


This document is  
submitted in partial  
fulfilment to the award  
of Masters Degree in  
Architecture at the  
University of  
Witwatersrand,  
Johannesburg

**“SOCIAL HOT SPOT”**  
A youth center in Hillbrow



To God the Almighty for being there when i needed Him  
To Mother and Father for believing in me  
To Ositah Egbuche for all his support

I would like to sincerely express my gratitude to the following for their continual support, patience and encouragement that has led to the realization of this thesis.

Professor Paul Kotze, Professor Lone Poulsen, Mr Mohamed Munchi, Mr Gerrald Chungu and Mrs Amadi Beatrice



## Declaration

I, Douglas Reginald So-owuna [0418782f], am a student registered for the course 'Master of architecture [professional]' in the year 2007. I hereby declare the following:

I am aware that plagiarism [the use of someone else's work without permission and/or without acknowledging the original sources] is wrong. I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have stated explicitly otherwise. I have followed the required conventions in referencing thoughts, ideas and visual material for others. For this purpose, I have referred to the Graduate School of Engineering and the Built environment style guide. I understand that the University of Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my own work.

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Signature



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# Chapter 1

**.Introduction**

**.The concept of Sustainability**



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## Introduction

Youths are described by Mandela as valued possession and without them, there is no future. Their needs are considered to be immense and urgent. Among these needs are desire to be accepted, wanting to belong, have a place of their own (Hertzberger, 1999, p. 12). Architecture SA has identified that the most overwhelming urgent crisis facing mankind according to Buchanan (2005) among other is the degradation of the natural environment. Youths in this study face the compound challenges of social and natural crisis described above.

'But officer, I haven't done anything wrong!'

Those were the words the author, found himself lamenting and pleading as the police threw him into the back of their truck with those thought to be hardened with crimes, for trying to do some sort of research without his passport in Hillbrow. While in the back of the truck and attempting not to make eye contact with anyone he looked through the window... saw a lot of people, young people... doing nothing, which got him thinking;

How can these youths be gainfully assisted? Should building of social centres be able to distract the profitable? Are the existing social centres actually being used by the most needed? Are the centres built for the youth specialised or should they be made more specialised than they are? Can Africa really afford to waste youths? Are there any governmental obligations and commitments to these youths? Or are they the sole responsibility of their families, churches, youth groups and perhaps parent staffed programs? What can really engage these youths and keep them constructive and productive in the society?

Youths in Hillbrow are the subject of this thesis concern. Hillbrow according to Leggett (2003) has one of the highest populations in the Southern Hemisphere with an estimated 50, 000 people in an area of 10.28 square kilometres. The actual count is believed to be much higher due to squatters and undocumented migrants left uncounted in official census reports. Hillbrow is renowned for immigrants and crime. Sixty seven percent (67%) of the population of Hillbrow are youths between the ages of 15-35. This population justifies the choice of the recipients of this thesis proposed intervention.



## Background of the study

Hillbrow is a port of entry in the city of Johannesburg. It is the first stop for people arriving from the rest of South Africa and Africa before moving on to other, more stable areas. Most of these immigrants successfully move to a better place while some sadly do not. Most of them are youths now trapped in these congested area with no where to go and nothing to do.

## Context of the design

Several projects have been designed by both government and non-governmental organisation including churches for youths in South Africa. Majority of these are recreational, sports and better still, skills developmental and located elsewhere other than Hillbrow. Even where they exist or any is found in Hillbrow, none are comprehensive enough to cater adequately for the needs of these groups of youths that have been in transition in every area of their lonely and helpless lives on the streets of Hillbrow.

Considering these crisis and waste of human resources therefore, the design problem is a youth facility with combined recreational, educational and counselling functions for the youths living within the inner city area of Hillbrow, Johannesburg.

The aim of this thesis therefore is to design what the researcher called 'Social Hot Spot' which will bring together facilities needed for holistic development of the youths in Hillbrow.

## Objectives

It is expected that the centre will provide opportunities and facilities that would lure, intrigue and inspire the youths to the resistance of the street life attractions, drugs and prostitution, through the provision of this social hot spot.



It is also believed that the effective use of this project will provide youths with opportunities to be gainfully employed and constructive within the society.

## **Research Methods**

Data that informed the thesis intervention were collected using: documentary evidence, semi structured interviews, observation and informal conversation. Literature was reviewed in form of statistics from 2001 census and other official published documents. These data were collected as insights into the living conditions of the youths in Hillbrow.

Twenty youths from Hillbrow comprising of both males and females were randomly selected. They were intercepted and sampled for the informal conversation. Most of them were residents while majority visit and squat with their friends in their homes and on the streets of Hillbrow.

The researcher interviewed some adults residing at Hillbrow. It was Semi-structured interview, allowing for open-ended responses that are flexible enough for the researcher to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The use of semi-structured interview also provided the researcher with the opportunities to probe the respondents on issues that are not very clearly responded to.

Finally, the researcher spent time on the streets of Hillbrow observing the living styles and conditions of the youths. This assisted in triangulating the information gathered from the youths and adults enabling a comprehensive intervention being proposed by the thesis. Respondents were assured of anonymity and as a result, names of the respondents were excluded in the reports





## Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured into eleven (11) sections with the following breakdowns:

Chapter 1

Gives overview sustainability and focuses on the social aspects as this constitutes one of the major issues in which the youth of Hillbrow face daily.

Chapter 2

This presented the historical development of Hillbrow.

Chapter 3

In this chapter, the demographic profile of the youth in Johannesburg, the Inner city and Hillbrow are examined.

Chapter 4

Analyses Hillbrow and looks at some of the social problems the youths face

Chapter 5

Here the needs of the youth and the intervention are made known.

Chapter 6

Examples of youth centres are studied

Chapter 7

This chapter shows an investigation of Hillbrow, site selection and analysis

Chapter 8

The development of the program

Chapter 9

Exploration of the design concepts

Chapter 10

Design drawings

Chapter 11

This chapter shows how green the intervention is




## Conceptual framework

The concepts that inform the framing of this project are embedded in the concepts of social sustainability, the youths and the degrading Hillbrow environment. The youths hanging around or living in Hillbrow are faced daily not only with the degraded environment but also social conflicts which led to the earlier description using words like 'waste, unprofitable and un-gainfully employed'. They are exposed to social ills such as prostitution, robbery, drugs and the likes. This section will attempt a brief exposition into the concepts of sustainability with particular interest to social and economic component which are the focus of this thesis.

Defining the thesis direct area of interest among the youths in Hillbrow is better understood from the concepts of Sustainability according to Sutton in <http://www.green-innovations.asn.au/sustblty.htm#what-is>. Sutton believes that sustainability is complex and people feel uncertain about what it means because it has to be applied to something before its meaning is clear. For the purposes of this study, I will opt for the survival concept of sustainability which captures the interest of this thesis and defines the thesis design. The most basic level of sustainability according to Sutton (2000) is survival sustainability. This involves the maintenance of ecological life-support system, the social capacity to solve problems and the economic capacity to meet subsistence needs of the population.

Based on the above, two levels of sustainability are worth thinking about. One is the maintenance of basic sustainability and this is usefully referred to as survival sustainability. The other relates to the maintenance/restoration of the normally expected quality of life (ibid). At this point, it is important to state that social and economic sustainability which interest this thesis focus on capacity of the youths in Hillbrow to solve serious problems, maintenance of decent social quality such as vibrant community life, improving social quality, subsistence, maintenance of decent standard of living and improving standards of living. Facing up to their scale and seriousness, Architecture SA (2005) noted that it is clear that achieving sustainability is the central challenge of our times. Architecturally, buildings inevitably impact upon and transform the environment, and because they both express and shape our culture, buildings and their architects have a great role to play in the pursuit of sustainability (Buchanan 2005).



Highlighting on the components of survival sustainability, Buchanan explains that contemporary buildings and patterns of settlement are major contributors to the environmental crisis. Architecture SA (2005) believes that the continuation of what we consider to be a comfortable and civilised form of human life depends on us as individuals and collectively as mankind, changing our ways rapidly and radically so as to have a much more gentle impact on the planet earth, by cooperating rather than competing with its natural processes. The answer to the above depends on the concept of 'Green' agenda considered by Buchanan (2005) as a tool in resolving the crisis of transforming all aspects of human settlement, including new building construction and retrofitting existing stock to be as 'green' as possible.

The theory of 'green' agenda which reflects social-economic concerns is considered by renowned architects such as Buchanan as that which will re-ground architecture in real, immensely serious and urgent issues, and reconnects it with personal values such as reverence for nature, that are emerging with renewed force. This study is intended to contribute to the above architectural virtues in the lives of Hillbrow youths. This implies that for everybody, green buildings also herald and enhanced quality of life, despite being devised to limit wasteful consumptions. Together with being consistent with changes in human values, this according to Buchanan is perhaps the most compelling reason for building green.

Hillbrow is both Johannesburg's heart and its underbelly. Its physical centrality, exceptionally high densities of housing and revolving demography sustain its cosmopolitanism. But Le Roux, (2004) noted that Hillbrow is also considered to be dangerous, with high levels of crime and abuse. Such violence is a massive social cost incurred in some societies because of inadequate investment in social capital, which can be the most severe constraint to sustainability.

In his book, 'Bleakness and Light', Morris (1999), a senior lecturer in the Sociology Department, the University of Witwatersrand states that Hillbrow has always had the reputation of being a neighbourhood on the cutting edge, a neighbourhood populated by more deviant segments of the society and a locality where many dubious activities occurs. This perception is due to its enormous concentration of residents- the common view is that it is the most densely urban space in South Africa.



Rick & Mario listed four guiding principles that direct socially sustainable work as follow:

1. **Equity** - This is when there is a fair distribution of resources among communities to facilitate full participation and collaboration. Inequities can be minimized by recognizing that individuals and groups require differing levels of support in order to flourish, and that some individuals and groups are capable of contributing more than others to address disparities and promote fairness of distribution. Lower levels of disparity in members always results in longer life expectancies, less homicides and crime, stronger patterns of civic engagement and more robust economic vitality within the society.

2. **Social inclusion and interaction**- This is where the environment enables individuals to celebrate their diversity and react and act on their responsibilities. Social exclusion limits the levels of involvement and impedes optimal healthy development of individuals and the community as a whole.

3. **Security** - People need to feel safe and secure in order to contribute fully to their own well being or engage fully in community life.

4. **Adaptability** - Adaptability is a process of building upon what already exists, and learning from and building upon experiences from both within and outside the community.