



SILENT WOUNDS OF THE FAMILY

An architectural response, addressing the current family crisis' in South Africa, through the proposal of a Tshwane Family Court.

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INTRODUCTION:

BACKGROUND:

In many social orders of the world the broken family core is an unfortunate and common reality, leading to an ever growing presence of homeless children, mothers, or fathers. South Africa is not a stranger to this phenomenon, despite the fact that it is viewed as a country with one of the most progressive constitutions regarding gender equality.

Daily shocking statistics show a lack of family values, guidance, and respect for the human race, further emphasising a society where people and families feel no restraint in harming a child, woman or man. The South African society as a whole is losing touch with itself and government is not realizing the impact of their conveyed message of disregard, when “for every 400 rapes reported last year- 17 became official cases, 1 perpetrator was convicted and for every perpetrator convicted, 1 case docket was lost or sold.” (Internet: <http://www.powa.co.za/Display.asp?ID=2.html>. Access 13February) This type of social degradation affects us all when the offenders and victims become the next string in our complicated lattice of a social fabric.

If one is to see the family dynamic and children as a whole as being bound to us through the familial concept of Ubuntu, creating the link between social and family factors affecting the population as a whole, then we are all responsible in the struggle against the all too typical cycle.

ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTION

The first points of intervention in the fore mentioned cycle are family courts, child courts and sexual abuse trauma centres allowing the victim a real chance to rehabilitation and healing. It is the foremost encounter in which architecture plays a vital role. Accelerating the healing process and opening up the platform to educate South Africans of all that is absent in our society.

Through an appropriate architectural intervention in these facilities, the struggle to altering common perceptions of family and human interactions can be correctly addressed and eventually revolutionized. Consequently the intent of this dissertation is to be able to reflect the essentiality of an architectural environment of inclusion and healing, allowing for rehabilitation, reconciliation and support.

REAL WORLD PROBLEM:

After lengthy debates and several commissions in June of 1996 the Department of Justice (D.O.J.) recognised the need for specialist family courts to be set out. However, due to insufficient time and financial resources it was considered that to have an ‘ideal’ family court would be impossible as an immediate outcome. In response to this the minister of Justice established five pilot family courts in terms of legislation, as an attempt to speed up the pace of reform. It was stressed that the pilots should be an interim measure and a source of information for the creation of a permanent family court structure. (Mills 2003: 5-7)

REAL WORLD PROBLEM CONTD:

Of the five pilots dealing with their respective provinces, only one was located in Gauteng the most densely populated.

The pilots are situated correspondingly in: Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Lebowakgomo.

The proposed design is aimed to challenge this lack of facility and permanent structure, specifically in the Gauteng province by proposing an appropriate multi functional and permanent family court located in Tshwane Pretoria. This Tshwane family court will be designed through a close analyses of the factors plaguing the current Johannesburg pilot court. Working in solidarity with the afore mentioned court it will greatly alleviate the increasing workload in Gauteng.

In addition to emphasising on a more humane architectural interface for a public building of its stature, the facilities will be extended into dual functional courtrooms for children abuse , further enabling a movement in greater governmental efficacy.

LOCATION:

The site chosen is situated between Paul Kruger street to the west and Proes street to the south. directly adjacent to the old Synagogue and flanked by a rite of way servitude to the west of the new National Library. The proposed Family court will allow for a much needed form of identity in the current vacuous spirit of place by further restoring the old Synagogue to its former glory and introducing it to a new generation through the re-use of this historic building as a tribunal court room and community hall.

Contextually the site's history with the treason trials's is another instigating factor as to why the spirit of civic duty is to be upheld and furthered. In conjunction with the Tshwane Inner City Project (TICP) framework of semi pedestrianising Paul Kruger street the site will be easily accesible to the people the family court would be serving .

METHODOLOGY:

The research method and application will consist of a hybrid of historical analysis (specifically the sites historical context and perceived context), philosophical analysis (focused on current normative positions in architecture) and grounded theory (a systematic evaluation of analysis of the contextual data, deductively discovered, bounded and confirmed).

DESIGN OBJECTIVE:

The intention of the architecture is to be accessible to all, regardless of culture. It must be equally accomodatory to the different users of the building, from victims to detainees. The design should not be overpoweringly institutional and comfort levels should be taken into consideration.

The complex as a whole should be legible and provide for different journey's or pause areas for choice and interest in the complex.

Through courtyard design along with evaporative cooling and internal cross ventilation the design will be mainly passively ventilated while based in an urban context.

FINANCIERS AND CLIENTS:

A total sum of R51 billion has been set aside to courts and their resources for this year alone. This project could be seen as one of those very worthy proposals to be funded by that budget .

As is currently the case at the Johannesburg pilot family court the Department of Justice would be dually the main benefactor and primary financial backer. Another financier could be the Heritage Council of South Africa pioneering the redevelopment of the old Synagogue. The site and its surrounds can thus be viewed as one important heritage anchor integrating it with the rest of the inner city initiative.

The clients will be split into categories of judicial bodies, victims, accused, and counsellors.

DESIGN GOAL:

The proposal aims at developing an intermediary level of conversation with people of all walks of life throughout the city and enhancing a civic identity. It will be designed inclusively to the city, the old Synagogue, and to the end-users from both legal and social parameters. Concern will be taken on the designing of entrances to victims, detainees, and magistrates as the highly private nature of each must be taken into account. An appropriate study will take precedence in relating the language of the building so as to accommodate all cultures

The building and a surrounding square will function as an interactive heritage information centre to all types of people, namely; pedestrians mediating through the square, children coming to and from school, lawyers, magistrates and government officials.

As is the case with the old Synagogue, which at the present lies in a limbo without identity , so too are the victims visiting the facilities stuck in their own intermediate state. The proposal will strive to transform this plethora of inadequacy by converting the old Synagogue into a new significant entrance reflecting the past injustices of the treason trials and indicating a path to a new identifiable and sympathising future.