

X (1)

UTOPIA ON TRIAL, AGAIN: RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ARCHITECTURAL ASPECTS OF SCHUBART PARK AND IMPLICATIONS FOR 'DIGNIFYING' ITS SPACES



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Introduction

- Schubart Park is a modern high-rise public housing complex in central Pretoria, built by the former Department of Community Development in 1977
- Purpose: to present research findings about residents' attitudes towards Schubart Park and to make conclusions and recommendations for 'dignifying' its spaces

Contextual discussion

- Modern(ist) architecture
- Underpinned by idealist / utopian ideas
- Principles and aesthetics include:
 - Functionalism
 - Simplicity
 - Reductionism
 - Community
 - The present
 - Permanence
 - Precision
 - Conformity
 - Abstraction
 - Distinctiveness

Contextual discussion (continued)

- Le Corbusier linked modern architecture with urban planning - 'super block' concept
- Increasing urbanisation and city rebuilding after World Wars – rapid development of complexes
- Ronan Point (UK) – gas explosion
- Pruitt Igoe (USA) – dilapidation
- Residential dissatisfaction and anti-social behaviour
- Defensible Space (Newman – 1973)
- Design Disadvantage (Coleman – 1985)

Contextual discussion (continued)

- Successful implementation in Singapore
- Postmodern reaction – architecture must be regional, local and particular
- Earlier research at SP showed 'associative' interaction and place perspectives (1985)
- Perspectives of a multi-cultural South African community in a post-apartheid / postmodern era?
- Implications for art and design projects?

Research method

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| ■ Perceived environmental quality index (PEQI) | ■ Self completed instruments with pictures |
| ■ Environmental psychology | ■ Attitudinal / demographic / socio-economic data |
| ■ Semantic differential scales | ■ Random sample = 20.8% (254 respondents from 169 units) |
| ■ Bipolar adjectives | |
| ■ Environmental Description Scale | |

Research method (continued)

- Resident profile (2000)
 - Female (62%)
 - White (66%), Africans (24.3%)
 - 21-35 Years old (49%)
 - Afrikaans (73%), English (6%)
 - Married (37%), Divorced / separated (17%)
 - Living with children (61%)

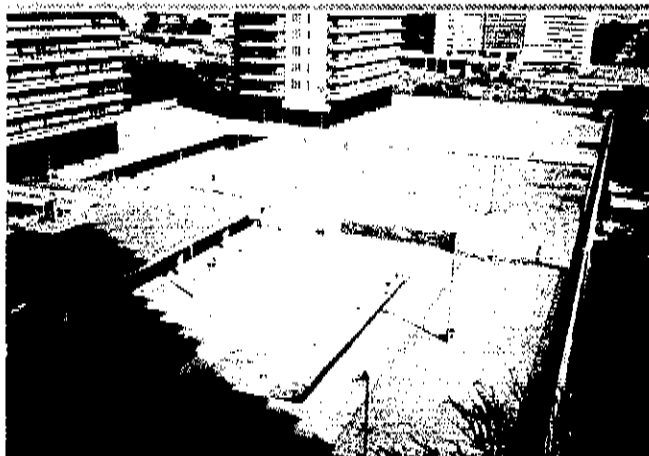
Description of Schubart Park

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| ■ Self-contained complex | ■ Noticeable deterioration since the nineties |
| ■ Four high rise buildings | ■ Influx of poorer households |
| ■ 813 Units | ■ Social distress and stigmatisation |
| ■ Podium level with recreational facilities | ■ Lack of proper funding / administration and maintenance |
| ■ Basic shops, community hall and parking | |

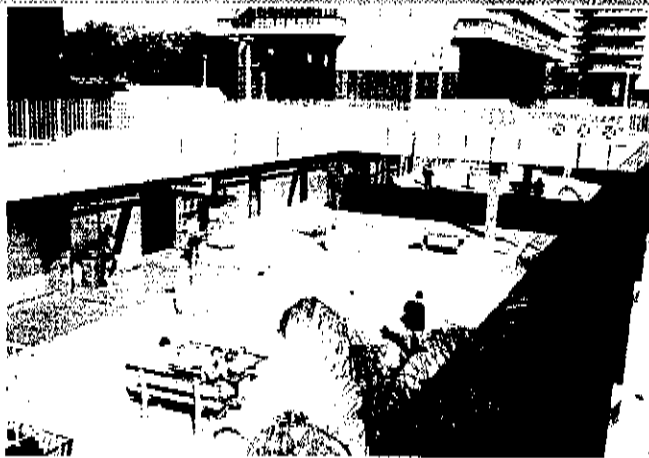
FLAT BLOCKS



PODIUM LEVEL



INTERNAL SHOPPING FACILITIES



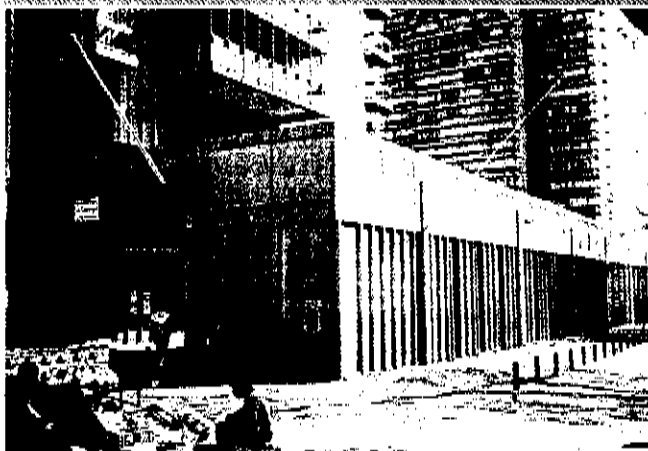
COMMUNITY HALL



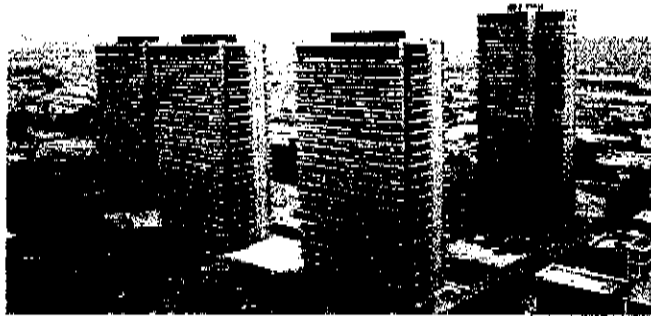
MAIN ENTRANCE



STREET FACADE



LAYOUT



SURROUNDING AREA



Findings

- Overall mean = 4.6 (1(pos.)-7(neg.) point scale, I.e. slightly more negative attitude towards complex
- All components had negative means, except 'layout' – neutral
- Community hall had most pos. mean with adjective 'useful'
- Main entrance had most neg. mean with adjective 'public'
- *Rational planning / practical utility* evaluated positively
- *Appearance / density / ease of access* evaluated negatively

Findings (continued)

- Statistical sig. difference between two groups:
 - GROUP A: Mostly Africans / Coloureds / have children / low-income / short term tenancy = *less negative*
 - GROUP B: Mostly Whites / no children / middle income / long-term tenancy = *more negative*
- Group B reaction against changes and emergence of Group A?

Findings (continued)

- Contrary evidence from qualitative interviews: residents, especially from Group B, actually have very positive perceptions of the housing type and very negative perceptions of *social issues*
- Romanticised memory of young middle income people from suburbs aspiring to live in Schubart Park because of close proximity to employment and inner city night life

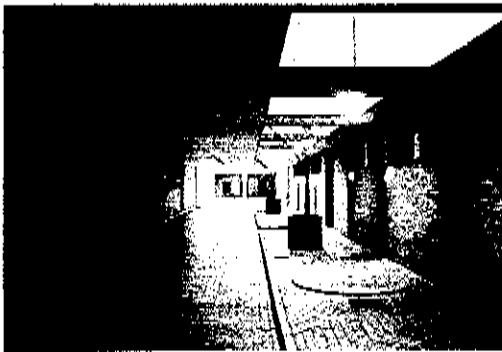
Conclusions

- People's perceptions about architectural aspects of shared residential spaces are clouded by their perceptions of *social issues*
- Research should lead to a proper understanding of historical / social contexts by triangulating qualitative and quantitative methods

Implications

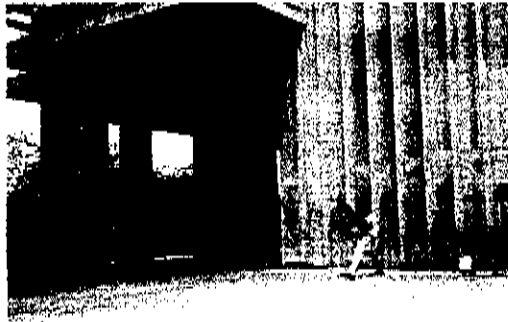
- Positive perceptions about orderliness, rational planning and practical utility (*housing type*)
- Negative perceptions about appearance, density and ease of access (*style / scale / security*)
- Gap exists for art and design projects to improve spaces in complexes like Schubart Park. How?

Implications (continued)



- Relative enclosure useful for place- or collective identity (defensible space)
- Numerous public & private spaces to express collective & private identities

Implications (continued)



- Large open & enclosed spaces for greening, landscaping and additional recreational facilities
- Extensive facades / wall surfaces for visual displays – contained to balance complexity with simplicity

Implications (continued)

- Businesses inside complex can be drawn into projects to fund and sustain them
- Existing facilities, such as the community hall, can be used for community participation in projects
- Should art and design projects be a priority given the extent of social problems? Can projects focusing on security and renewal lead to better 'dignified' spaces for residents at Schubart Park?