

# PROBLEM STATEMENT



## Introduction

In the light of the country's political history and the circumstances surrounding apartheid, South African cities suffer from disintegration. On one hand, the city maintains its formal functions for residents, such as offices, community buildings, municipal services, etc. on the other hand, security and many others constraints, create a lack of informal spaces for public gathering. Such cities become places which discourage social interaction, where sometimes residents do not even know who their neighbours are.

By contrast, in South African townships these social circumstances generated a unique quality of community life. It might be that the segregation policy, despite many disadvantages, enabled this community life to exist on the outskirts of the cities.

The major goal of the Art Centre would be to contain and strengthen this natural manifestation of community life. This paper will attempt to provide a proposal along these lines taking a section of Alexandra near Johannesburg as an example.

## Township Problems

An examination of township life yields several problems which should be addressed.

For example, a lack of facilities that enable the community to experience diverse activities together as part of street communal life and an absence of a place with which people can identify.

Undoubtedly, there is a large group of people who did not have the opportunity to get a proper education in their youth. They need a springboard to join the workforce by developing some skills.

Since meeting the fundamental needs for food, health and employment has the high priority, the township has not responded adequately to its artistic needs. Mainly because of the fertile ground for natural art to evolve such as hardship and stress in daily life which push people to find simple but real personal expression, it is crucial to create a place for these activities.

## General objectives

The following are the objectives for the Art Centre:

1. To enable the community to experience art activities and participate in them.

By creating different types of workshops with varied open spaces, the Centre should be a place for common art for the public, while serving as a gathering place.

2. To create a space for local artists in order to express their talent.

The Centre will enable local artists to have basic conditions in which to work and create art. These workshops will have basic equipment at the level to which an artist can make beneficial use without great personal expense.

3. To connect the Art Centre to the existing Community Centre in order to create a significant community gathering area. By doing so, the whole complex would have a critical mass of attractive activities, which will encourage people to join in.

## General assumptions

The centre will serve as an Art Activities Centre for skilled and non-skilled people.

The centre should be able to liaise with the existing Community Centre by means of complementary functions and mutual facility usage. The community representatives will be the main role player which runs the Centre.

Funds for the establishment of the Centre will be the responsibility of the Alex Chamber of Commerce. However, the existing operation and maintenance will be funded by income from selling the art products and come from the municipal authorities.

## Main design points

### Functionality:

#### *Macro scale*

- Continuity of the existence the natural pedestrian route by strengthening it with various open/closed spaces, as part of the new Art Centre.
- Connecting space to the community hall and its entrance.
- Adaptation to existing Centre activities for the local community (neighbourhood branch) and providing unique activities, which serve the whole of the Alexandra domain (focal branch).

*Micro scale*

- Multi purpose rooms/spaces, which can cater different types of activities
- Combine street Arts (scrap metal sculpture, graffiti) with indoor Arts (ceramic, sewing)
- Create a platform for a mixture of arts to enrich each other, and thus people to liaise and enjoy common experience.

*Permeable secure space*

Gradual entry process: public - semi public-private.

Visible building and activities, which invite people to be part of the happening.

Ramps and other elements define a soft edge and protect the space (Instead of walls etc.).

*Link to the outdoor development of the Jukskei River:*

- A plan, which opens visible and physical gaps among the buildings in order to experience the river's qualities.
- Provide outdoor activities, which combine with the river's activities.
- Gradual steps to bridge over the heights between the Centre and the river bank.

*Interaction with the joined northern neighbourhood ("TB settlement"):*

- The Centre takes into consideration the neighbourhood's public space (internal street) - creating a common space open to the public.
- A future development of art factories/shops in the residential area is part of the concept of the Centre.
- Springbok Street can be used as an "entrance" to the Centre with benches, tuck shops, verandas and other light facilities.

*Sustainable Architecture for long-term maintenance:*

- Design principles, which express the simplicity of local materials, in order to make the project viable in both the social and economic climate.
- Materials, which have a long-term resistance and good insulation.
- Solar tanks for water heating.
- Recycle system for water usage.
- Maximum use of daylight.
- Maximum use of insulation materials to cool down/heat the spaces.

## Administrative concept

According to the research, the majority of the community centres readily obtain funds to establish the facility. The shortage of money starts immediately after that stage. Sometimes, donors and the community authorities announce the opening of a centre, with no proper planning for its daily funding.

However, the Art Centre has three legs of financial support:

First, participating artists will be chosen on the basis of productivity and viability. The Centre will provide shops and exhibition space, which exposes the community to art and enables the artists to sell their work

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Second, the Centre will rent out well-equipped workshops to artists who want to have permanent facilities. The idea (as done already with the car technicians light industry) is to enable artists to rent the workshops on an hourly base according to their needs. This concept also enables young artists to have a place to work at a reasonable cost, and provides some income to the Centre as well as to the artists.

Third, adding the site to the tourist route of Alexandra, showing/selling local art products to tourists and using the restaurant's ideal location with its great views of Alexandra.