Urban Acupuncture - Khayelitsha

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URBAN ACUPUNCTURE

‘The Needle and the (W)Hole.’

Location: Khayelitsha Cape Town (2007)
Design Consultants (phase two): City Think Space, ACG Architects and Development Planners
Clients: City of Cape Town and Khayelitsha community Trust

Khayelitsha is the largest and last township to be formally established in the Western Cape. Located at the heart of the Cape Flats and abutting Mitchel’s Plain, its narrative of dislocation, hope, and unequal access to resources, amenity and infrastructure positions the area as an exemplar of Apartheid informed informality. President Thabo Mbeki identified it as one of twenty national urban renewal nodes with a specific role to play in terms of social cohesion, upliftment and integration across the fractured cultural divide. The central business district was conceived to create a new urban room, an inspirational public realm for a devastated and desolate community lacking any resilient hierarchy of formalised ‘publicness.’
With competing voices of legitimacy, delivery of projects was hampered through indecision and lack of accountability between the state and social organisations. In a sense the informal landscape was mirrored by turbulent informal forces squabbling over the gaunt carcass of available resources. The noble intention of creating complementary CBD’s for each community (So called colored and Black African) has not been achieved despite the presence of catalytic interventions which anticipate and provoke the spontaneous creation of convivial environments through strategic urban design interventions. The informal condition in this instance could be described as a coded void or ‘hole,’ in the socio spatial geography of place.

Within this process, multi-purpose centers were identified as key urban markers for urban development, and encompass four components, a sports and recreation aspect, municipal offices and service point, heath and service clinic, and a library/arts and culture aspect. These later evolved into Thusong Service Centres.
As an outcome of a two year public participation process held by the City of Cape of Town to identify hierarchies of need for the community, the necessity for the sports component was identified as a priority and Makeka design Lab was commissioned to execute. The creation of a civic catalytic architecture in a context where the civic imperative is not a normative priority of the state presented challenges for officialdom, and the project seeks to relocate the discourse of architecture in informal conditions as part of a transformative act shaping township into town through bold design- architectural and urban. How does the needle stitch the (w)hole?

Continued on Panel 2.

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