

Debbie Whelan

**PUBLIC PLACE MAKING IN AN APARTHEID ERA TOWNSHIP
IN SOUTH AFRICA: CIVIL SOCIETY ACTION IN THE ABSENCE
OF THE STATE**

Keywords: Civic space, community development, township development, Mpophomeni.

**TWORZENIE PRZESTRZENI PUBLICZNYCH W OBSZARACH MIEJSKICH
ERY APARTHEIDU W AFRYCE POŁUDNIOWEJ: AKTYWNOŚĆ
SPOŁECZEŃSTWA OBYWATELSKIEGO WOBEC BIERNOŚCI PAŃSTWA**

Słowa kluczowe: przestrzeń obywatelska, rozwój społeczności, rozwój obszarów miejskich, Mpophomeni.

Introduction

Contemporary South Africa is notorious for its recent history of enforced segregation along race lines, fulfilling the requirements of a suite of twentieth century legislations which together were referred to as apartheid. These legislations commenced with the Native Land Act of 1913 which restricted the means by which African people were able to own land, and culminated in a number of 'Group Areas' legislations which were promulgated in the 1950s and 1960s. These stipulated separate development, and advocated for the removal of African people and other people of colour from areas subsequently deemed as 'European' or 'White'.

These legislations are fundamental backgrounds in the story of Montrose House, and its recent transformation into the Mpophomeni Eco-Museum as they contextualise the tragedy of parts of its history, and at the same time present a stark contrast of self-serving governmental agendas in the lack of support in the promotion of a history which has had as important a role to play in the unlocking of the apartheid regime as perhaps did the Solidarity Movement in Gdansk in Poland.

This paper discusses a community project that has been in existence in various forms for over a decade. The site is at Mpophomeni, inland of KwaZulu-Natal, a densely populated province situated on the eastern seaboard of Southern Africa, and inhabited largely by people belonging to the Zulu ethnic group. The community project is centred on the establishment of an eco-Museum, and the associated civic space that is developing around it, and which is also constantly evolving.

This paper will begin by discussing the history of Montrose House as a good example of a vernacular nineteenth century farmhouse in the Natal Colonial context, then continue by describing the site as the centre of a new township to house African people in terms of the Group Areas legislations as mentioned above. It will elaborate on the manner in which townships were laid out in order to maximise the access of the authorities and simultaneously limit the means by which a localised civil society, which could present a threat to the authorities, could develop. It will supplement the history of the township by describing the SARMCOL strike in the 1980s as this event has had an indelible effect on the residents of the township. Indeed to some extent it forms the core of the role of the new Eco-Museum in the former farmhouse as a significant means by which reconciliation in the community is being carried out today. It will then describe the project and the manner in which it is gradually being considered as a central part of the community of Mpophomeni, through civil action and not political will. Please note that an extensive historical background is necessary in order to present the full context of the house in history, and offer some understanding as to the manner in which it is, perhaps, embraced by the community of Mpophomeni as an element of their history and social continuity.

Importantly, the paper notes that whilst the development of community space such as this is not necessarily consistently sanctioned by the authorities for a variety of reasons, a quiet stasis has occurred in its establishment in the last few years, indicating community participation and a perceived sense of ownership by the community as a community space. This indicates to some measure that the provision of community space can be sanctioned by the community over time, with the realisation that non-partisan projects are occurring and that public participation may exist in a number of different forms.

1. Preliminary synergies

South Africa and Poland have travelled similar journeys to attain freedom and democracy. The oppressive regime of apartheid in the former, subjugated people based on racial lines, whereas communism ruled removing essentially human traits such as identity and choice. Both populations, emerging out of centuries of domination, followed by oppression, had to 'learn' the *minutiae* of democracy. Certainly, for South Africans, this was made more difficult by the proportions of those with necessarily changed lifestyles from an essentially rural, preindustrial society, to one of urbanised society with imposed values and cultural systems. Further, the forced relocation of people from rural and marginal areas into specially constructed 'townships' is a vital piece of the background to this paper. Both of these changes were made within five years of each other: The success of the Solidarity Strike and the fall of Communism in Poland in 1989, and the transition to a democratically elected government in South Africa in 1994. It was in between these two transitional moments that the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (UNCEP 1992) was signed, en-

trenching into late 20th century governance the fundamental potentials of public participation and capacity development (Principles 9 and 10) in the manner by which citizens have a right to determine their living space and their environment. These principles were actively part of the (Non Governmental Organisation) NGO sector working in South Africa during this period (online 1)

Significantly, this paper was initially presented in the Solidarity Museum in Gdansk, Poland; a space embracing the role of the Trade Unions in bringing change to Poland in the 1980s, which at the time served a stark reminder that all is not well in the land of the Rainbow Nation, and that the new democracies of Poland and South Africa now travel significantly divergent routes. It was also presented in the month following the '#Rhodesmustfall campaign, aiming at unseating heritage, literally and figuratively, which fundamentally altered the landscape of heritage in South Africa, bringing to the fore its' dislocated and misunderstood context (Whelan 2015).

Whilst the core of this paper discusses public place making in a modernist, apartheid era 'township' fundamentally in a post-apartheid South Africa it focuses on heritage and its visibility or invisibility as the core of the project is a building which embodies white history, both Dutch and English. Like many developing countries a continuous challenge to heritage in South Africa, is infrastructure and development (Whelan 2015). Whilst much of this is 'developer driven' aiming at baseline profit, much pressure also comes from the public sector in the guise of provision of services, housing and employment potential. The days of the NGO working with the operational model of capacity building and public participation as entrenched in the *Rio Declaration* have passed, and, despite the practises being written into the new South African Constitution (1996) as well as governmental legislations, these key components of 'development' appear to have largely been abandoned, become vehicles for financial gain, or politicised.

2. Montrose House: the building and its history

Montrose House is the old farmhouse which formed the centre of a nineteenth century 'Voortrekker'¹ farm named *Rietvallei*, granted to a significant local personality, one Andries Pretorius at the end of the 1830s. It is situated around 15 kilometres outside of Howick in the Natal Midlands, some 100 kilometres from the coast. Common to land grants of the time, it originally consisted of approximately 6000 acres and would have at first been used to run cattle.²

¹ The Voortrekkers were farmers of Dutch origin who had moved up into the interior of the country after the British took occupation of the Cape Colony in the late 18th century.

² It is suspected that an outbuilding dates to this period as well as the earliest part of the farmhouse.

In 1855 the property was purchased by Dr. William Addison, a Byrne Settler³ who came from Addington Park in Kent. He is considered as being responsible for the building of a significant part of the homestead, which is situated in a valley, maximizing the shelter of the hill behind it as well as the access to a small stream running close by. Addison's son, Charles Brabazon resided in the house, and after his death the property was sold to Charles Lund and ES Goodwill in 1911. Lund was a colourful character, serving the community in a generous fashion to the extent that he died during a Natal Provincial Council meeting on which he served. His son Guy Lund took over the property in 1923 after this event, and he and his family lived in the house, farming maize and dairy, for many decades until it's expropriated to form the African township of Mpophomeni in order to fulfil the requirements of the Group Areas Acts which legislated for separate residence and separate development.

Today it forms a rambling collection of buildings, including the ruins of a dairy and a now retrofitted mill building, situated in some remnant garden space on the edge of the densely settled township of Mpophomeni. Associated with it are a number of outbuildings which in the past formed part of a functioning farm. These buildings form the primary layer of built infrastructure which characterizes the core of the project.

Architecturally, Montrose House is a good example of a veranda farm house constructed of random-coursed stone as well as coursed stonework under a multiple-ridged complex corrugated-sheeting roof. It has a veranda to two-and-a-half sides. There are significant amounts of yellowwood, a local hardwood derived from natural forest in the area used for veranda posts, windows and doors, as well as being constructed of dolerite some of which is dressed. Sandstone quoins are found to the corners. The house has been subject to the usual accretions and additions in its history. Brian Kearney considers the house as "a fine example of a midlands farmhouse in the Natal veranda style. The floor plan develops along an extended axis and has veranda to three sides. The spreading corrugated iron roofs are of a complex form and shelter stone walls' (Kearney 1988: 20). These roof ridges have louvered gambrel sections, with Late Victorian affectations such as finials to accentuate these ridges. Furthermore, there is a large Georgian Wired glazed skylight buried deep within the ceiling space on the northern side.

Importantly, the house stood in a farmhouse garden, with banksias rose, palm trees, Norfolk pines and hydrangeas. Remnants of this garden are still extant, although much of it has returned to grassland. It is in very good structural and material condition considering its lack of recent maintenance, and, together with appropriate interpretation, can be used to convey a message as to

³ A number of settlement schemes were promoted by land speculators in the mid-19th century. One of these speculators was Joseph Byrne, and people that came out to the Colony from England under his aegis were known as 'Byrne Settlers'.

the endurance of old buildings, in addition to the manner in which they should be looked after.

It is important to note here that this house as a physical, built form is a product of the colonial era, and as such would generally, in a post-apartheid environment, especially in a township, be considered as a legacy of the oppressor (Coombes 2004. Tomaselli, K and Mpofu, A. 1997). However, the expected lack of respect from the settled community is not evident and rather, the manner in which the community have embraced the space tells another story.

The next section will briefly describe the formation of Mpophomeni township within the general context of apartheid era townships, and situate the fate of Montrose House within this era of the history of the site.

3. The development of Mpophomeni township

As noted earlier, Montrose Farm's close proximity to the town of Howick was to be a major factor in ending the active farming by the Lund family. In the early 1960s, the town was compelled by legislation to remove those people of African origin from living within their urban precinct, theoretically reserved for white occupation, and relocate them to an area more distant from Howick as part of the policy of separate development, in order that it could implement the notorious Group Areas legislations. Most of these residents worked for a company known as British Tyre and Rubber (which later became Dunlop). The site was chosen just after World War I, largely because of its proximity to the Howick Falls, a waterfall with a significant cascade on the uMngeni River, and thus useful to drive hydroelectric power. Labour came from surrounding farmlands, and, whilst the original labour force worked for only six months of the year, after a time the economic power of British Tyre and Rubber in the town of Howick was so great that the Town Board allowed for settlement of their labour within the town limits, in a 'black belt' township known as KwaMevana. A number of possible locations for the intended township were considered, randomly choosing Montrose Farm after nearly 32 pages of meeting record.

As a consequence, the property was expropriated by the authorities through the Howick Town Board, and the Lund family required to relocate. Rather than lose his life's work on the farm, Lund shot himself in the house. The site of Montrose House is thus poignant- not only were the black families of the people living in Howick resettled in the new township of Mpophomeni, constructed some years later, deeply affected by the move, but too the white family members that suffered from expropriation in the name of the apartheid policy of separate development.

It was people from KwaMevana who were the intended settlers for the new Mpophomeni township, and this inextricable link between the town of Howick, the Rubber factory and the new settlement of Mpophomeni began to be enduring and, ultimately, tragic.

After Lund's suicide, it took some years for Mpophomeni to be established as an African township. When it was built, it followed the rubric of apartheid township planning, interrupted in places by the undulating grassland on which it was built. Jacob Dlamini, speaking of Katlehong, where he grew up, noted that this was a 'scientific township'. 'It was laid out in a grid, with streets that intersected at 90° angles, followed beat curves and ended in T-junctions. It was divided into 32 rectangular sections, each named after a local luminary (Dlamini 2009:44). He continues by noting that the idea of a 'scientific township' was one coined by urban planners in the late 1940s, as a new government initiative which improved on the slumlike condition urban blacks were living in at the time (Dlamini 2009:46). Typically too, as a late era township, there was little cognizance paid to the creation of urban streetscape or public realm – the streets themselves *were* the public realm. Moreover, the creation of public spaces was not in the ambit of the planners: they were more concerned with accommodating numbers. Facilities were not grouped, which meant that clinics, schools, churches etc were all distant from each other. Lisa Findlay and Liz Ogbu note: *'Nor was there any "public space." While there was a great deal of unoccupied land in most townships, it had no civic, social or cultural role. It truly was a "no-man's land," with no owner, no rules, no maintenance. Footpaths to transit connections often crossed these weed-infested fields, but they were dangerous and strewn with trash. What little civic interaction occurred in the townships during apartheid happened in people's yards, in churches or in the marketplace'* (Findlay & Ogbu 2011)

As was with the recommendations of township planning in South Africa at the time, the houses were all stock examples, on similar sites (Calderwood 1964). Significantly, in Mpophomeni, much effort was placed in the planting of an avenue of plane trees, a landscaping initiative that certainly sets it apart from its contemporaries.

Indeed, the landscape was important: the map in the figure above clearly shows the township as being situated against steep ground, whereas the bulk of the actual intended housing was on a shallow slope. This means that in terms of strategy, given the main road running around it to the north, the policing of the new township was controlled, to some extent by the landscape forms, allowing for one way in and one way out.

When it was, in the early 1970s, Montrose House was used as the 'Township Manager's' residence (hence the note on the above map 'Bantu Affairs'), and as such formed the kernel of a series of ancillary buildings that supported the operations of the township, largely to do with housing the vehicle fleet and machinery such as tractors. Many of these buildings remain, and have been included in the greater scheme of the project. However, tragically perhaps, these buildings suffered from dire abuse and lack of maintenance since the assumption of duty of the new government in 1994: electrical wiring was ripped out, elements of buildings stolen for reuse, scrap metal and firewood,

and some became the hideout for goats and ponies. Some had fires lit in them, perhaps by errant children or squatters. The house itself, at least, retained some of its dignity as it was re-appropriated as the Municipal building for the area of Mpophomeni.

4. The SARMCOL Strike

At the beginning of the 1980s, trade unions were still peripheral organizations in the political structure of the country. Furthermore, Africans were not allowed to register with these trade unions. In 1973 Africans could register under an umbrella General Factory Workers Benefit Funds, which was a cover for what became the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU). After the 1979 Wiehahn Commission, African Trade Unions were legalized as long as they had registered themselves in terms of the Labour Relations Act. MAWU did not do so and was challenged by Sarmcol in this regard. It took them until 1982 to register (Bonnin 1987:185).

Debby Bonnin notes that the agitation at SARMCOL was being reflected in similar community struggles at Mpophomeni. She says that 'It is possible to hypothesise that organization and struggle in either sphere strengthened organization and struggle in the other. It is argued that this action in Mpophomeni was building a sense of community solidarity which the Sarmcol workers could call on to support their struggle against BTR Sarmcol (Bonnin 1987:208).

Essentially, long standing disagreement between management and the Metal and Allied Workers Union resulted in a wildcat strike by the workers at BTR Sarmcol.

The next section will interrogate the possibilities that exist in order to highlight the progress of the Montrose House Eco-Museum as a community based project in what is becoming a civic precinct.

5. The framework of possibilities for the authorities and the public

As indicated earlier, the South African Constitution, formed by public participation, has as core values issues entrenching public participation in the governance process. Clause 152 records that the '*The objects of local government are to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.*' This indicates the actions of the public as voters, citizens, consumers and end-users, and particularly '*As organised partners involved in the mobilisation of resources for development via for-profit businesses, non-governmental organisations and community-based institutions.*'

Mpophomeni is situated within the Umngeni Municipality, which arches across largely rural lands, and centred on the town of Howick. Its motto is '*People Centred Development - Intuthuko Kubantu*' (Umngeni Municipality 2016). For the Municipality, however, little appears in its 2016 Local Development Plan which indicates any level of commitment to public participation and

community development. This is despite the *The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000* which deals extensively with the requirement of public participation. Chapter 4 of this Act recognises that the Municipality is compelled to:

- *develop a culture of community participation;*
- *put in place mechanisms, processes and procedure for community participation;*
- *communicate information concerning community participation;*
- *allow for public notice of meetings of municipal councils;*
- *allow for admission of public to meetings;*
- *allow for communications to local community;*
- *allow for documents to be made public;*
- *allow for official website;*
- *allow for regulations and guidelines;*

Ironically, the Umgeni Municipality has as its motto ' *People Centred Development – Intuthuko Kubantu*' (Umngeni Municipality 2016)

6. The Montrose House Eco-Museum project

The impetus for the repair project dates to 2007 when Mr. Frank Mchunu of the Zulu-Mpophomeni Tourism Experience approached the author for assistance in assessing the condition of Montrose House with a view to its refurbishment as a community-driven eco-museum. The intention at this point was to merely carry out judicious repairs: it is vital to note that at this point we were conceptualizing at a small scale and concentrating specifically on the house itself. Funded by the Municipality, a document itemizing repairs and maintenance to the house was assembled, which was also categorized in terms of priority. The biggest issue besides general lack of maintenance and cosmetic repairs at the time was the prevalence of Cats Claw creeper (*Macfadyena*) an insidious exotic which is so tenacious that it had fresh growth inside the roof space. This had caused damage to floors, plasterwork, stonework and pointing in parts of the house.

The layers of post- 1970 official occupation were also patent: old air-conditioning boxes inside the house with massive chiller units outside, perished piping, electrical accretions creating a nest of which rats would be proud. A massive walk-in safe also graced the front of the house – spaces inarticulately dry-walled, and pin boards situated in every room. Over the years the spirit of 'house' had left, and been replaced by the *accoutrement* of 'office'.

The report prepared for the Municipality was the first step in what has become a long protracted experience, unnecessarily prompted by the same authority. It was carried out through the auspices of Mr. Frank Mchunu, the driver of the Zulu Mpophomeni Tourism Experience (ZMTE) and myself as a volunteer. Funding proposals were put together and priced, and sent off to Lotto, the National Lotteries Fund. Lotto responded some three years later, awarding us

R 500 000.00 (then worth about € 50 000.00). It is important to point out at this juncture that this building is still officially the owner of the site and the buildings, although it has been leased to ZMTE for the purposes of establishing an Eco – Museum for a number of years.

Initially, this limited funding restricted the scope of works; the roof structure had to be rebuilt, and the corrugated sheeting replaced. This was not part of the original assessment, in which the roof had been checked, but found to be largely sound with little evidence of termites or borer. However, the Municipality as the owner compelled the project to employ a structural engineer, who recommended rather that the roof was under structured, and that it needed more substantial truss systems.

Whilst in a perfect world this issue could have been addressed more sensitively and more practically, decisions regarding the longevity of the roof had to be made, and its possible impact on future generations. Importantly, given the history of lack of maintenance, together with the robust environment, decisions had to be taken that benefited the building and its safety in these conditions. In addition, a lack of working capital meant that choices of economic rather than principle value had to be made, maximising the stabilisation and security of the house. This meant that trusses and purlins were replaced with more substantial members, as well as the employment of 'Gangnail' trusses, a decision with which the purist conservation community is not content. Again, the purist conservation community would insist on keeping the iron that was on the roof, which had been patched over the years. They would also advocate using new galvanized iron as an option, which had to be cleaned to strip the oil and carefully prepared. Both of these options were not possible due to context: the possibility of reusing the original patched iron was there, but the realities of the building not being maintained for the next twenty years also had to be factored in to the equation. Replacing with like was also problematic: the cost was much more prohibitive, in addition to which the process was long winded and exposed desirable materials unduly to those unsavoury elements of the township. Indeed, a large portion of the old iron removed from the roof was stolen from the veranda from under the nose of the security guard one weekend. Thankfully, the sheeting for the roof, Zinalume was donated by Safal / Safintra which extended the possibilities of repair to the timberwork of windows, veranda posts and doors. This sheeting, although not the iron of the purist's toolkit, was in a very similar S-profile and thus visually 'read' the same on the roof.

7. The site as public precinct

This tranche of funding was rapidly used up, much of it on repairs to doors and windows and the like. In the interim, the overall conceptualization of the single problem of the single house began to change, and the possibilities of the whole site became an opportunity. We began to conceive of the entire site, with all of its unrelated and dilapidated buildings as a whole, which led to exciting concep-

tions of the possibility of providing a real civic space for the people at Mpophomeni. Currently the apartheid planning together with incremental development split civic facilities, meaning that the theatre was distant from the clinic was distant from the taxis. This involved viewing the Eco -Museum as the central locus for a variety of other civic minded organizations, including properly accommodating a feeding scheme that feeds over a hundred small children a week, a space for artists in residence in a town in which there is an overwhelming enthusiasm for artistic expression, a possible coffee shop for local people and visitors to spend time in, a place at which local people can pay their water and their lights on a voucher system, but more importantly create a fenced garden precinct in which local people can come and barbeque on weekends, set up marquees for weddings and functions, and hopefully create a garden in which people will happily have wedding photographs taken.

Whilst much of this continues to remain a distant memory, some of these dreams were achieved with the injection of nearly R 2 000 000.00 (about € 200 000.00) in 2012 by the Department of Arts and Culture through the Provincial Museum Services Division. This was intended to complete the works to Montrose House, fund the construction of a perimeter steel palisade fence, and repair some of the outbuildings for reuse. The project felt that it was important to employ a principle agent to run the project, and for this we employed Mike Arnott, a retired quantity surveyor. This has possibly been the best decision the project made, as Mike Arnott's scrupulous attention to detail on a continuous basis has been a saving grace.

The first challenge was the provision of a fence. We innocently went to tender, happy to prioritise local, black entrepreneurs in the allocation of work, but at the same time fully cognizant of the need to remain professional and impartial. In the end, we did employ a local fencing contractor, who happened to win the tender on price, which, it was discovered, was wrong as he was largely innumerate. We could not reject his price for fear of bullying and sabotage of the project, and thus emerged Mike Arnott's truly greatest challenge: the project management of the fence. This was then challenged as the fencing contractor had no credit record, and the suppliers would not issue him material. After contingency plans were made, the fence was finally completed. The fencing contractor, however, did not understand the terms of the contract and was recalcitrant in completing the snag list for completion. On one occasion he parked his car in the precinct and removed the battery as protest in order to pay retention funds. Ironically, on the last leg of his finalizing the completion list, he left his car without the handbrake on. It rolled, slowly and gaily, into the newly completed fence.

As the fence was being completed, we went to tender on the repairs to ancillary buildings on site. The old house, being over 60 years of age, was required by law to be worked on by a heritage builder, and to this end, Andy Dawson

who had been working on the building from the beginning, had his contract extended.

The successful tenderer for the other buildings began well, but it emerged that the robust site environment in Mpophomeni compromised his attendance on site, as well as his ability to keep competent foremen. It was at about this time, that the major participation of the Municipality was required: bottles that were dumped for recycling needed to be removed, itinerant contractor dumping on site had to be remedied, consultation had to be entered into with regard to sewage disposal, treatment of runoff, some engineering concerns, the disposal of asbestos, and, most importantly, the replacement of the bulk electricity to supply to the site.

To this day, none of these queries have been adequately addressed, and scant assistance has been forthcoming from the Municipality with respect to their buildings on their property.

Despite this lack of municipal buy-in, the project continued with a number of unexpected hitches: perhaps the most alarming was the disappearance of the main contractor and the Municipalities insistence on the provision of a toilet for their pay - office staff, paid for, of course, by money that the project had to raise. This impasse delayed the project for another ten months, in which time we manage to raise another R 400 000.00 from KwaZulu - Natal Provincial Museum Services in order to construct the toilet to the afterthought whims of the Municipality.

This toilet is nearly finished. However, there is still no news from the Municipality as to when we can move their staff into the new building in order that we can complete works on the old house, and begin to set up the museum.

Currently, we have funding to complete the museum building, to carry out some basic landscaping, and to repair two of the oldest buildings on site. One such example is what the author suspects is the oldest building on site, colloquially named the 'Hideout'. This is of vernacular random rubble construction, with coursed river stone at the base in places. The walls internally are of mixed construction, some green brick, some fired brick and stone, and has, since its construction around 1845, had many different layers added. The floor was most likely stabilized with layers of cow dung and ant heap as in typical Zulu construction - currently it is covered with goat droppings and the haven of a prolific colony of weeds. The roof would have originally been thatch, and as with most settler buildings, would have been roofed with iron as it became more affordable and more easily available. This roof was on a structure constructed out of substantial Yellowwood trusses, with transverse members and purlins consisting, of what appears to be wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*). Wattle arrived in South Africa from Australia as early as 1838 with John Vanderplank (Bulpin ca 1959: 171). There were originally timber shutters on the single window opening, and much of the distemper covered plaster internally was mud

or slightly stabilised with lime. As in Figure 7, the last number of years have seen the corrugated sheet metal roof disappearing, the tie beams from the Yellowwood trusses being cut out, and further degradation of the roof structure due to fire.

The approach is to repair this building using as much of the extant material as possible in order to showcase the vernacular buildings of the early Dutch settlers, particularly aimed at the residents of Mpophomeni, many of whom perceive white settler culture within a specific and contemporary paradigm. As a space, it can interpret pre – industrial materials and their application, as well as beginning to debunk the myth that fired brick and concrete block are the only materials of any worth.

The intention is to thus repair like with like, using earthen plasters stabilised with a weak lime mixture for the internal walls, and to point the outside where necessary with same. Over the years, some of the building has been repaired with cement, and whilst it is ideally considered to remove this and replace with lime, in a climate with relatively high rainfall and driving rain, it is best to leave the material in place. Windows will be replaced with handmade timber shutters, the door will be replaced with like. It is intended that the floor be reconstructed with cow dung and crushed antheap, requiring it to be '*sinda*'ed or polished by a member of the community every couple of weeks.

A point of contention is the treatment of the roof covering. As noted, it would have originally been thatch, and whilst community members are fully in favour of its reinstatement, corrugated sheeting is more practical – it is less maintenance as well as safer in an area in which grass fires are common in winter. At the same time, constructing with thatch engages the community at a greater level, as this provides for ongoing maintenance in a culture in which women are traditionally thatchers. This decision, however, requires a carefully planned maintenance programme, and the funding to go with it.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this particular building is its aspect across the *vlei* or wetland, to a reasonably pristine hill, giving it a visual landscape that would have been part of the context of the original building.

Sadly for Montrose House, facing in a different direction, the original landscape across the *vlei* has, in recent years, been interrupted by the construction of houses. Whilst in the township itself the rules and regulations of urban areas regarding home construction within the boundaries of legislation, across the fence - line towards the *vlei* is land that belongs to the Zulu king, or *iNgonyama*. This land is administered by *amaKhosi* or chiefs, who often allocate land without due consideration as the immediate fiscal rewards are the primary objective. Draconian legislation pertaining to the protection of the wetland notwithstanding, houses have mushroomed in the last couple of years, being the beginning of a protracted court case for their removal and relocation. This is an issue in preserving an idea of the original landscape context in presenting the house

as an example of a late Victorian farmhouse within the grasslands of the Kwa-Zulu – Natal Midlands.

Conclusions

The Montrose House project in Mpophomeni is an important community – driven heritage project that does not rely on political rhetoric for its justification. This may explain why it is sidelined by the authorities on a continual basis, but at the same time this is not plausible as it contributes directly to service delivery and the improvement of the environment and amenity of township dwellers.

It is important to note that work on this project is community – driven, from the community up rather than a ‘top down’ imperative. This also depends on the coherence and like –mindedness of the community involved, and internecine squabbles can do much to scupper such projects. Luckily, the Montrose House Eco – museum project has not suffered such challenges on any scale as yet.

It is also iterative, growing with each separate tranche of funding, and as the realities and possibilities of the project become bigger, the scope of works becomes greater. This also means that work happens slowly, and the project grows systematically mutating as part of the community, rather than an immediate alien deliverable that has landed as a result of single – minded political whim rather than a coherent and gradual assessment of the changing needs of the community.

Whilst the academic conservation aspects of this project are perhaps the least important components of the project as a whole, it is important to ground the work in a conservation framework, but at the same time be fully cognizant of the challenges of the realities of the site, in order to best protect the old buildings, and prepare them for active and meaningful reuse in a very altered environment from their origins. The challenges of working within such contexts means that decisions have to be made to constantly mitigate against theft, vandalism, lack of maintenance budgets both now and in the future, and the ongoing operation of the precinct.

In order to do this, the philosophical stance has to be iterated: the means by which Montrose House was assessed, and the recommendations submitted were intended to provide guidelines for its repair, and appropriate reuse as a museum building. The intention was not to restore the house to a non-sustainable ‘former glory’, but rather to work with it appropriately in a sustainable and manageable manner, which the new end-users appreciate as well as the owners of the building, The uMngeni Municipality. This meant that the work undertaken was largely ‘repair’ than ‘replace’.

More important are the recommendations regarding the long term tenure and use of the building as it is these that minimize the maintenance and protect

it for longer. This also involves retraining of staff, and appropriate monitoring of items such as air-conditioners and heaters.

Land tenure systems also proved to be a challenge, as these variant perceptions mean that landscapes cannot be protected or conserved through the application of similar infrastructure legislations, but have to actively be negotiated between them.

At the same time, it is also vital to note that this approach provides an opportunity to showcase the repair and transformation of buildings to communities which exist with little cogent consideration of the past and its material products and processes, but also provide options: that old buildings may look old and may be in a state of disrepair, but this does not necessarily mean that this is the end of their lives. Thus, in a western world which is actively promoting recycling positioned against an Africa that has totally adopted consumerism and discard, this building can act as a point of reference for alternative ideas and approaches.

Indeed, this, the first Agora Workshop, intended to present different ideas of addressing public space and public participation, in order to contextualise challenges and broaden the scope for planning and built environment professionals to address similar issues. It is hoped that synergies existing in the post-Communist countries may raise means by which we in South Africa can begin to address similar background problems using different applied strategies that we have learned in the realms of public place and public place making.

Bibliography

1. Basu P., 2007, *Palimpsest Memoryscapes: materializing and mediating War and Peace in Sierra Leone. In Reclaiming Heritage: Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa*, (eds) F.De Jong & M.Rowlands, pp. 231–259. Walnut Creek. West Coast Press.
2. Bonnin D., 1987, *Class, Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940–1987: The Case Of The B.T.R. Sarmcol Workers*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal unpublished Social Science dissertation.
3. Braby, 188, *Natal Almanac and Directory*, Pietermaritzburg: P. Davis & Sons.
4. Bulpin T., ca1959, *To the Shores of Natal*, Cape Town: Howard B Timmins.
5. Calderwood D., 1964, *Principles of mass housing*, Pretoria: CSIR.
6. Coombes A., 2004, *History after apartheid: Visual culture and public memory in a democratic South Africa*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
7. Dlamini J., 2009, *Native Nostalgia*, Auckland Park: Jacana.
8. Dorning D., 1997, *Chimneys in the Cloud.*, Howick: Brevitas.

9. ICOMOS Australia, 1979, *Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance*, Burra:ICOMOS.
10. Findley L., Ogbu L., 2011, *South Africa: From Township to Town*, "Places Journal", November 2011. Accessed 03 Oct 2015. (<https://placesjournal.org/article/south-africa-from-township-to-town/>).
11. Kearney B., 1989, *Verandas in the mist- the architecture of the Dargle, Howick and Karkloof*, Pietermaritzburg, National Monuments Council.
12. Republic of South Africa, 1996, *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*.
13. Rosenthal E., 1981, *The SARMCOL Story*, Howick: SARMCOL.
14. Tomaselli K., Mpofu A., 1997, *The Rearticulation of meaning of National Monuments: Beyond apartheid*, "Culture and Policy" A Journal of the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and media Policy 8(3) 57–75.
15. Umngeni Municipality, 2016, *Umngeni Municipality Integrated Development Plan Review*, Howick: Umngeni Municipality.
16. United Nations Environment Programme, 1992, *The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*. Rio. <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=78&ArticleID=1163>.
17. Whelan D., 2014, *The challenge of community based heritage projects in an emergent democracy: A case study*. In. Eds. Amoeda, R, Lira, S & Pinhero, C. *Heritage 2014. Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Heritage and Sustainable Development*. pp 255-266. ISBN 978-989-98013-6-3.
18. Whelan D., 2015, *The complexities of heritage preservation in multicultural environments: identification, conservation and management*, In Eds. Amoeda, R, Lira, S & Pinhero, C. *Rehab 2015 - Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Preservation, Maintenance and Rehabilitation of Historical Buildings and Structures*. pp 693-703. ISBN 978-989-8734-07-5.
19. Online 1: <http://www.besg.co.za/about-us.html>, accessed on 31 August 2016.

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł opisuje obywatelski projekt, który jest obecny w różnych formach już od ponad dekady. Zlokalizowany jest w Mpophomeni, w głębi gęsto zaludnionej prowincji KwaZulu-Natal, położonej na wschodnim wybrzeżu Afryki Południowej. Jej mieszkańcy to głównie społeczności należące do grupy etnicznej Zulusów. Projekt skupia się głównie na stworzeniu Eko-Muzeum i towarzyszącej mu przestrzeni obywatelskiej, która formuje się wokół niego, nieustannie się rozwijając.

Artykuł rozpoczyna rys historyczny Domu Montrose jako dobrego przykładu wernakularnej architektury dziewiętnastowiecznego gospodarstwa rolnego w stylu kolonialnym prowincji Natal, po czym następuje opis lokalizacji jako centrum nowego obszaru miejskiego dla mieszkańców Afryki w kontekście przepisów Stref Grupowych.

W rysie historycznym artykuł odnosi się także do strajku SARMCOL w latach 80. XX wieku jako wydarzenia mającego duży wpływ na mieszkańców obszaru miejskiego.

W pewnym sensie nowe Eko-Muzeum w dawnym gospodarstwie rolnym faktycznie staje się ważnym elementem, poprzez który następuje dzisiaj stopniowe dążenie do pojednania społeczności.

Projekt ten jest uważany za centralną część społeczności Mpophomeni, która stała się taką za sprawą działań obywatelskich, a nie odgórnej woli politycznej.

Artykuł uwypukla również fakt, że mimo, iż przestrzenie takie jak ta, z różnych względów niekoniecznie są w obszarze zainteresowań władz, to jednak w ciągu ostatnich kilku lat po cichu usankcjonowała się sytuacja wskazująca na partycypację społeczną oraz specyficzny rodzaj społecznej współwłasności tej przestrzeni.

Powyższe wskazuje do pewnego stopnia, że własność przestrzeni społecznej może być usankcjonowana przez społeczność wraz z upływem czasu, poprzez świadomość, że takie projekty powstają i że partycypacja publiczna może istnieć w rozmaitych formach.

Information on the author:

Debbie Whelan, PhD,
Durban University of Technology,
Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment,
Department of Architecture,
E-mail: debbie@archaic.co.za