

The African City/ACBD

I think the term 'African City' is misleading. We need to ask ourselves what we are referring to when we speak of 'Africa'?

Cities as we know them today did not appear in Southern Africa till the advent of the Dutch settlers. At that time, the Funj further north were an established nation, within a context that had seen the rise and fall of great civilizations since 660BC. Generalizations about urban practices in such diversified contexts can rarely be accurate.

Africa is vast and varied but the concerns of professionals are similar due to our colonial past. What is characteristic of '**cities in Africa**' is that, imposed western systems have broken down almost completely, as in Khartoum, or exist side by side with traditional, or uniquely resourceful and innovative, ways of 'doing' as in Durban.

I feel sad that so many people in Khartoum struggle to survive, yet at the same time I take pride in the fact that the city operates in uniquely different ways to the west. My dream is that the suffering may be lifted without ever aspiring to re-create a western system. Our greatest tragedy is that we have been programmed, through our colonial past, our biased education, the media and international policies to believe that the above is impossible.

If accused of being sentimental towards a culture to which I belong, I will argue that diversity in lifestyles is the key to sustainability.