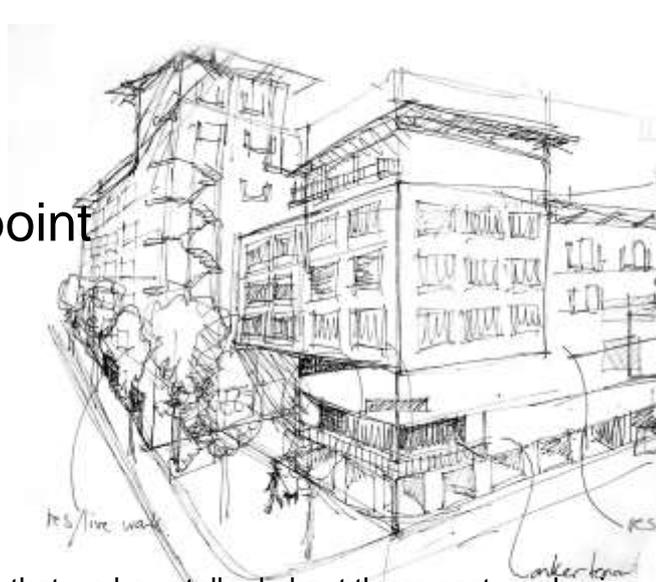


Housing – My viewpoint

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In general

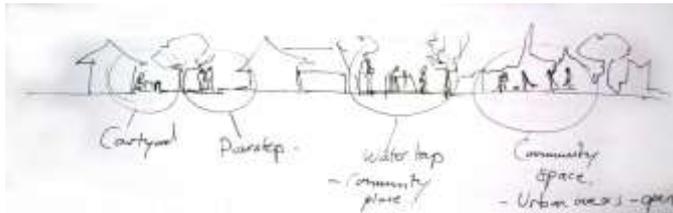
Maybe the first, most important thing that we have talked about these past weeks, is that housing does not stand alone. When designing buildings, the future occupant (also by that implying the function of the building) should be the first consideration, of course. A house is a place for a person (with a specific lifestyle, culture, income, and whatever else makes that person and his situation unique) to spend a part of his life in. Though the house is definitely not the only part of the living environment of that person – and that is the fact that so often causes mistakes in urban design and in housing design. To create an environment where a person could function normally with as much as possible comfort, housing needs to be integrated into the environment with other amenities, job opportunities, schooling, public open spaces, shops and more. A house becomes only one part in a layered and complicated, rich urban layout. **The urban environment becomes the place for living rather than the house on its own...**

When intervening within an environment with the aim to provide more housing, the whole 'ecosystem' of the area first has to be considered. This was our approach with Mamelodi. When not doing this, monotonous environments are created with people that are very dependant on another area's job opportunities, commercial-, recreational- and other activities. And one of the most important problems is the time and money spent on transport. While we were busy with our analysis of Mamelodi we realized that the neighbouring Nelmapius is a good example of such a monotonous environment. It is a widespread, low-density community which consists of houses (one per plot) only. We also addressed this issue within our solution.

When looking at development and upliftment in disadvantaged areas it became clear to me that a well designed building alone can't solve the problem of poverty. In fact it is only a small part of the solution. Again the keyword is **INTEGRATION** into a system of different aspects (organisations, funders) working together to bring forth the solution. A good example of this is the New Europa House in Hillbrauw. It is an old building, upgraded and divided into social-, communal-, transitional- and normal rental flats. The transitional housing sector of New Europa House is closely connected to MES (Mid-city Evangelical Services which again has a contract with the Department of Social services). For a prearranged time between 18 months and 2 years, a person could stay at New Europa House and at the same time receive training in different skills, through courses presented by MES. When the training period is over, MES also helps with job placements where after the person would then move into communal housing. A previously untrained and homeless person can become self-sustaining again. For this process, a building alone would not make a difference.

Money seems to always get the blame for bad living environments, whether it is the lack of money of the occupant or that of the government. I think though that many of it can be blamed on bad design and planning rather. In short important things to be

considered in designing of housing in my opinion is : **urban sprawl, integrated environment, designing for safety, levels between private and public space, higher densities, identity/place making, OCCUPANT PARTICIPATION.**



Movement from public to private
(Correa,1996)

Occupant Participation

As mentioned above, people are unique with unique needs and circumstances. According to Osman and Gibberd (2000:10) 44% of South Africa's population falls within groups that has different difficulties with the built environment (disabled people, HIV+, children under six, elderly). Apart from this, any person would somewhere in his/her life experience some kind of a disability (broken leg, weak because of illness, forgetting glasses, etc). Special care needs to be taken to consider and include these groups within communities. Though, whether abled, disabled or differently abled, any person would prefer a place with identity and character to which he/she is able to relate and which can adapt to suite their needs, in order to create and express their own identity within their community.

In my opinion, two other things will happen when people are allowed to do this. **1.** Their reaction will contribute to the overall identity/character of that community and **2.** People will be proud of places where they can express themselves - people take care of the things they are proud of.

For this to happen, occupant participation is vital. This could for example be in the design and planning process (as in several of Frans van der Werf's projects in Netherlands (Habraken, www.habraken.com) where all the units are designed in cooperation with the future resident) the management of the building, or by allowing for flexibility within the finished product – applying open building principles. This flexibility can occur on different levels of permanency needing different amounts of effort, time and (possibly) money for it to be changed. A permanent/semi-permanent system would be needed to support this flexible infill system. The support system needs to be of high quality and would probably be more expensive, while the



“Hong Kong – Apartment building facades altered and extended by individual owners.” (Habraken, 1998)

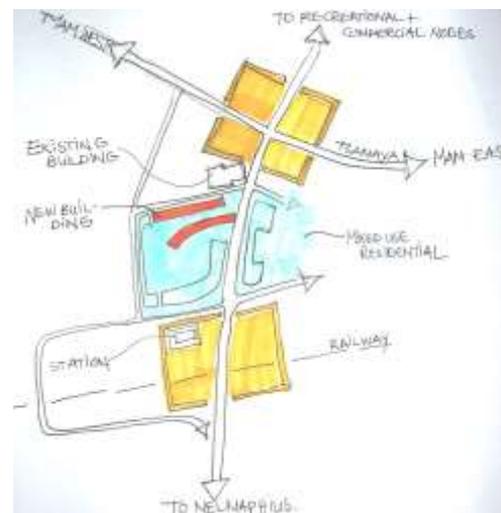
temporary infill could be cheaper. Habraken (1998) refers forms within our cities and identify the different levels as “major arteries, roads, building elements, partitioning, furniture, and body and utensils.”

In Mamelodi

Mamelodi is a very big township with a very low density. Through analysis of the area in terms of infrastructure, commercial- and recreational activity, movement patterns and the lifestyle of the people of the area (the whole 'ecology' of Mamelodi) we tried to identify the place where an intervention would be most suitable. We were strongly directed to the area around Eerste Fabrieke station which is very high in use but very low in formal development. It stood out as a missing link within the network of Mamelodi. It would also cause for a stronger connection between Mamelodi and Nelmapius, directly South of Eerste Fabrieke station, creating another (new) CBD for Mamelodi but also providing for the amenities that Nelmapius is short of.

The proposed node

Within the chosen node, existing activities and movement was taken into consideration. A very high density layout was proposed recommending new facilities/amenities while still including the existing activities. The area would be much more self-sustaining than the rest of Mamelodi. This would hopefully be an injection that would cause for the development of higher densities in the surrounding areas, more people investing within their own area, and a general stronger sense of belonging and identity for the people of Mamelodi.



Building within proposed node

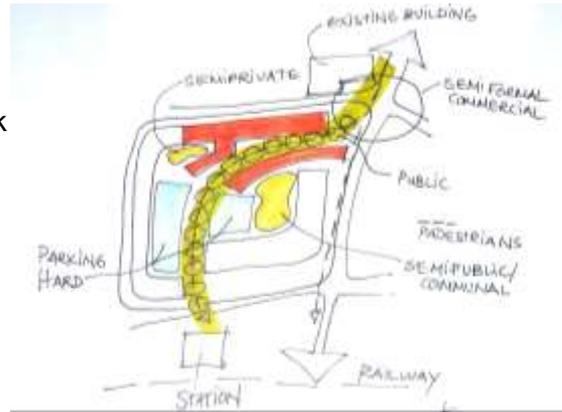
The proposed building

The site I designed on has different aspects within the proposed area, to respond to. On the north eastern corner, it is on a secondary square with an existing building on the opposite corner housing different commercial activities including a butcher, lunch pub, food store and liquor store. Between three and five stories would be added to this building and the surrounding buildings designed to react to its activities and character.



Existing building

East of the site, passes the main street of the proposed node. The eastern part of the building would thus be much denser and will include some commercial space and live/work units (restaurant, offices, community- and training facilities). As the height will be between eight and ten stories, the residential units would be slightly more expensive and also bigger. To the western side the density would be lower with mostly four storey walk-up units, a combination between social and transitional housing and also units for ownership. It is planned that transitional housing would work in cooperation with training facilities.



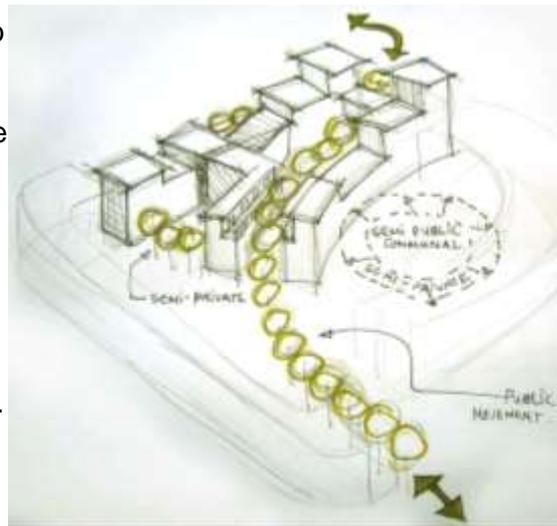
Building within residential block

The site is divided and forms at the same time a pedestrian entrance into the residential block and a public pedestrian route towards the station. The units on ground floor would react to this by being designed as live/work units. Spaces around this route would then subtly and gradually move from public to private spaces, into individual units.

Both sections of the new building would have family units on the areas that open unto semi-private/-public spaces. A crèche would be accommodated within the southern section to open unto the central communal space.

All units are placed in such a way that it gets sufficient natural light (north orientation). The form and height of the buildings are in reaction to this study of light. Units are also oriented in such a way that all semi-public/-private areas would be under constant surveillance by residents, causing for a much safer environment.

My focus within the design is to create a rich, layered environment that responds to the surrounding area and is able to respond to its users. Different people should easily be accommodated within the building, for example families of different sizes or differently abled people. Open building principles would be applied to achieve this on design level.



Concept drawing of building, showing movement, building heights, different types of spaces

People of different income groups would be accommodated as well and, as mentioned above, also commercial space. This gives the opportunity for cross-subsidisation, to overcome (at least a part of) the financial barrier that is generally associated with housing and also cover some of the costs of the training facilities.

Resources

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