

CS STUDIO ARCHITECTS

EERSTE TREETJIES COMMUNITY CENTRE

LOCATION: KOMMAGA, NAMAQUALAND, NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE

DATE: 1986 - 1990

BACKGROUND

Kommagas is a rural village in Namaqualand, the famous flower area of South Africa. The village is located 100 km from the closest town, Springbok with the only access being dirt roads. At the time in Kommagas there was a high employment rate as most people worked on a nearby (60 km) diamond mine in Kleinsee (small sea). The other form of income and employment is farming. The settlement is often isolated due to floods. After various meetings with the executive committee of the local community organization "Eerste Treetjies" (First Steps), the brief for a multi – purpose community hall with a library, pre – school and skills training workshop was established.

The 5 000 residents of Kommagas originally formed part of various mission towns in the area. The village which has been likened to an oasis is situated in the centre of this vast landscape. Originally the nomadic herdsmen of this region lived in round huts made of young trees which were bent to form the structure while sack or animal skins were used for covering. Some of these structures can still be found in Kommagas. Most residents have started building

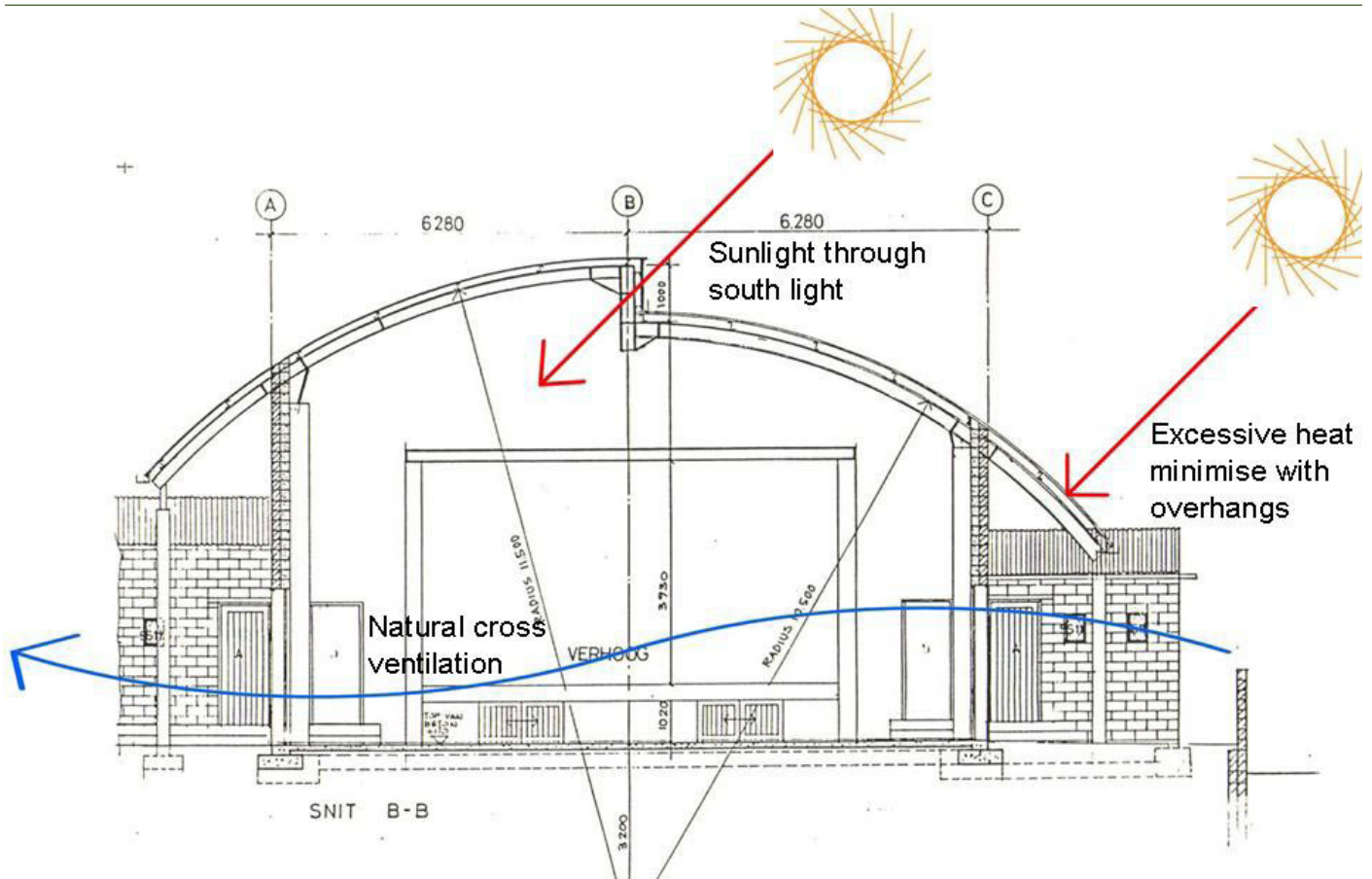
sink and block houses, using locally made blocks. The land is also communally owned and as with all the villages in these areas, land and water are two issues which cause endless conflict between residents and local authorities.

The site is centrally located within the village. As with many other rural towns, the roads are irregular and provides for an organic richness in the planning and layout of the town. A dried up stream with palm trees and other foliage along the embankment, gives the town the oasis like appearance within the semi-desert environment.

DESIGN

One of the main requests from the community was that the design should reflect the historical round hut vernacular of the area. The design therefore applies the "round hut" circular shape as an urban planning element which binds the three comprising buildings together. The archetypal shape is also formalistically expressed within section. There are large overhangs and shutters to alleviate the extreme heat which is characteristic of the summer months in this area.

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Construction of the building was a cultural learning process for both the professionals and the community alike. Local, unemployed labour was recruited to work with a local contractor. We assisted the community in purchasing all the building materials - excluding the blocks and cement - from Cape Town in order to save costs. All the blocks were therefore made out of a mixture of local River sand and cement.

Approximately 8 – 10 local labourer's worked to complete the project's first phase within a 12 month period. The acoustic wall hanging at the back of the interior hall is designed by a local artist and is a representation of the village. The wool was sourced from local sheep and was spun by the local woman's group and coloured with natural dyes. In all, it consists of 23 carpets.

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