Kliptown Explored

KLIPTOWN EXPLORED


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Research Project

Urban Design exists as the intersectional point between architecture , planning, urban geography, art and city management. Edgar Pieterse challenges urban practitioners with the idea that, "a crucial focus of democratic practice should be spatially framed arguments for what the right to the city means".

In applying this concept and its relevance to the South African context, we argue that the commonality in terms of the language of urban design, must be able to be interpreted and understood by those who are engaging in the process. However, to add "quality to both process and product, the outcomes, Pieterse indicates, has to "emerge out of a skillful articulation of urban struggles" for which "a broader repertoire of strategies and tactics are needed" that are unique to context and place. It is thus in our interest to explore and unpack the techniques and methodologies that make urban design a more relevant practice to unleash the potential benefits of urbanity.

Distribution of resources, growing economies and the hope of a better life draw more and
more people to the cities every year. As a result of the shortage of adequate and available shelter, people occupy vacant land and erect shacks in areas without sanitation, infrastructure or any social amenities. In order to move forward, and provide the much needed housing and services to these millions of people, a new and innovative design approach must be adopted. Housing programmes which provide a diverse number of solutions, each specific to context and needs and the promotion of integration at city and neighbourhood scale, are critical. An emphasis on upgrading, with a focus on sustainable development as opposed to eradication, is a means of providing people with the services and shelter that is needed.

Upgrading is to be looked at as a process towards the delivery of appropriate housing, and an opportunity to transform informal settlements into liveable communities. The principals of informal settlement upgrading are based in integration and innovation, and an urban design framework which emphasises quality and sustainable living environments.

There is currently a programme engaging in the upgrade of informal settlements. It poses a challenge as to how to engage in a constructive and innovative way to incorporate, integrate, improve and engage in forward planning to assist in bettering the conditions of about 17% of our urban population.

Our proposition is an inquiry into how to develop appropriate techniques in responding to the particular environments and expectations of communities living within a condition of
informality. The aim is to create more liveable, sustainable and resilient cities that can respond to the changing needs of a growing urban population, as well as developing a more bottom-up approach to urban governance and decision making.

To build an alternative future we need to free ourselves from preconceived ideas and move decisively towards multiple innovative possibilities.

Kliptown has long fallen between administrative zones and official concerns as an interstitial space in which natural buffers, dissecting railway lines and wide arterial roads have form barriers dividing the district, offering few safe pedestrian routes and isolated blocks of neglected land.

Kliptown was deliberately chosen as the site for the signing of The Freedom Charter in 1956 because it fell between jurisdictions and different designated Group Areas, which consequently enabled a diverse gathering of "the people".

The exhibition work explores an urban design framework for Kliptown which consolidates existing development with catalytic projects, alternative designs for medium density housing and in-situ informal settlement upgrading into one coherent neighbourhood. The framework acknowledges and builds upon the history and heritage of the area, to ensure that each development enhances and contributes to build a coherent whole, and anticipates the future.

Urban design translates the process into spatial interventions that facilitate traditional practices, current livelihoods, and future aspirations. The product is an urban design framework that guides development decisions, frames interventions, is supportive of the everyday and the celebratory but is flexible enough to enable future change.

Continued on Panel 2.

MONICA ALBONICO AND LONE POULSEN