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Umamkhulu Place: a place for orphaned and vulnerable children

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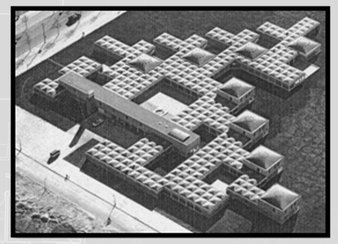
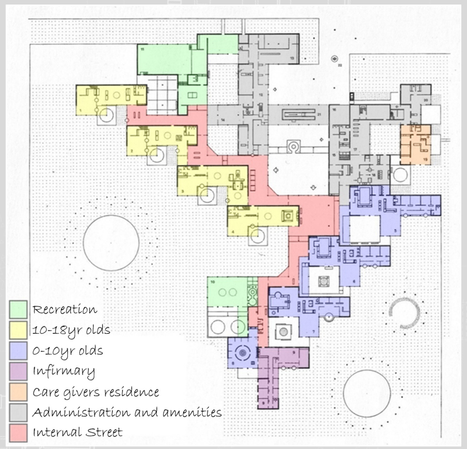
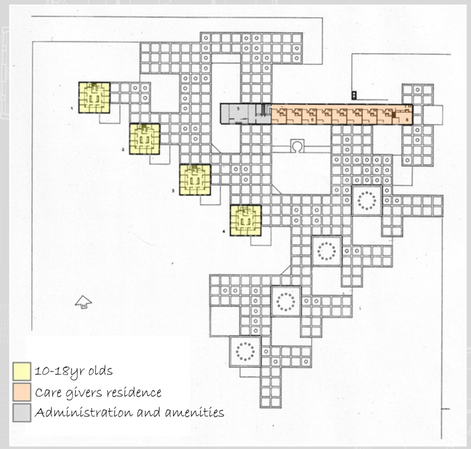
Aldo van Eyck's Orphanage



Aerial view of the Orphanage
Van Eyck, Amsterdam Orphanage
Netherlands, 1960-61
(Strauven 1996:14)



Spaces emerge off the internal streets
The younger children are placed on the ground floor on the East side and the older children on the West side with access to the first floor dormitories
Ground floor plan (Strauven 1996:5)



Grid of domed roof spaces and first floor dormitories and care givers residence
First floor plan (Strauven 1996:6)

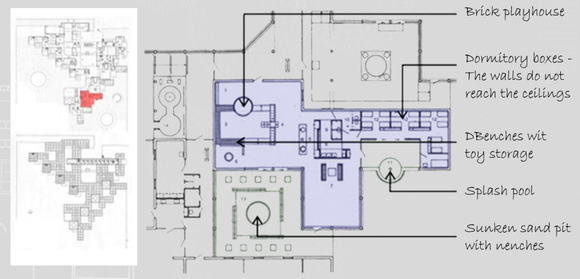
"A house must be like a small city if it's to be a real house; a city like a large house if it's to be a real city. In fact, what is large without being small has no more real size than what is small without being large. If there is no real size, there will be no human size." (Strauven 1996:11).

To do this, he unified the orphanage under a roof of small and large domes. The small domes form a grid that extends across the entire building so that the overall pattern can be read at every point.

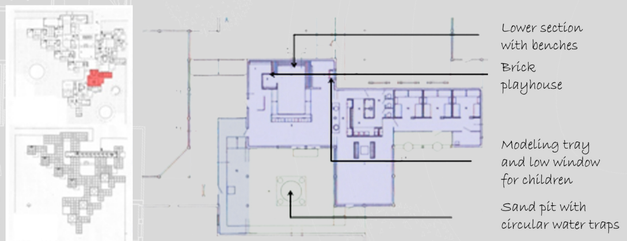
The idea of grid creates a consistency throughout the design where all other elements suggest diversity and individuality.

The theme of diversity is most evident in the way the residential units are designed. The two types of units were based on the age groups of the children living there and were conceived as "dwelling houses" with a variety of individual interiors and layouts, numerous play houses, little kitchens and cosy corners.

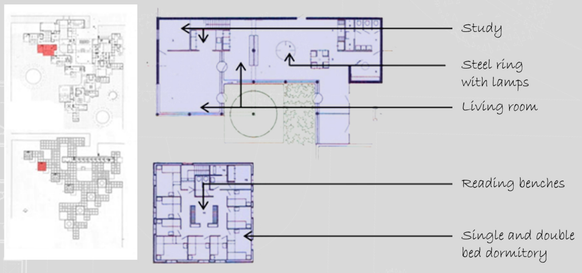
The focus of the inner court is a circular seat marked by two lamps, from it the settlement fans out centrifugally. It is the fixed point from which decentralisation is developed and delineated. The inner court "provides the initial impulse for the two interior streets, which branch out in contrary zigzag movements to give access via interior and exterior courtyards to the various units." (Strauven 1996:16)



2-4 year old department (Strauven 1996:23)



4-6 year old department (Strauven 1996:25)



14-18 year old girls department (Strauven 1996:25)

One of the ways van Eyck used to make the Orphanage more like a home was to house young and old on a familiar footing. He divided the one hundred and twenty children into eight groups; each of these groups would have contact with the other groups with the entrance hall large enough for group games. The design incorporated a horizontal arrangement of the children according to their age groups, the groups were ordered 0-2 year olds; 2-4 year olds; 4-6 year olds; 6-10 year olds; 10-14 year old girls; 10-14 year old boys; 14-18 year old girls and 14-18 year old boys. The groups were ordered this way because each group, and from puberty, each sex has its own needs and wishes, therefore it became necessary to give them appropriate facilities. The emphasis was on domesticity and cosiness.





The orphanage also makes use of elements like pure geometry and 'streets' to connect spaces and ideas. Internal intermediate spaces not only connect the residential units but also link the internal streets to the outdoor spaces.

Sparrow Homes

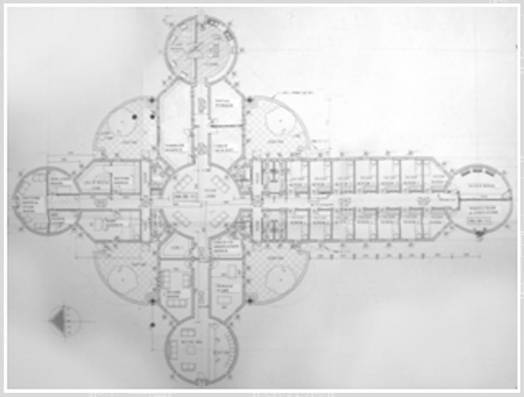


Sparrow Rainbow Village,was to be a low cost scheme because of the quick building time and the technique that did not require scaffolding. The expenses were also minimized due to the dome shape not requiring gutters, water would be able to run down the 'sides' freely and around the protruding arched doorways and windows.

It provides a hospice, housing and a teaching centre to educate the public about HIV/AIDS.

The domed village takes on the appearance of a traditional African village (at times it has been described as space age); this idea is seen in the use of the Ndebele colours and patterns on the craft village

There were not to be any centralised courtyards because the grounds were large and open to nature, the emphasis was on the "Go out and live!". This motto was very important to her idea of large open spaces, she mentioned that if you internalise courtyards the sick do not go out and experience life.



Plan of the Hospice

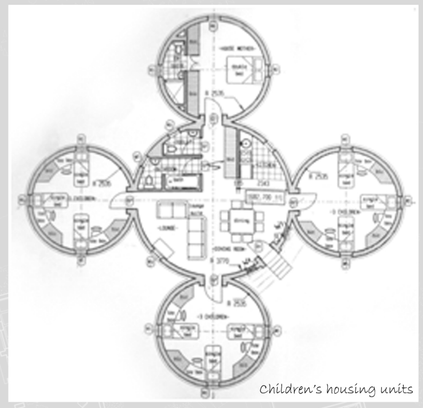


The hospice and the large garden area



The Hospice coridoor

The hospice is designed in the shape of a cross; there is clear access through the building across the width with most of the amenities along this axis. The central dome has been elevated to allow light in from above. The circular shapes of the domes and vent at the apex allows infected air (like the TB virus) to be circulated up and out. The long axis is dedicated to housing the sick and dying in small rooms off a central corridor .



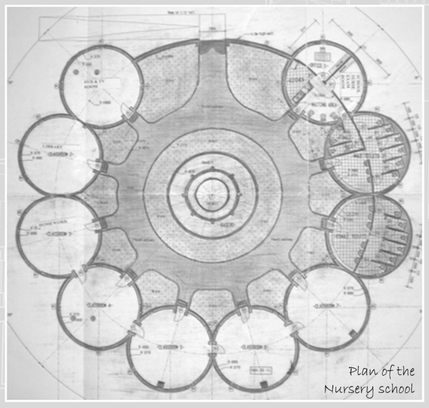
Children's housing units



The children's housing units



The housing uses the domes to set out living spaces. These houses are for orphans who live in group foster care as a family unit with a house mother. Each house consists of five domes, the large dome being designed for the living room, kitchenette and bathrooms and toilets. The four smaller domes are the bedrooms, one dedicated to the house mother and the other three to twenty children. Each house has its own piece of land for a vegetable garden. This same housing typology is used for the adult housing.



Plan of the Nursery school



Nursery school play yard



Nursery school class

The nursery school is the only section of the facility that has its own private courtyard. All the surrounding classrooms face toward the central playground and all the classrooms are linked internally for maximum communication between the different age groups.

Aldo van Eyck's Orphanage is designed with the idea of a house as a small city, Spaces are linked together and are focussed around courtyards. Elements fit age and gender, creating a comforting environment that pays attention to physical and emotional needs.

By providing spaces dedicated to age and gender, it creates an environment that demands change and splitting of bonds formed in dormitories. Once the child reached the appropriate age they would be moved to a new environment, split from the people they have been living with to form new bonds. Even though the spaces are all linked by internal streets and large internal spaces, the children are still split from their orphan family units

The Sparrow Rainbow Village focuses on forming a foster family in a house environment. The architecture is not focused on the age or gender of the child; rather it focuses on their health and 'family'. The architecture is outward facing with intent to avoid courtyards.

The buildings peculiarity of shape however draws a certain amount attention and stigmatisation. It is understood that if you live there or go to the clinic there, that you have HIV/AIDS and due to a still widely misunderstood virus.