



SLUMIFY

Qualifying Informal Urban Densification

reflections

on the why and how



Contents

REFLECTIONS

Research vs. Design	10
Lab vs. Student (Theme)	12
Lab vs. Student (Methodology)	14
Project vs. Context	16

When one deals with a problem as big as the global housing shortage, and resultant proliferation of slum environments, one is morally obliged to produce work which can essentially help and potentially solve the problem.

This thesis deals with a manner of appraisal, which may help avoid costly mistakes and white elephants, such as the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication (figure 14), within slum development, but in no way solves the problem of slums as a whole.

One needs to realise that one thesis may not be able to save the world, but may be able to enact change that affects a small percentage of the population. The importance of limitation in research is incredibly crucial. It is more valuable to solve a small problem comprehensively, than to solve a large problem badly.

This thesis forms a small start to a lifetime of work, dealing with informality in a responsible and sensitive manner. Due to time limitation, many aspects were not comprehensively analysed, leaving space for an abundance of future work on the subject.

REFLECTION

Research vs. Design

The research advocated a qualitative appraisal methodology when dealing with slum upgrade projects. Whilst the research phase was concluded with a set of guidelines to inform the process of intervention, the true measure of the success of the research will be the success of a feasible design solution.

The intention of the research was to find a means to qualify a slum, meaning that the research and design is intrinsically linked. Figure 1 depicts the workflow projection for the project. The research results in a set of guidelines explaining means of intervening in a site. The guidelines are then utilised to qualify Kliptown Informal Settlement as a means of site analysis.

The application of the guidelines in Kliptown informs the design process, forming the baseline off which to design and make decisions. The tools allow one to gain perspective on systems, spaces and materials within the site, in order to formulate a means of intervention.



Figure 1 was generated in order to understand the workflow and research goals in relation to the design. The research was designed in order to inform and involve the design process. The figure was created in order to distinguish between the research and design components.

Figure 1 Research vs. Design (Author, 2015)

Lab vs. Student (Theme)

I chose to explore lab as it allowed me to frame my own topic. A graduation project in my opinion is a very personal endeavour, which is why I chose to deal with the pressing issue of informal urban densification in my home town, Johannesburg.

Having grown up, and received the vast majority of my architectural education in South Africa, a third world country, I developed a fascination with the value of the informal. Although it may seem crass to consider the “value” of poverty, I am fascinated by the human being’s ability to provide for themselves in very real terms.

The theme of quality is one which was inspired by the site I chose. Across the railway line from the settlement, you find a monstrous public space, coupled with a 5 star hotel, designed in the name of urban upliftment.

The development in my opinion depicts the huge problem one notices in the way urban slums are upgraded or relocated. The efforts ignore the preliminary reason for the existence of slums, being that they provide cheap housing and a means to earn a minimal living.

The research therefore dealt with the idea of qualifying urban informal densification in order to formulate a base for meaningful slum upgrade processes.

The freedom to develop my own theme allowed for a great deal of explorative pursuits, and henceforth a great deal of time was lost to the research process.



Figure 2 Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication In Kliptown Soweto. (Author, 2015)

Lab vs. Student (Methodology)

As before, Explore Lab allowed me to formulate my own methodology and means of research. This allowed me to cater specifically to my chosen theme.

In order to “qualify” a slum one needs to employ a qualitative appraisal methodology. In order to formulate this methodology (or guidelines as it has been previously called) I utilised an inductive approach resting on the premises put forward by qualitative research methodologies.

The research is therefore multi-method in focus, with a naturalistic approach to its subject matter. The approach taken is that of grounded theory. The researcher therefore does not begin with a preconceived theory in mind, but with an area of interest; allowing the theory to emerge from the data. The tactics undertaken are descriptive (noting patterns and themes), analytical and explanatory. The research process includes three distinct phases. The first phase is that of theoretical familiarisation. In order to conduct thorough research it is important to familiarize oneself with the theoretical construct that supports the goal.

The second phase is context specific site investigation utilizing contemporary participatory research tools extracted from the theoretical research. The literature research informs various methods such as transect walks, informal surveys, model building amongst others in order to formulate an inventory of tools for on site community appraisal. The third phase was the development of the guidelines.

The design process forms the next step, following on the research. The research informs the design, and the design in turn iterates the research.

The approach of Explore Lab allowed me to substantiate my own means of research, meaning that I could elaborate an appropriate methodology.



Figure 3 illustrates the interaction on site, which is phase two of the research. The tools were tested in practice on site in Kliptown Informal Settlement in Johannesburg, South Africa. The photographs were taken as a means to document the process of investigation.

Figure 3 Community Participation in Kliptown (Author, 2015)

Project vs. Context

It is important to reconfigure the way of thinking about urban slums. Instead of being considered a major urban problem in third world countries, one needs to realise their essential role in the continual functioning and growth of the nation's economy.

Slums provide a means of living which allow rural populations to transition into urban life- providing cheap labour. The problem rests in the fact that slums should only act as transition spaces- meaning that the poor quality of life experienced by slum dwellers should essentially be temporal. The slum, and the surrounding context needs to provide opportunities for the slum dweller to progress and earn a better life.

The project is located in Kliptown Informal Settlement, a slum in South Africa. In South Africa, the government provides each eligible slum dweller with a number, which entitles them to an RDP house, provided by the government. There are many problems with this scheme. One is that the shack that this person left behind is inhabited by a new family thus perpetuating the cycle.

To break the cycle one needs to realise and augment the importance of informal living in third world society, but how does this relate to an architectural project?

The proposal is born from the necessity to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants, by upgrading the quality of the housing. People without training do not necessarily know what they want, or how to achieve their desires. This provides a gap for the architect to intervene.

The proposal is for a facility which produces building materials and solidifies and secures the railway station node by activating manageable and meaningful public space.

The intention is to fill the “employment” gap in the society by designing a people based means of construction, which instils skills in a socio-technical manner in order to provide slum dwellers with the opportunity to progress and earn a better life.

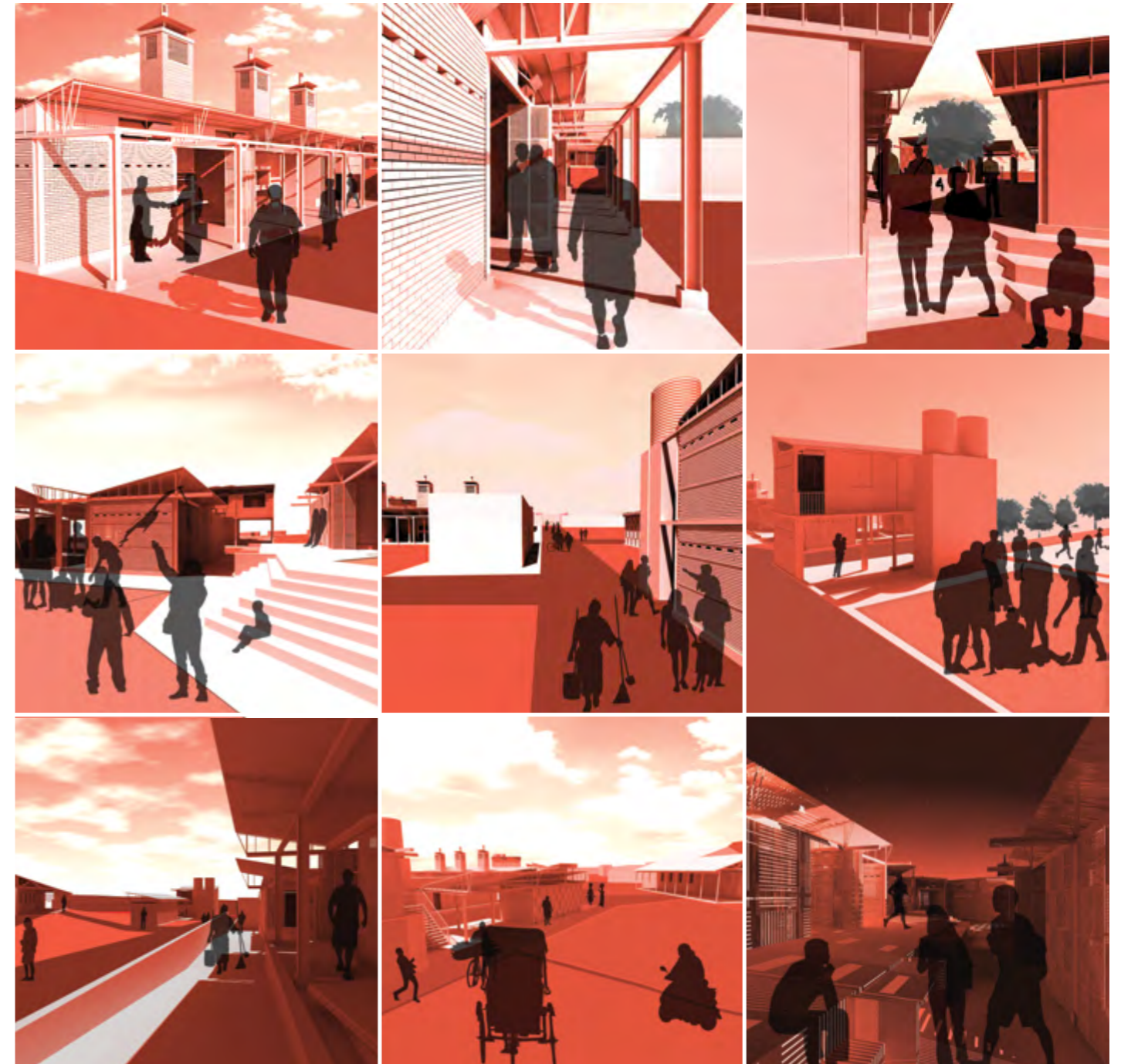


Figure 1: Project on site (Author, 2015)

