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Vertical gymnasia: creating a new dynamic in the city of Johannesburg

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Vertical Gymnasia

Creating a new dynamic in the city of Johannesburg

Abstract

It is not uncommon, that reference to sports goes hand in hand with notions of health, community and fun. Participation in sports activities has the well-known benefits of contributing to the well-being of the individual and society. During recent years, sports has adopted a more welfare approach with the ability to effect social good in communities. Specifically, some of the qualities that make sport a desirable culture in the community are: stronger more connected communities, inclusion of minority groups, healthy youth development, urban environment rejuvenation among a list of many more. In light of the above mentioned benefits, multi-disciplinary sports facilities in particular become important in providing opportunities to engage in sports activities for the community, available to people of all ages, gender and economic status. Hence, their importance in communities today.

Cities, however, present a conundrum in relation to sports activities. On one hand, sports facilities in many cases take up a significant amount of land due to the requirements of spaces for different disciplines of sport, particularly of top sport which has strict standards and sizes of space. On the other hand, cities are densely populated areas that are highly built up, this has led to major land constraints. As a result, land is allocated to activities that are perceived to be directly more economically profitable. These circumstances often relegate sports facilities on the peripheries of cities, in doing so limiting access to these spaces by city dwellers and users due to proximity. The few sports facilities left in cities particularly central business districts often fitness gyms are mono-functional, meaning they do not offer a wide enough range of sports activities to accommodate various sporting needs and desires and therefore not inclusive. Urban street sports, such as parkour, street basketball, street soccer to mention a few are evidence of a lack of sports spaces. These activities spring up in residual spaces of the city such as rooftops, alleyways and closed street sections.

In light of the aforementioned reasons this research report proposes a vertical sports facility as a strategy for developing a sports facility in a dense city context. Thereby, countering the need for more land and as a prototype design this can be replicated in many parts of the city to suit population densities. Additionally, this research also addresses the context of Johannesburg city, particularly the Newtown area. Johannesburg city has been described as a decaying city. Essentially, a city that is fragmented, physically, by perceived or actual boundaries, socially and economically through the division of people, by race and financial status. This makes the intervention of a sports facility all the more relevant to catalyse urban regeneration in Newtown and the greater extents of Johannesburg city as well as to foster social cohesion and inclusivity.

By

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