

ARCHITECTURE AS EMPOWERMENT: THE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Introduction

During the Apartheid era, architecture in South Africa has - in a very material sense - sustained and even initiated many of the social, economic and political problems associated with township life and the segregation of society that the new South Africa has inherited from the old. Architecture today can play an active role in redressing the situation. The answer to the question how this can be achieved, however, lies neither solely in the quantity nor quality of new buildings for rural areas and townships. While both are important, this paper intends to focus on a different approach: architecture as a vehicle of empowerment through community participation. While acknowledging the benefits of community participation, many architects nevertheless regularly experience a range of obstacles when attempting to involve their client community, sometimes leading to frustration and discouragement. Many of these problems are shared by professionals throughout the country and could be addressed or alleviated through more communication and sharing of solutions. This paper will attempt to facilitate this process by compiling commonly experienced predicaments and suggesting solutions.

Definition

The term 'community participation' most frequently occurs with reference to the fields of a) development and b) housing. Community participation in development is often understood to mean something along the lines of the following definition by Roodt (1996:312), 'people involving themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, in organisations indirectly or directly concerned with the decision-making about, and implementation of, development.' With respect to housing, community participation can be interpreted in a literal narrow sense as simply self-help home building, which can be an oppressive concept. Turner

(1976; also Turner and Fichter 1972), in his fundamental studies based on research in the United States, Peru and other Latin American countries, however, contends that 'the central issue is that of *control* or of the power to *decide*' (Turner, 1976:128).

'Community participation' or 'participatory development' thus has a variety of frequently contradictory meanings.¹ Roodt (1996) in his paper 'Participatory development: a jargon concept?' distinguishes two diametrically opposed definitions of community participation. The first one is rooted in the colonial (especially British) policy of achieving efficient colonial government by 'getting communities to take on responsibility for their own development' (Turner, 1976:313), an approach where decisions are made at the top and implementation is done by the people on the ground, best exemplified by development practice in South Africa's former bantustans. The second definition is based on the concept of a transformation of people's consciousness which leads to a process of self-actualisation and empowerment. Similarly, Farouk concludes (by citing Moser) that all definitions of community participation can ultimately be classified into two categories, ie definitions 'that contain an element of empowerment and definitions that do not', or, in other words, definitions referring to 'development of communities or to development *in* communities' (1996:6).

This study's definition of 'community participation' sees the aspect of empowerment as its focal point. 'Empowerment', to follow Jonathan Cook's (1995) understanding of the term, is the crucial factor that makes development sustainable: it 'implies a shift of control towards the people who actually do the core work' (Farouk 1996:286). With respect to community participation in architectural design this point has crucial implications for the role of the architect and the professional team, as will be shown below.

Community participation in architectural design is here defined as the active involvement of a committee consisting of elected (or self-appointed) members of the client community in need assessment, establishment of the brief, fundraising (if applicable), design of the building, construction, maintenance and management of the completed structure. Given that considerable resources are currently being committed to the construction of clinics, schools, community centres, and sports facilities, an extended process of community participation can thus turn those same buildings into vehicles of empowerment. The transfer of skills and knowledge resulting from community participation can contribute considerably to the rapid development of human capacity upon which the implementation of the current Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is dependent (Cook 1995).

While literature on various aspects of community participation in development and housing abounds, very little has been published with special reference to architecture, particularly not beyond small case studies. Consequently, this paper is primarily based on interviews with architects, many of them leading professionals in this field in South Africa and widely experienced with community work.²

The Benefits of Community Participation

In the past, African communities were typically provided with facilities such as schools, clinics, community centres, sports facilities, etc, according to what Harms (1972:194) calls 'the technocratic caretaker model': local authorities would assess the needs of a community, draw up a professional design for the most suitable building to accommodate a clearly defined brief, and then arrange for the construction with skilled labour and technology often brought in from the outside. Such 'government hand-outs', were thus always built *for* the people but never *with* them, as a result of which communities rarely gained a sense of ownership and responsibility. Facilities were sometimes hardly used because they did not actually suit people's needs or buildings became an embodiment of governmental authority and consequently prone to vandalism.

The participatory approach to architectural design aims to redress this situation. Its most obvious advantage is the achievement of a sense of ownership and pride. The extent to which the community identifies with the structure determines the likelihood that the building will be used, maintained or protected from vandalism in the near future. Involving the community not only in establishing the brief but also in the design and construction process is the only way towards a true architecture of self-expression. The building becomes a material expression of a joint community effort.

The attention thus shifts from the building as the end result, the delivery of a product, to the building as a process - a process of empowerment, which becomes the basis for sustainable development. The architectural project is thus not designed to merely provide a facility for a specified purpose, but to draw as many members of the community as possible into the project and invite them to participate - each one according to his/her own interest and ability. By allowing individuals to gain much needed self-confidence and a sense of personal achievement, the building alleviates drab surroundings, lethargy and desperation of its end-users.

Carin Smuts from CS Studio Architects in Cape Town reports from her own experience:

In order to get a public facility there [in the township] you're dealing with people who've had Apartheid education, you're dealing with people who haven't finished school, you're dealing with people who've been locked up for three or four years ... So, it's more the process and the changes in people's lives than the buildings themselves. And you will often find that a lot of people we've worked with never did anything, or they were just sitting on the street. And now, all of a sudden, they are running building projects or young people decide to go to university or to go and work somewhere because they now realise that there is more to life.³

Opinions among the architects interviewed differ regarding the extent to which community representatives should get involved in the architectural project. Particularly involvement in financial matters is a thorny issue, since financial mismanagement is a frequently experienced problem. It is suggested here that community representatives should at least be fully informed in all financial proceedings, be unconditionally accountable and feel obligated to make responsible decisions. Total transparency not only eliminates the potential for conflict and corruption, but helps the community comprehend the limitation of funds and understand how cheaper materials, for example, can translate into more spacious rooms. This point is aptly illustrated by comparing the Guguletu Multi-sport Complex, built by Jo Noero with virtually no participation of the local community, and the nearby Masikhanye Isibane Sakho Multipurpose Centre, designed by CS Studio, with extensive involvement of community representatives. The former has been published extensively in architectural journals (*Architecture SA* 1995) and is widely acclaimed in professional circles for its user-friendliness, clarity of structure and resourceful detailing.⁴ The local people and users, however, who were not informed about the limitation of funds available for this building, perceive their new sports complex as cheap township architecture and report numerous problems in terms of functionality.⁵ In the case of CS Studio's Multipurpose Centre, currently under construction, members of the committee proudly explain to the interested visitor how they managed, in collaboration with the architect, to save money here and there.⁶ The centre is promising to become a large, functional and handsome building despite extreme financial constraints.

Shifting the emphasis from the building as a perfected shelter for specified functions to the building as a process and a vehicle of empowerment implies that local people become skilled and enlightened through participation in various phases of design and construction. The tremendous lack of education necessitates

the teaching of even the most basic concepts, such as the role of an architect or a quantity surveyor, how a tender procedure works, how to set up a contract, how to read architectural drawings and how to write letters for funding proposals. It should be obvious that the learning curve for the community and the potential uses of this knowledge for improving the quality of life are enormous.

Community committees sometimes continue existing and working after completion of the project, taking care of the running of the building or motivating for additional services. Gideon Scott, architect in Cape Town, who built a number of clinics in townships around the city, consciously encourages this by fitting the new buildings with spaces that can be used as meeting places for such committees. A simple meeting room can assist the process of institutionalisation of a committee of volunteers, which, in turn, can sometimes even attract funding of necessary equipment.⁸

The most immediate manner in which the building can become a vehicle of empowerment is through generating employment. Hiring local contractors and labour provides an opportunity for training by engaging un-skilled local labour trained on site, and supports the local economy by utilising locally available technology. For some individuals, opportunities might open up for continued employment after completion of the building and there are examples of small-scale businesses, such as brick- or concrete block-making, which were initiated for the construction of a community facility and sustained for some time thereafter. (Coppola 1995).

Community involvement often stops at the point of the actual design process, which architects traditionally understand as the core activity of their profession. If, however, the architect is willing to accept a role as part of a team where various design options and the choice of details and finishes are developed in close consultation with the community representatives, the benefit for the community lies in an increased process of identification with the building (apart from the learning experience); for the architect - according to the experience of many of the professionals interviewed - in the personal gratification received from working *with* the community rather than *for* them.⁹

A case study from Great Britain (Habeebullah et al 1986) suggests that community participation can also be a potent agent to successfully overcome ethnic tensions in racially mixed areas or in cases where a building serves a racially-mixed user body (such as schools, clinics, community centres). The building becomes a mutual focus that pulls disparate communities together and a builds a bridge between interest groups.¹⁰ Furthermore, there seems to be evidence that the participatory approach in housing projects has an effect on the

reduction of crime and violence (*Planning* 1994). More research in this field would be extremely beneficial and pertinent to the present South African context.

Problems with Community Participation

Despite the rewards and benefits of the community participation approach in architectural design, every architect experienced in this type of work can relate numerous unpleasant, disheartening and frustrating incidences, difficulties and disappointments. Architects can get disillusioned and tired of community work, resenting the enormous amount of energy and sometimes money that is being wasted on fruitless discussions or unacceptably poor workmanship. It is not suggested here that community participation is the solution to deep-seated socio-economic and political conditions, which are often at the root of problems experienced by those architects, but it can make a significant contribution. Much more research is necessary in the field of community participation with the dissemination of results to practising architects and to students of architecture as essential reading.

Mistrust and Disrespect

A good start is Dr Kevin Wall's article 'Personal insights: involving urban communities in decision-making', an anthology of personal experiences with community participation published in the journal *Planning* (Wall 1993). His article begins with one of the key issues responsible for problems with community participation. 'Urban professionals - engineers, town-planners and architects - do not generally enjoy positive credibility with the low-income communities in urban South Africa. Their role is not understood; likewise, professionals are often ignorant of the needs and priorities of the community.' (Wall 1993:22). Unpleasant, insulting and even intimidating incidences are being reported by almost all architects who conduct community work. Rumours and misinformation discrediting members of the professional team tend to spread quickly with the result that attempts to build up trust are compromised or the existing atmosphere of scepticism amplified.

Long Meetings

Mutual mistrust and ignorance, lack of education, difficulties with communication and internal power struggles are the main causes for frustrations commonly experienced in community meetings. The very essence of the participatory approach requires the professional team to attend frequent, long and often unremunerated meetings, sometimes with the entire community, often on weekends or at night. Not every member of a community will equally benefit

from a development project and subgroups within communities have different interests, expectations and sometimes hidden agendas. Despite efforts to stay neutral in internal arguments, architects are often perceived to be siding with one of the conflicting parties and consequently accused of bias, racism, or devious intentions.

Community Representation

According to Wall (1993:22) and some of the architects interviewed, the architectural team might experience the frustration of finding a decision reached in a painfully long meeting reversed, amended or modified at their next site visit. Committee members often don't have a broad mandate in the Western sense of representative democracy to make decisions on behalf of their constituency, but are expected to have decisions ratified by the community. Furthermore, it can be problematic to define who exactly belongs to 'the community' and who should be represented. Committees might not be truly representative in that certain stakeholders or potentially opposing interest groups within the community have been excluded, unbeknown to the professional team, resulting in a number of impediments once the building is under construction. Other problems reported by architects include individuals making a disastrous decision and then simply disappearing; or former community leaders suddenly returning from exile and demanding to have a say in the project that's already under way.

Lack of Education

'A lack of shared concepts', says Kevin Wall, can result 'in parties inadvertently talking at cross-purposes, or even in a complete breakdown of communications' (1993:22). Given that the very concept of architecture is a foreign notion to most African communities, they cannot be expected to comprehend even the most basic architectural terminology, be able to read plans and drawings or even translate a three-dimensional model into a building. 'You have to enter into their brains in order for them to understand...' says Eustice Sediti from CS Studio in Cape Town.¹¹ This total lack of understanding, skill and experience complicates communication enormously and leaves the client community without any basis upon which to make decisions and judgements about the prospective building.

Lack of Maintenance and Vandalism

The ongoing problem of vandalism and the general lack of maintenance - attested to by every single architect interviewed - cast doubt on the efficacy of community participation for fostering public responsibility. Many architects

report incidences of vandalism, like Carin Smuts who has personally watched somebody equipped with a hammer going on a rampage through Uithango, a recently completed cultural centre in Nyanga, where the community was involved every step of the way. Other people made a fire in the ballet room, smashed the piano, stole the security fence, broke virtually every window, damaged the lights and the toilets.¹² Maintenance, too, is widely confirmed to be a tremendous problem - due to tight financial resources, lack of organisation and skill, political conflict and adverse attitudes which focus on immediate usage rather than on future upkeep. All architects interviewed who have attempted to set money aside for future maintenance have abandoned the practice following misappropriation of funds and conflict over control of the money.

Long Delays and Emotional Drainage

Abuse or non-use of a building shortly after completion understandably leads to personal frustration, disappointment, and emotional drainage on the part of the architect, given the enormous effort, time investment, close interaction with the community and the witnessing of initial positive results. Community participation is a process of involvement that works both ways: the architect, too, establishes a sense of connection with the building and the people. 'One gets so emotional about a building; when you then see the vandalism: it is devastating,' says Carin Smuts¹³ and Janina Masojada broadly agrees: 'I find it very frustrating and disheartening' to go back there now, because we were so intensely involved with it for quite an extended period of time'.¹⁴ Some architects appear to feel almost embarrassed to take visitors to their buildings, preferring instead to show the first set of photos taken at completion. Delays due to funding problems, extended decision-making processes and internal and external power struggles might bring the project to a halt. Working with un-skilled labour, coping with an array of unforeseeable obstacles, and complex tensions within the community that affect the progress of the project, can be a traumatic experience for architects and cast doubt on the future viability of the community participation approach.

Local Contractors and Local Labour

According to several architects interviewed, many communities reject tender procedures and insist on utilising the local builder and specific local contractors, not because they promise to deliver quality work but because they are of political importance in the area or have high-ranking connections. Problems arise when the local builder proves to be incompetent or self-enriching; the architect's plea for the builder's dismissal is rejected and a valuable part of the scarce monetary resources is being wasted. On the other hand, communities' specific demand not

to employ the local builder or certain contractors can result in threats and even violence. Architects often react with frustration and a lack of understanding, not realising that these and similar problems are essentially rooted in a clash of cultural, political and economic values and practises. Tender procedures, legally binding contracts, awards based on merit, etc. are concepts of a Western, industrialised, capitalist society, which many African communities - guided by traditional customs and conventions, existing hierarchies and internal power struggles - have no real comprehension of and possibly no interest in.

Employing local labour usually implies a generally low level of skill, which persists even if extensive training is provided, often resulting in poor craftsmanship and low quality work. Workers don't understand the necessity for the architect's standards of quality and easily feel offended when their competence and proficiency is questioned. Architects report such problems as tensions over pay levels, long delays in construction, and conflicts resulting from the limited selection of workers from a large number of unemployed people within the community.

Finances

It must be acknowledged that the participatory approach is extremely time-consuming for the professional team, particularly if the project is located in a rural area. While some architects impose a facilitation fee or build into their charges a certain percentage for excessive time spent in community meetings, workshops conducted to teach local people basic skills and knowledge, etc, many architects are not remunerated for the extra work. The current fee structure, according to which the architect's compensation is calculated as a percentage of the total cost of the building, often makes low-cost work financially unattractive. It is no coincidence that a disproportionately large number of architects involved in community projects are very young with recently established practices, some of whom admit that they accept this type of work mostly due to lack of other commissions. Many architects thoroughly enjoy community participation ventures and appreciate making a social contribution, but often feel pressured to find ways and means to make up for small profit margins in order to sustain their practice.

Risks

Kevin Wall lists the following risks involved in community participation: 'The danger of becoming involved in the politics of patronage; rising expectations, which are difficult to fulfil; elites among the beneficiaries tend to appropriate a disproportionate share of the benefits; the process can be hijacked by a

maverick, on account of the consensus approach which is adopted; even the best involvement process which has been established at the local level can be derailed as a result of developments at a national level' (1993:25). Every architect engaged in community participation work could easily extend this record of risks and problems based on his/her own experience, since each project is different and involves a unique set of predicaments. This account is not exhaustive but summarizes the most commonly reported problems as a point of departure for exploring possible solution.

Possible Solutions

How can community participation become more effective, successful, and rewarding? Many solutions are already implicit in the description of the dilemmas recounted above. For example, in the case of decision-making and mandate, frustrations and unpleasant surprises could easily be avoided if democratic procedures were clearly explained, clarified and comprehended, from the outset, by all parties involved. Architects would benefit from consulting appropriate published material in this respect. The Community Projects Foundation (CPF) in Great Britain, for example, distributes a number of in-house publications, such as 'Working on a Committee', which explains such concepts as leadership, financial control, etc.¹⁵ Architects must acknowledge being caught in a disadvantageous bias of Western paradigms and assumptions. Many problems and frustrations could be minimised, if architects approached African communities with a different set of expectations, based on a more accurate understanding of their culture and way of thinking.

Representation

More important than the question of mandate is the aspect of true representation. Realising the enormous potential for problems as a result of leaving one important person or group of stakeholders unconsulted, architects would be well advised to spend some time with the community and establish exactly what kind of people are on the committee, who they represent, and who is not represented. The architect should ask the initial client group whether there are any other people within the community who could be invited into the project. Targeting people who are not directly interested in the prospective building and asking them to propose additional purposes or functions according to their own needs, can broaden the representation base, increase the community interest in the project and diminish the risk of future vandalism by individuals or members of sub-groups who do not benefit from the development.

Communication

Acknowledging that communication is the key to any kind of successful and effective interaction, the professional team should ascertain certain ground rules. The client community must clearly understand how community participation benefits them, prompting a natural interest in contributing to its effectiveness. A code of conduct which includes mutual trust and respect, a willingness to communicate without hidden agendas, and a mutual understanding of the importance of each party's value systems, should be established at the outset and all parties involved must feel obliged to further the goal of successful negotiations (Wall 1993). Architects would also benefit from familiarizing themselves with research and recommended solutions for a number of problems that result from communication by using an interpreter.¹⁶

Despite the tremendous disparity in level of skills and knowledge between the professional team and client community, it is pivotal that all parties treat each other on equal terms. Gounden and Merrifield (1994:98) call this a moving away from the 'us and them' syndrome' in favour of building partnerships and sharing the same vision. By implication the architect must, on one hand, avoid arrogance, on the other hand, abstain from an over-sympathetic, apologetic or paternalistic attitude. White architects in South Africa tend to feel guilty for coming in as an outsider and sense an obligation to listen to everything people have to say, no matter how obtuse or irrelevant. If architects feel too guilty to speak up and call someone to order, they are likely to become intolerably impatient and irritated.

The Architect as Facilitator

The participatory approach requires architects to play a crucial role in facilitation and empowerment by becoming part of the development process. This can entail conducting workshops to build capacity within the community, possibly assisting clients with writing of funding proposals, teaching them managerial skills and enabling them to make informed decisions about the prospective building. Architects in sub-Saharan Africa have traditionally contributed very little to local community development projects (Uduku 1995) and even today most professionals feel strongly attracted to the glamorous Western image of the architect 'as part of the jet-set' (Gounden and Merrifield 1994:23), still propagated in the popular media and professional journals. In South Africa during the time of the apartheid government, moreover, the elitist position of the architectural profession was further emphasised by the fact that access was closed off to non-whites. The participatory approach demands a redefinition of the role of the architect as a facilitator, as a professional who

accepts a social responsibility, the architect not as 'grand designer, but rather as guide and helper in a broad community framework' (Hardman and Varghese, 1997:18). Architects like Rodney Harber, Gideon Scott, Carin Smuts and others are shaping a new and more relevant professional identity, which might very well be the only viable direction for ensuring the long-term survival of the profession in South Africa.

Changes in Tertiary Education

The groundwork for such a redefinition of the architect's role and position in society must be prepared in the universities. Uduku (1995) argues that many crucial problems affecting architects all over sub-Saharan Africa are rooted in the architectural training available in these countries, because the curriculum 'remains focused on the needs of less than 40 per cent of the population living in formal parts of urban areas and not for the majority who do not'. He suggests that major changes to both the architectural curriculum at the universities as well as a radical alteration of the currently existing building contract¹⁷ are prerequisites for a sustainable introduction of participatory planning. Curriculum changes should, according to Uduku, aim at the introduction of courses dealing directly with participatory architecture and planning, and focus on the transformation and evolution of traditional architecture. 'Architectural education needs to keep as a central theme the need to emphasize the uniqueness and significance of African design in a global context.' (Hardman and Varghese 1997:25).

While most architects interviewed (trained at South African universities) would not see a need for radical changes in the architectural curriculum, there was a consensus that their own training had left them ill-prepared for the work they were performing in practice. Many architects agreed that a less theoretical and design-oriented approach in favour of a more practical, building-oriented one would be more appropriate in the context of the new South Africa. A more holistic understanding of the discipline, where such fields as engineering, town-planning, and landscape design are closely integrated with architecture, has been called for long ago (Britz 1982). Taking this thought a step further, it is suggested here that a basic knowledge of anthropology, sociology, history and art would facilitate a better interaction with client communities and a better comprehension of culturally specific needs and aspirations.

Knowledge of Theoretical Models

The participatory approach in architectural design has much in common with community-based research activity, where the architect as facilitator can be equated to the researcher who meets and works with a community on a particular project. It can, therefore, be helpful for the professional team to be familiar with current theoretical models or multidisciplinary methodologies of community research. Architects' ready access to relevant research material could easily be facilitated through current bibliographies which should be on the shelf in every architect's practice and a standard reading item for students.

One research methodology that seems applicable as a tool for conducting the participatory approach successfully is Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).¹⁸ The time investment for a properly conducted PRA workshop - between three days and one week - might sound enormous, but the initial input will almost certainly pay off in time saved for conflict resolution and additional meetings later. PRA emphasizes, for example, the significance of identifying key role players in the community and a comprehension of such aspects as the history of development in a particular area, the respective community's understanding of the boundaries of that community, the importance of building trust through informal talks and spending time with the people, as well as the importance of knowing and being sensitive to cultural norms.

Ideas gained from PRA that are of obvious use to architects include the establishment of a seasonal calendar, which highlights recurring periods of the community's intense occupation with specific activities. Knowing and taking into account such periods can have a crucial impact on the progress of the project. Even understanding people's daily routines can be helpful when scheduling a workshop or an important caucus meeting. Likewise comprehending the socio-economic dynamics of a community can be critical. For example, while from an outsider's perspective a certain community might not appear to have any institutions, in reality a number of societies are likely to exist, particularly in rural communities, which, once identified, could be utilised in support of the project.¹⁹

Overcoming Internal Power Struggles

Community participation often leads to frustration and long delays because it is essentially a political process in which underlying internal power struggles surface unexpectedly, resulting in conflict and counter productivity. Prior to getting involved in needs assessment and discussion of the building project with the community, it is important for architects to prepare the ground by identifying, confronting and attempting to overcome existing frictions and internal strife.

The significance of this process is often underestimated and architects tend to believe conflict resolution lies outside their scope of ability and responsibility. However, material such as the training modules published by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (*Habitat* 1989) is readily available to help architects address the problem of conflict resolution and a number of very simple workshops have been proven to be highly effective in this regard. One such example, originally developed in the United States, is *A problem-seeking process*, a workshop folder produced by Shelagh Nation, Educational Facilities Consultant at CSIR in Pretoria. CSIR has refined the workshop and adapted it to the specific South African context, using a hands-on approach based on familiar, readily available and inexpensive materials. Nation has conducted the workshop herself with great success, involving other architects and students from Pretoria University.

If the architect is not willing or able to conduct the workshop personally, any person from within or outside the community could be entrusted with the task. Consisting of an easy-to-follow and entertaining step-by-step process, the material allows the workshop to be conducted by anyone capable of reading basic English. The person does not need to be educated but should be perceived by the community as being neutral and respectable. According to Nation's experience, the workshop should only be run in the presence of all stakeholders and it is of crucial importance to find consensus rather than settling with majority decisions. The person conducting the workshop should be seen as unchallenging and somewhat lower in the hierarchy (preferably a woman with children), who must be able to discover subtle signs of dissension, and specifically address those individuals to prompt an answer or opinion from them. While Nation agrees that ideally a certain amount of skill, which can be taught, would be helpful, she insists that the workshop can still be successfully conducted without those skills.

Grassroots Need Assessment

Accurate need assessment can be a difficult task given the lack of shared concepts and social gap between architect and client community. Community participation is an essential prerequisite to accurately determine the client community's needs, even if an architect is approached directly by a group of people with a specific brief.

In his study 'A decision support system for architects based on participatory tools for community design', Shubhagato Dasgupta (1996) systematically describes methods or tools for need assessment informed by his research in the field of rural housing in India. The methods are based on observation, interviews and participatory interactive games, which are easily comprehensible,

entertaining and conducted with very simple and inexpensive requisites. All of these methods, which blend the academic traditions of architectural research, social research and participatory appraisal, have - according to Dasgupta - been tested in the field and then further revised.

Although these games specifically relate to housing, they could easily be modified for use in different contexts. The benefits of these games are not limited to an accurate need assessment; they provide an important opportunity for the community and the professional team to get to know each other and establish mutual trust, for individual members of the community to discover each other's individual priorities, and they allow for a playful introduction of important terminology.

Architecture Workshops with Children

As discussed above, most of the problems experienced with the participatory approach result from the client community's lack or inadequacy of education. While it can be hoped that the younger generation will emerge with more basic skills and knowledge from a redefined post-apartheid education system, schools remain unlikely to introduce children to such fields as architecture. Filling this educational gap, architectural workshops with children can help prepare the ground for a more effective involvement of informed community participants in the future.

Shelagh Nation, assisted by a group of student volunteers from the Pretoria School of Architecture, occasionally conducts one-day workshops for standard eight to ten pupils from disadvantaged schools in surrounding townships. During this seven-hour workshop the children learn how to select a site, they determine a brief for a community building, produce basic sketches and finally even construct a model. Once the process is set in motion by the facilitators, the children regularly get very enthusiastic and easily sustain the dynamic. Nation points out that the progress achieved within the brief period of time is far more rapid than even the university normally considers possible. The experience of this amazing enthusiasm in the task of planning and designing a building, which has prompted Nation to suggest the possible existence of a basic innate ability to build, or a human 'construction instinct', is corroborated by Rodney Choromansky from CNN Architects in Durban, who has conducted similar workshops with children.

The benefits of such workshops in terms of empowerment of individuals are immense. Shelagh Nation reports that the children glow with pride at their achievement at the end of each workshop and she found that they had not lost their newly-found confidence when re-visited later. Perhaps more importantly,

the child who has gained a basic knowledge about how to select a site and how to read architectural drawings will grow into an adult, who some day will be likely to sit on a community committee, where he or she will be able to make informed judgments and more responsible decisions about a prospective building project as well as helping others in the community.

Given the enormous benefit and the low cost in terms of personnel, time and financial resources, it is extremely regrettable that such workshops are not being conducted more frequently and systematically. Every architectural student throughout the country could easily perform the task with some initial guidance and even benefit personally from the experience. Students should generally be more strongly encouraged to get involved in voluntary outreach programmes and workshops like these should regularly be built into compulsory projects on third or fourth year level.

Human Resource Development

The greatest potential for an architectural project to become a vehicle of community empowerment lies in its ability to build capacity through skills transfer on a variety of levels. The actual training and teaching of basic architectural knowledge, organisational, managerial and technical skills currently takes place in different ways. Sometimes the funder provides a field agent to facilitate community participation, who, however, might not be qualified enough, requiring the architect's assistance. In other cases, members of the architectural team become involved directly in organising or conducting courses for selected members of their client community. Additionally, a number of training organisations throughout the country offer formal education and training courses.

Apart from a few exceptions, however, training is currently always focussed on and conducted in connection with individual development projects and dependent on the availability of material and human resources in each respective case. Cook (1995:294) also warns that not all training is empowering, but that training needs to respond to specific, accurately identified needs. To improve living conditions on a broader scale and enable members of disadvantaged communities to assume control of their lives, the provision of training and human resource development must be conceptualised on a broader and more systematically organised level. In the absence of suitable adult education facilities in many rural and township environments and considering that much of the content taught in workshops and training courses is applicable to a range of everyday life situations, training should not be restricted to a select number

of people directly involved with the building project but opened up to the broader community, until the availability of space and materials are exhausted.

Capacity building could also be made considerably more effective through improved communication and collaboration between various architects engaged in the same area, local training organisations and educational institutions. It would be beneficial, for example, to explore the possibility of pooling and sharing resources to provide a more efficient service for a larger number of people, to investigate ways of linking architectural students' projects with actual building endeavours, or of involving trained volunteers and students to assist with workshops and training courses. In this context it would be beneficial to introduce people to practical training manuals such as the *People's Workbook*, published by the Environmental and Development Agency (EDA)²⁰ (Berold and Caine 1981), which contains a section on building explaining on a very basic level supported by cartoons and easily comprehensible drawings how to select a site, how to make bricks, etc. A similar manual, illustrating conventional architectural terms and concepts, was developed by a group of students at the University of Orange Free State in the context of working with communities on the design of community centres (Corbett 1990).

Moreover, it is essential that mechanisms are instituted to properly evaluate the effectiveness of all training programmes. It should be understood that a mere participants' evaluation of the completed course - as it is currently done, for example, by the Built Environment Support Group (BESG) in Durban²¹, is absolutely insufficient in this regard. Only through regular visits to communities can the practical application of participants' knowledge be assessed. Any conclusive evaluation results must translate into immediate revisions of the course structure. To take this a step further, given the importance of capacity building as a pre-requisite for sustainable development, Cook (1995:294) suggests that 'we should make greater efforts to measure progress in human empowerment. Keeping indices of key variables which measure human capacity and performance will help us make informed progress towards a more sustained position.'

Conclusion

Many architects believe that the current emphasis on community participation is overrated - an extreme response to the total lack of consultation in the past - and likely to wane naturally in the future. Roodt (1996) points out that community participation in development has experienced a high failure rate throughout Africa in the past. Nevertheless, he agrees that a number of factors unique to

South Africa justify the current enthusiasm and optimism regarding the success of community participation.²²

Some of the architects interviewed point out that more standardisation (which pre-emptly community participation) is necessary in the interest of cost-effectiveness, quality standards and timely delivery. A certain amount of standardisation, however, is not necessarily conflicting with community participation if the old modular system is replaced by a partial standardisation that affects only certain functional units within the building, while all other parts, particularly the public areas, remain variables and allow for community involvement.²³

It must be recognised that people who focus on the 'waste' of time and financial resources implicit in an extended process of community involvement perceive community participation strictly as a step on the way to obtain a particular building - not as a means for community empowerment in connection with a building. To a certain extent community participation is thus an end in itself, conveniently attached to an architectural project, but with a distinct and important objective in itself, which must be acknowledged to take time and cost money.

While some architects have presumably always involved their clients in the development project, community participation on a larger scale is still a comparatively new experience for most professionals in South Africa and some of the problems encountered are clearly due to the architects' respective approaches and expectations. It can thus realistically be anticipated that a combination of more routine and changing attitudes on the part of the professional teams, more research and sharing of experiences, and hopefully changing socio-economic and political circumstances within the African client communities will lead to a more successful and efficient community participation process in the future.

As mentioned above, community participation is not the solution to the kind of problems that tear communities apart today, but it can make a contribution, even if the result is no greater than instilling a few people with confidence and a sense of self-worth. 'The positive spin-off far outweighed anything else: The builders grew enormously in confidence and capability. They helped each other and developed firm bonds of camaraderie which will endure' (Claude 1995:9). Many architects involved in community work will be able to corroborate, based on their own experience, this evaluation of a development project in Ndundulu by Dennis Claude. Keeping in mind that it sometimes takes nothing more than a few individuals - motivated, confident and equipped with specific knowledge or skills - to set a dynamic process of development and upliftment in motion, community participation can be one way of achieving this objective.

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NOTES

1. In many developed, industrialised European countries, for example, community participation in mass housing and urban planning is often a result of neighbourhood protest movements against the rationalist schemes of planners and developers in the 1960s. (Goodey 1981). An excellent summary of the various definitions for community participation is presented in the introduction of Farouk's (1996) recent thesis.
2. I am grateful to the following individuals who have shared their experiences with me (in alphabetical order): Rodney Choromansky, architect in Durban (CNN Architects); Vito Coppola, architect in Durban; Andre Eksteen, architect in Pretoria (Ball de Villiers Architects); Gabriel Fagan, architect in Cape Town; Roger Fisher, architect in Pretoria and lecturer at the University of Pretoria School of Architecture; Revel Fox, architect in Cape Town; Rodney Harber, architect in Durban and lecturer at University of Natal Durban School of Architecture; Michael Liebenberg and Janina Masojada, architects in Durban; Thembeke Myeki, community committee member, Gugulethu Community Centre; Shelagh Nation, architect and Educational Facilities Consultant at the Centre of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in Pretoria; Henry Paine, architect in Johannesburg; Gideon Scott, architect in Cape Town; Eustice Sediti, architect in Cape Town (CS Studio); Warren Smit, Senior Researcher at Built Environment Support Group (BESG); Carin Smuts, architect in Cape Town (CS Studio); Xolile Somdaka, Co-ordinator, Gugulethu Multisport Complex; Heinrich Wolff, architect in Johannesburg (Jo Noero Architects).
3. Interview with Carin Smuts, 7.2.97.
4. The building won the ISAA Award in 1995. Cf *Architecture SA*, 1995, November and December.
5. Interview with Xolile Somdaka, Co-ordinator, Gugulethu Multisport Complex, 10.2.97.
6. Interview with Thembeke Myeki, Community committee member, Gugulethu Community Centre, 10.2.97.
7. Compare the case of Rodney Harber's Mbazwane Resources Centre in a remote area near the Mozambique border: 'The empowerment generated by the experience was demonstrated by the committee's latest achievement in applying for funding and laying over 100km of water reticulation using the resource centre as a base' (Slessor 1995:43).
8. Gideon Scott explains that part of the IDT funding for the clinic buildings was allocated to the supply of components used by the volunteers to continue their work, such as small book keeping courses or desks and stationary for their room. Interview with Gideon Scott, 12.2.97.
9. Gideon Scott, for example, explains the benefits of his extensive involvement with the community as follows: 'It makes everything so much happier. People ... are really happy with the building, because they know they've chosen the colour, they've chosen the floors, we've been to the showroom and we've seen all the different vinyl...' Interview with Gideon Scott, 12.2.97.
10. The study refers to the Sparth Community Centre (opened in 1985) at Sparthbottoms, a mixed neighbourhood of whites and Pakistanis near the centre of Rochdale. The experience in Sparthbottoms between 1981 and 1985 suggests lesson from which others working in

multi-ethnic areas could usefully learn. Although there is an increasingly large body of published work on anti-racism and the necessity to develop anti-racist policies and practice in community work, there are few case studies and practical accounts of how such work can be done.' (Habeebullah et al 1986:2).

11. Interview with Eustice Sediti, 7.2.97.
12. Interview with Carin Smuts, 7.2.97.
13. Interview with Carin Smuts, 7.2.97.
14. Interview with Janina Masojada, 24.1.97.
15. For a list of publications see back page of Habeebullah (1986).
16. One example of such research is Buckle (1995).
17. 'Participatory planning is based on the consultative process being used at every level, effectively it decentralizes power, this would radically alter the building contract as it exists in most countries and is thus resisted by most conventional architects world-wide. ... Also due to their past colonial heritage, most African countries have had the imposition of a western form of building contract on all forms of construction activity in the formal sector from colonial times to the present day. These factors continue to influence the economic direction and power relations structure of architecture in Africa in the 1990s' (Uduku 1995:24).
18. Methodologies of Community Research', Prof. Peter Ewang, University of Zululand; one-day workshop at the Human Science Research Council, Durban (25.3.1997). See also Chambers (1992).
19. This important point also underlies Nene's (1982) study on 'The role and potential of black women's voluntary associations in development', who concludes that Black women's associations with their first hand knowledge and experience of their particular community's needs, can play an important role in development.
20. EDA is an organisation, started in 1977, which works with small village groups on development projects in the field of agriculture, water supply, education, health, etc.
21. Interview with Warren Smit, Senior Researcher at BESC, 4.4.97.
22. 'The major difference between South Africa and the rest of Africa, it is argued, is a long history of organised struggle against a repressive regime which has built up a strong heritage of local level organisational capacity and local level participation which will not easily disappear, as has been a tendency in many parts of Africa' (Roodt 1996:320).
23. Interview with Gideon Scott, 12.2.1997. Scott, who has built a number of clinic buildings in townships around Cape Town, was at that stage working on such partial standardisation plans for government funded buildings.