedek met nuwe en inspirerende herinneringe.

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Abstract

This research dissertation explores how the symbolic space of public space, and therefore memory and meaning attached to a place, could inspire the process of the design for a landscape intervention. The research argues that community identity of a neighbourhood can be enhanced through the landscape and, more specifically, through the memory that a landscape holds. Furthermore, it suggests that relationships can be fostered within a community through the use of urban public space. Public space is a platform for the initiation of events which in turn provides the opportunity for interaction and therefore the conception of relationships.

The area of study is Marabastad in South Africa, which underwent a number of forced evictions during the Apartheid regime. This community was uprooted and forced to live in racially demarcated areas. The development plans for Marabastad suggest that previous residents have the opportunity to return to their land. Adding to this, a new residential component is proposed for the area. This suggests that a new community would be present. It would consist of people who do not know one another as well as a combination of people who do and do not have knowledge of the area's past.

In order to initiate the interactions between these community members the author proposed a landscape intervention in the form of urban public space for Marabastad. The physical landscape intervention was conceived through recognising the memory that the site holds. The memory of certain events was revealed while at the same time the opportunity for new memories and associations to the landscape was created. In this way the traumatic past that Marabastad has experienced is overlaid with new and inspiring memories.

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Definition of Terms:

COMMUNITY: a group of people living in one place or having the same religion, ethnic origin, profession, etc (The Little Oxford Dictionary). In this dissertation, community will refer to a group of people that inhabit a certain area who have a shared connection.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY/SENSE OF COMMUNITY: the notion of membership, need fulfilment, shared emotional connection and loyalty and is believed to be vital to human functioning (Talen 1999:1365-6).

EVENT: something that happens (The Little Oxford Dictionary). This can include a performance, an interaction, a conversation or a memorable moment.

LANDSCAPE: "*The word* paysage *means landscape (as in land and countryside) and much more, conveying both qualities that are both visible and invisible. It refers not only to issues of environment and ecology but also to the mood of an entire nation, to its changing sense of identity and cultural belonging*" (Girot 1999:59). Landscape is therefore not only the space that encompasses the exterior of a building, it is also layered with meaning and can contain traces of the past.

SUSTAINABILITY: "Sustainable development integrates economic, environmental and social values during planning; distributes benefits equitably across socio-economic strata and gender upon implementation; and ensures that opportunities for continuing development remain undiminished to future generations" (Peine 1999).