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Resuscitating roots restoring and documenting oral culture in Mozambique using architecture & mnemonics

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Abstract

Mozambique's culture is predominantly an oral culture. This means that it is a culture that perceives, receives and gives through hearing and speaking. Cultural values and norms are not written down or recorded in any way but are passed on from generation to generation through storytelling and verbal teachings, using the various local dialects.

Most of the people who comprehend and use local dialects belong to older generations. The passing on of cultural heritage to younger generations has been a challenge. As a result, there has been a neglect and loss of culture and traditions especially in younger generations. Mozambique has a lack of cultural activities which cater for a diverse public and have an educational component to it.

This research studied how Architecture can promote the process of remembrance of an oral and sensorial culture through sensory experiences and mnemonics in order to restore, document and transfer it to future generations. This research was an informant for the design development of a Cultural Centre which promotes the process of restoration and remembrance of a forgotten culture as well as the process of learning languages. The material used conduct this research was gathered through readings, interviews with anonymous participants, personal observations and personal knowledge obtained during the years that I lived in Mozambique.

The Cultural Centre is formed by four components: the performance space, the interactive museum, the learning areas and the research spaces. All the cultural performances are recorded and then taken into the interactive museum as an exhibition as well as into the research areas where they are studied and documented. From the research area it is then taken into the learning spaces to be taught and passed on. These learning areas also cater for cultural activities which encourage active participation while learning.

This research has showed that the nature of Mozambican culture creates a need for gathering and interaction spaces which allow for informal and formal activities to take place. These kinds of spaces are provided in the design, as well as green open spaces which are lacking in the area where the site is situated. Younger generations will be able to learn and practice their culture and maternal languages, and people who have never had an opportunity to learn how to speak and write in Portuguese will be able to.

Public schools can benefit from my building proposal as well as benefit it. The educational system is becoming increasingly more academic orientated resulting in the neglect of culture and creative activities that promote culture. This has been working against Mozambican culture and should be addressed as well. Sensory experiences such as smell, sound and visual access have been integrated in the architectural language of the building in order to trigger memories related to cultural heritage in the building users. The spaces within the building were designed to encourage the building users to engage, both directly and indirectly, with the activities offered in the Cultural Centre as well as to share experiences and memories with each other.

The site is located in Maputo, more specifically in *Zimpeto* which sits on the outskirts of Maputo city. It is situated in between a formal market and an informal market. Next to the informal market there is a

bus rank that brings people to Maputo from the Northern rural areas. The site is accessible from a main road that leads directly to the city.
This research served as an informant on how a building can be a tool in the process of restoration and learning of languages and an oral culture.