

# Culture Consumption Shift to Mitigate the Climate Emergency

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**Abstract:** The built form of the South African post-apartheid city continues to perpetuate the paradigm that only one culture is available for consumption. Culture is consumed by South Africans who form part of a nation diverse in culture, and by an international tourist market, seeking the provision of diverse cultural experiences. Yet, most African cultural artifacts are found encased in colonial architecture museums, where the narrative is restricted to the observed, and where the cultures are entombed and thereby unable to reach out and affect the city around it. This places these cultures as either historical records and artifacts, or something foreign to the city, belonging to the fringes of the post-apartheid city, and not as an existing way of living that is held by city dwellers that lacks places that allow them to bear fruit and serve. In this paper, the authors argue that there is an opportunity to provide built form interventions that will accommodate the many cultures alive and active within South Africa. These cultures may be represented in built form, as a facilitator for first-hand experience, and may then further establish a market for cultural consumption and contemporary tourism that is more authentic. To do so, secondary data is presented on the current social and economic milieu of how culture is consumed as a value-add good product in the post-apartheid city. Furthermore, two cultural architectural interventions are presented as case studies. A conceptual framework is constructed, showcasing the lessons learned, as well as expanding the conversation around culture, consumption, and climate – as well as how responsible tourism may support positive responses to each. By introducing the climate emergency, architecture's complicity in driving consumption is further exposed. An argument is presented whereby existing architectural interventions in the post-apartheid city are shown to fall short in their attempts to transform the city away from the colonial capitalist linear economy consumption practices that degrade the environment. The paper concludes with a vision for future architectural interventions that better succeed in providing space and place for diverse cultural inclusion, thoughtful consumption patterns and climate change mitigation. There is a market for the consumption of culture as an experience. An indigenous circular economy of locally produced, and locally consumed culture is an alternative to current human consumption patterns that damage the environment.

**Keywords:** architecture, climate emergency, culture, economy, indigenous

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## 1. Introduction

The climate emergency we are facing requires us to act on all fronts. As one of the highest contributors to climate degradation, construction and buildings have the highest potential in resolution capacity<sup>1</sup>. This requires not only changing how buildings perform in their life cycles, but also changing how we build future interventions. Not only do buildings contribute to the climate emergency in their life cycles and construction, but through the promotion of linear economy thinking and practice which is a legacy of colonisation across the world.

African cultures have philosophies, traditions, and beliefs related to a human's relationship to earth and, by extension, a human's relationship to building, that fall under sustainable methods that can act against the climate emergency (United Nations, 1992). These traditional ecological knowledge systems that follow circular economy thinking and practice, are commonly practised in isolation in rural areas, away from South African urban centres in areas of poverty where most of the population dwell (World Bank, 2020). There is an opportunity to bring these cultures into the city, not as artifacts placed in museums as the common form of cultural consumption as tourism places them, but as forms of knowledge and practice inherent in all forthcoming buildings. This would allow the consumption of culture to both serve as singular events in tourism, and a consistent immersion that lies within the growing urban fabric. This consistent immersion would move African culture and identity and its potential from historical recording and performance, to being part of a fabric that contributes to solving the climate crisis and transforming colonial legacy cities.

Two case studies of prototypes show how this could take form through raw material selection and spatial programming defined by indigenous knowledge systems. The case studies have been critically analysed as examples of cultural consumption - both lying within the city of Tshwane, one at the city centre, the other in the

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<sup>1</sup> This is especially evident when one considers that cities consume two-thirds of the world's energy and as a result are to blame for over 75% of global carbon emissions (UN-Habitat, 2020).

CBD's residential periphery - to extrapolate a conceptual framework as a solution that prefigures the end of the cultural assumptions of post-colonial cities in South Africa.

## **2. A review of literature:**

### **2.1 Culture in built form**

According to Eagleton, (2016) culture can be defined as "(1) a body of artistic and intellectual work; (2) a process of spiritual and intellectual development; (3) the values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices by which men, women and people live; or (4) a whole way of life."

We lean on culture's metaphor when we speak of the evolving force of identity - with cultural identity the strongest of them all, the most embodied and, most readily graspable by our intuitions. This fundamental force propels our understanding of reality and our efforts in maintaining and transforming our identities' bricolage (Roth, 2003). We project grounding models that describe how cultural information is intentionally or inadvertently passed on (Kashima, 2014) - now commonplace and woven into our understanding of the world and consequently, woven into our identities (Roth, 2003).

"As we go about our business of living our daily lives, we construct a social reality that is mutually meaningful and yet only local" (Kashima, 2014). Colonisation and industrialisation, amongst others, have globalised what was meant to be experienced on a local scale, and given how relatable this is, it is rather odd that we rarely consider culture on the collective level of the civilisation.

While science has made progress along the long procession of history where architecture was understood to be a reflection and an expression of culture (Koirala, 2016), this notion that in the cultural sector, architecture has a role in preserving the ancient values of culture (Bemanian, Gholamirostam & Rahmtapnah, 2010) has not yet materialised in Tshwane. Sesana (2020) notes that this is a result of the city's contention over its heritage historically and politically expressed through buildings (architecture), and that this symbolic heritage communicates the city's conflicting cultural and political forms of ownership. In this paper, the built form of Tshwane - a model South African post-apartheid city - continues to perpetuate the paradigm that only one culture is available for consumption. The built form of Tshwane speaks of a type of language, a particular culture, an ideology, and a way of living (van Tonder & Thomas, 2022). Tshwane is a post-apartheid colonial city based on a linear economy, with single-use modernist architecture that relies on car use.

Buildings are not inherently good or evil. Buildings are tools, and their power depends on how the tool is wielded. What you do with the power determines whether the result is something that we applaud or something that we deplore. Rapid climate change can be linked to the culture of globalisation, and consequently, the culture of colonisation. Colonisation's expansion displaced native people, not just geographically but spiritually, economically, and politically too. The buildings tell a story that echoes the tensions in present-day. At inception and erection, the buildings disregarded the culture and religions of the native people.

### **2.2 Culture consumption**

In this paper, the understanding of the consumption of culture is premised on the notion that consumers can momentarily suspend their ideologies and briefly ingest a reality or truth that is foreign to them. This threshold is where we begin to understand but also interface with culture (moral perspective) in not just in a market-related way, but in an oddly empowering, even slightly evocative way, while enabling our realisation of the value of the ecological community.

This engagement is also about how an individual or community owns and understands the reverberations of their actions and realities. This is a way of starting the process of building a more visceral understanding of space and culture connected to one's environment, because the things that sustain and connect us do not belong to us alone - they belong to a much broader whole (a community in which we are active members). This subversion of the meaning of consumption relies on the understanding that culture creates and communicates new meanings and transforms narratives.

It is of the utmost importance to remember that though we speak on the contemporary post-apartheid city, the majority of South Africans, those who are part of and descendants of the Bantu people, live in Townships or

Location areas (products of the apartheid system). Also, many dwell within rural areas far removed from urban life. Urban migration brings South Africans to cities and while doing so causing the dissolution of spirit - that relates to the relationship between self and others, inclusive of people, organisms, and objects- born from the disparity in the places they are from and the places they arrive to (Thomas, 2021). This displacement (primarily an experience of the Southern African Bantu) from a background abundant in culture and spirituality (those spiritual beliefs that inherently preach about the respect of land and custodian role) that lacks resource, towards one lacking culture and spirituality yet is composed of materials and resources they have never come into contact to. This inversion of circumstance intensifies the violent process of identity erosion (Thomas, 2021).

To understand the intent Africans bring to building, one must understand the depth at which roles of custodianship play a role within African societies. It is not only the lack of access that youth of urban South Africans have to indigenous knowledge systems, but the lack of access to the custodians who are the primary vehicles of that knowledge (Thomas, 2021). Through the mediums of performance, whether dance, coming of age ceremonies or storytelling, the custodians introduce the unknowing person to their roles as 'earth keepers' and members of a greater community. It is them that proliferate the African material belief and relationships that define the method of building that contemporary Africans are developing, bringing circular economy and sustainable building strategies into the city.

The case studies presented here serve different purposes - one as a land redistribution hub (Figure 2) and the other as an African social health facility (Figure 4) - yet they share multiple similarities. Both are concerned about cultural inclusivity, the relationship between humans and the world, and the politics of sacredness of space. The case studies are not just explicitly concerned with politics - they offer a cathartic healing experience, that touches the social and psychological lives of the people. They showcase this through multiple ways, the simplest being through ritual: healing is choreographed through ceremonies, once you arrive, you take off your shoes and remove all your gadgetry. Through consumer participation, the ceremonies do the work of repairing the ruptures of history and are expressive of the chasm that requires bridging in modern-day post-colonial cities.

### **2.3 Tourism**

Culture is consumed by South Africans who form part of a nation diverse in culture (Mistry, 2001), and by an international tourist market, seeking the provision of diverse cultural experiences. Despite the harsh South African lockdown and travel restrictions, almost 16 million foreign tourists visited South Africa in 2019 pre COVID-19, and 5 million in 2020, (Stats SA, 2021a). In 2018 the direct contribution of the tourism sector to GDP (Gross Domestic Product) was nearly 3% with just over R130 billion spent. Furthermore, in the same year, the tourism sector contributed approximately 4.5% of total employment in South Africa (Stats SA, 2021a).

With most people in South Africa living in poverty (Worldbank, 2020), the unemployment rate at its highest since credible measurement (Stats SA, 2021b). Thus, it can be inferred that tourism culture consumption is only for the affluent. A shift is needed towards tourist attractions that target local tourism in addition to international tourism. This shift is important for the feasibility of the market and to address the climate emergency, as international tourism contributes significantly to global carbon emissions. All human consumption contributes a carbon cost within a linear economy, and international tourism accounts for 8% of global carbon emissions. This percentage is projected to grow by 4% every year, with half of this carbon emission cost allocated to travel between countries (Lenzen, Sun, Faturay, Ting, Geschke & Malik, 2018).

In South Africa, tourism is a value-add good product that contributes to economic growth, and employment. In turn, this contribution to growth and employment combat poverty. Yet most African cultural artifacts are found encased in these colonial museums where the narrative is restricted to the observed, and where the cultures are entombed and unable to reach out and affect the city around it. This places these cultures as either historical records and/or artifact, something foreign to the city belonging to the fringes of history and the modern city, and not as an existing way of living that is held by in city dwellers lacking places to bear fruit and serve.

Recent attempts at restitution of artifacts includes a Dutch report that speaks out against colonial looting of indigenous culture (van Onderwijs, 2020), and activist Mwazulu Diyabanza who attempts to reclaim what was stolen from Africa and now entombed in France (Nayeri, 2020). It is time to take on the opportunities for possible widespread dissemination of many cultures throughout cities built for only the colonial dominant culture. This paper presents such built form activism in the form of two case studies.

### 3. Research methodology

This paper argues that there is an opportunity to provide built form interventions that accommodate the many alive and active cultures within South Africa. As a facilitator for first-hand experience, culture in built form establishes a market for cultural consumption as contemporary tourism. This argument is supported by presenting two architectural interventions as case studies, whose language, form, function, and ritual behind the theory and elements constituting their makeup were inspired by indigenous knowledge systems.

The two interventions are juxtaposed with their contexts. The first is placed within the city centre falling into the primary tourist route, surrounded by the colonial legacy architecture of the Victorian, Edwardian, and Georgian styles, and backdropped by Modernist monoliths. The second intervention is placed in a high-density residential area rich in diverse African cultures, shouldered by a community who have repurposed a village of Cape Dutch style homes to provide services catering to the local population. The two case studies have not been built, and currently form part of post graduate work produced previously by the authors.

The history of colonisation in South Africa perpetuates a narrative that privileges colonial culture, it is through buildings and building practice that colonial culture is preserved. Buildings construct stories that contain and express the way we understand ourselves and the world. Too few cultural interventions such as the two case studies have been added to the city since the fall of apartheid in 1994. A vast part of indigenous culture in the city is only ever understood conjecturally. Meaningful indigenous spaces and buildings are few in orientation and practice. For this reason, the paper explored two conceptual case studies that have the character of social integration and whose main goal was to introduce a cultural and architectural renaissance in the city.



Figure 1: Tshwane figure-ground with the two **conceptual** cultural architecture interventions case studies

### 4. Limitations

In this paper, the authors do not attempt to define or redefine culture, nor do they attempt to generalise what culture is across the various indigenous South African and African communities. The paper is based only on Tshwane and its historical cultural traits, that may have evolved or been abandoned. Furthermore, this paper refers to cultural consumption as a subset of human consumption and circular economies as an alternative to linear economies. Due to the page limit and a consequent need for brevity these concepts are not elaborated.

#### 4.1 Case study 1

The Hub was designed to promote ties between indigenous communities and their landscapes (Fernández-Llamazares & Cabeza, 2018). Through its strategic positioning in the epicentre of the city (the origin point of the city), it connects the city with those who were dispossessed (economically, spiritually, and physically) by the colonial regime within the city. As such The Hub narrates the history of the land whilst reconciling the past with the present, through ritual and the facilitation of indigenous knowledge transfer between generations (Fernández-Llamazares & Cabeza, 2018).

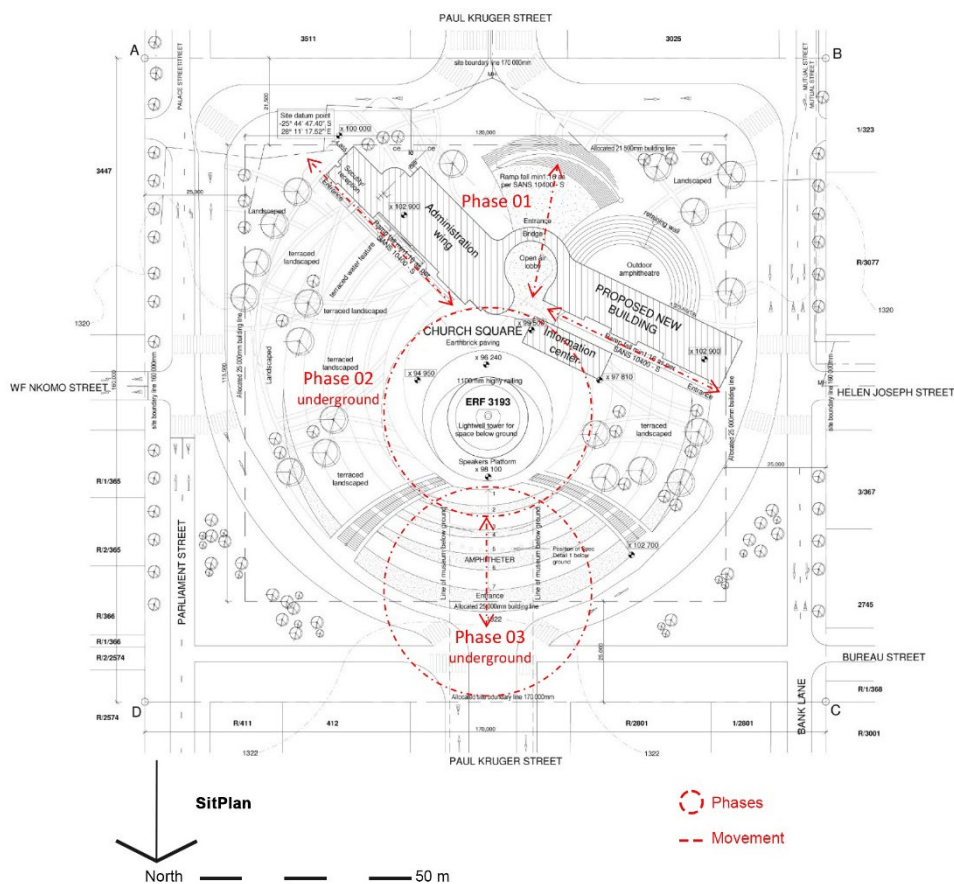


Figure 2: Case study 1 site plan: Land redistribution hub in Tshwane

The author of case study 1 counterweighted her conceptual understanding of land<sup>2</sup>, and juxtaposed it with her native understanding of land as being a sacred entity<sup>3</sup> whose agencies brings into being new realities (good and bad). By employing the symbolic act of digging, the hub is revealed, highlighting the fact that the rising-up of the built surrounding context is directly linked to that which was exploited. It serves as a mediator between indivisible histories and territorial access to the divine (Sesana, 2020) - it is an act of storytelling and archaeology - both familiar and reorienting.

Sesana (2020) notes that buildings and historical sites are vocabularies of knowledge that embody narratives of the past, present, and anticipated future, as well as a sense of identity grounded in storytelling. Therefore, it can be said that the revival of cultural life in urban indigenous nations is rooted in storytelling that is deeply connected to the cultures of indigenous nations which are integral to their homelands (Cornthassel & Chaw-winis, & T'lakwadzi, 2009).

Water and land are scarce and valuable resources for indigenous people (Ojomo, 2011). In the context of Tshwane, where it has high groundwater levels, observations such as these informed the second concept which references the womb and the notion of rebirth. In light of the function of the building in relation to the nature of the site, it became necessary to conceptualise and regard both the water and the land as gateways (physical and spiritual) to the existing urban environment (Sesana, 2020).

Through a series of proposed indigenous rituals within The Hub, The Hub reveals open doors of healing to the modern world by weaving the tribal world with the contemporary world and, as such, weaving the indigenous community and nation together (Sesana, 2020). As The Hub tells stories that are connected to Tshwane's history and the cultures of indigenous homelands, it echoes many wounds of South Africa's past and present, such as displacement, marginalization, and provides an opportunity for change.

<sup>2</sup> As ascribed to it by capitalistic logic - a precious resource (Borde, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> Land holds multiple stories captive that are latent within its scars.

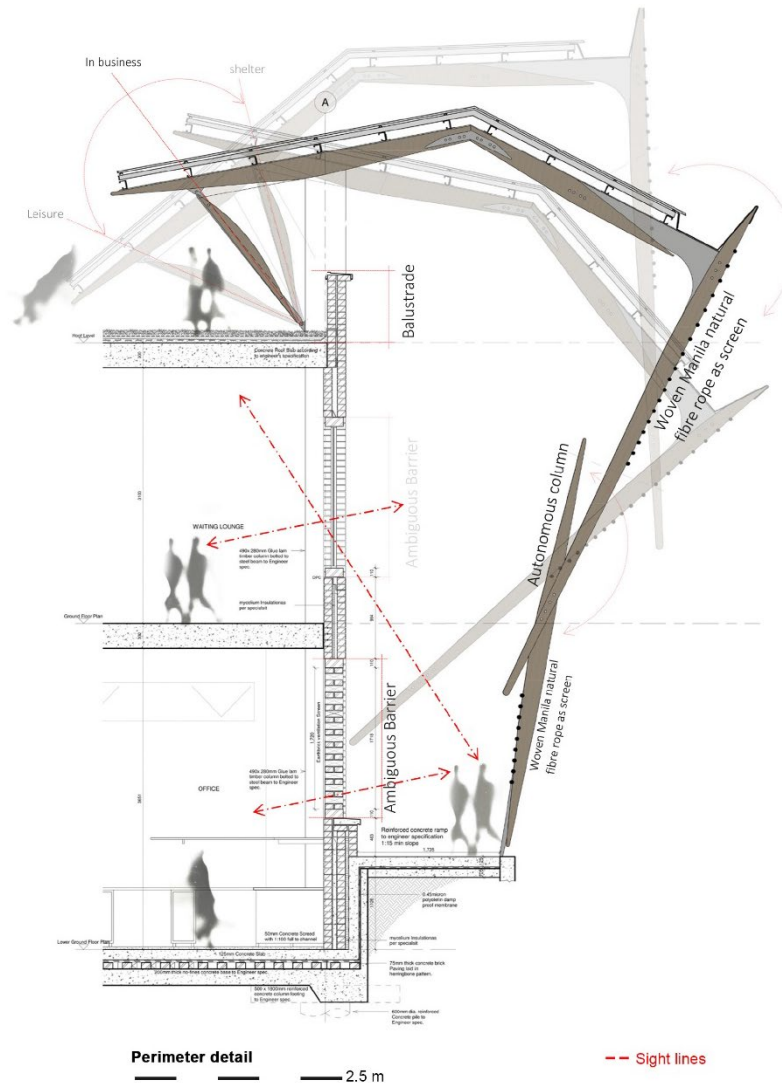


Figure 3: Case study 1 section: Land redistribution hub in Tshwane

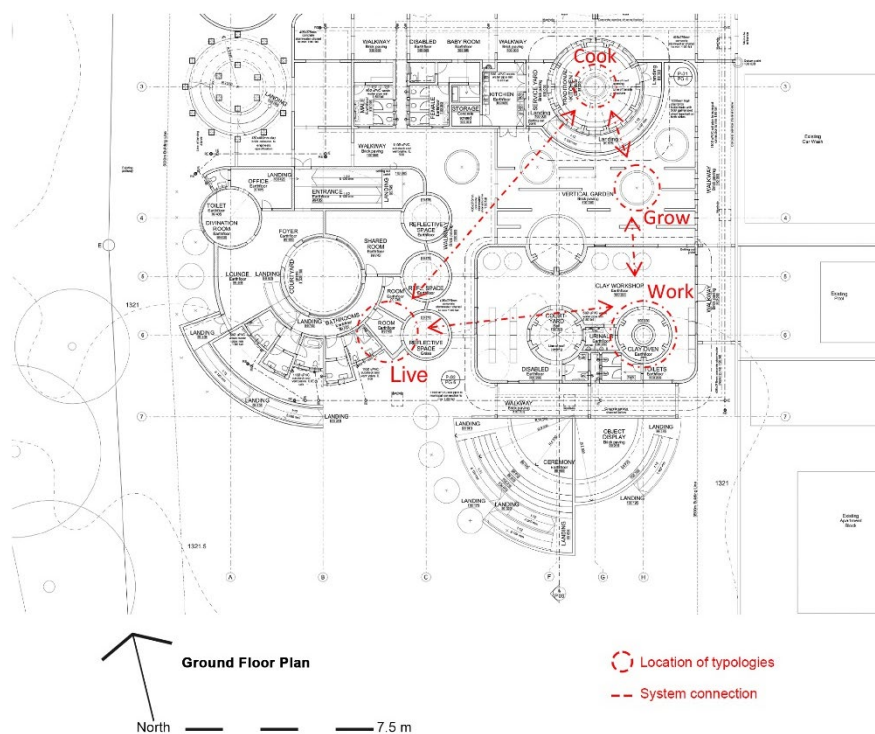
The Hub is not a single building but a series of buildings each of which functions as a phase (Figure 2).

- Phase 1, focuses on the administrative development of land redistribution.
- Phase 2, as the core, focuses on connecting the people to the land through the integration of sacred spaces with archive spaces.
- Phase 3, the heritage boulevard i.e. the colonisation museum focuses on highlighting the dispossession of land in relation to the ‘achievements’ of the coloniser.

The material is an extension of its former life (Figure 3). It is never at odds with what it was. As such, the building is not designed to outlive its purpose. It is designed to gradually decompose and return to the land from which it came. Theoretically, each component comprises nature's rawest elements and thereby contains in its makeup the embodiment of the ancestral native spirit (Sesana, 2020) that speaks of inter and intra connectivity.

## 5. Case study 2

The architectural intervention offered as a case study below, focuses on creating a closed system of living, where an individual lives, eats, grows, and creates within one place, thus reducing the need for the use of logistic technologies for the delivery of goods and materials to the site (Figure 4). It puts into the forefront the relationship that humans have with the earth as custodians.



**Figure 4:** Case study 2 plan: African social health facilities in Tshwane

This relationship is manifested by the formation of building structure through the manipulation of clay (the first [ma]terial, as related to earth, grounding, and mother earth). The clay is moulded into bricks that are used as both walls and roofs, while the floors are made of clay earth floors sourced in situ – while timber used as walls, roofs as bricks, floor as earth floors sourced in situ, and timber ([wo]od, as related to trees, growth and the feminine), as structural elements for overhead planes and platforms, that support elements such as the vertical garden systems (Figure 5).

The principles that African indigenous value and knowledge systems centre are harmony with nature and having environmental awareness (Obiora & Emeka, 2015: pp 89). This means that, like other societies, “African societies construct culture in their encounter with and effort to understand and relate with nature, in order to harness its resources for the nurture of the society” (Obiora & Emeka, 2015: pp 90). The difference inherent in African indigenous and traditional value systems is their being founded on “the ethic of love and respect for the earth” (United Nations, 1992) as said by Maurice Strong in his opening address to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.

This love and respect for earth comes from belief systems in which there is a greater existence that brought all matter and living organisms into being. As there was the one creator, these metaphysical thoughts centred on how that source placed within all things, whether animals, plants, metals, air, celestial objects, or gods, a universal force or energy that stays within all such forms. This force empowers them, maintains them, and is part of that greater creator (Asanie, 1985).

Consequently, separation occurs less between two entities (Obiora & Emeka, 2015: pp 90).

*“[There is]...less separation between subject and object, between self and non-self, but fundamentally all things share the same nature and the same interaction one upon another ... (‘and’ the living?) the living, the dead and the first ancestors, from the stone to the divinities a hierarchy of power but not of being, for all are one, all are here, all are now”*

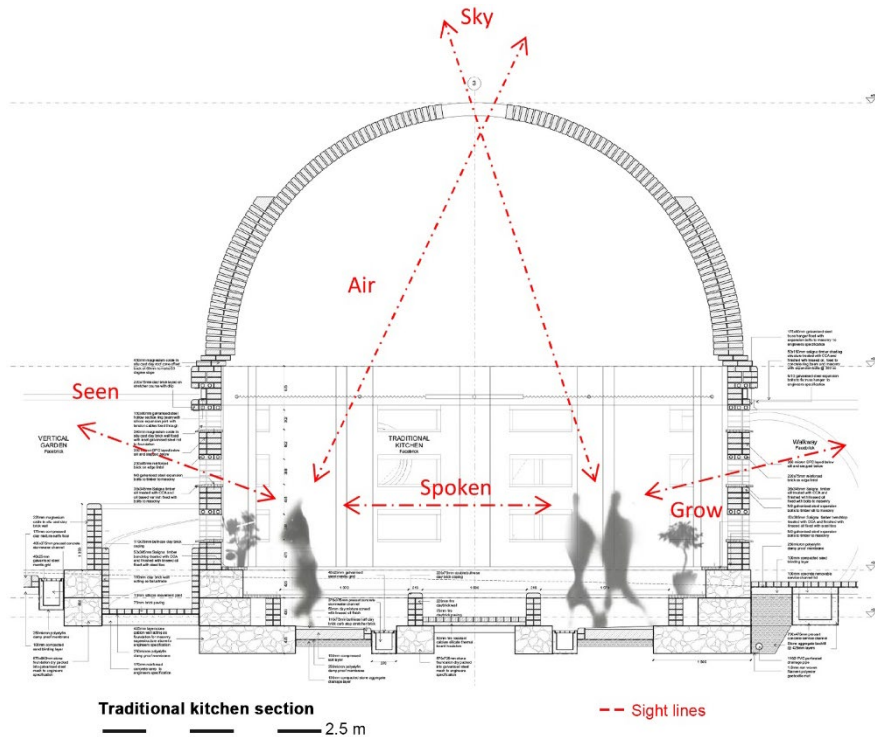


Figure 5: Case study 2 section: African social health facilities in Tshwane

The material first approach and celebration of the natural as a framework for design created limitations that correspond with sustainable solutions. An example would be the aversion to overly processed material such as concrete products such as glass reinforced concrete (GRC). When moving from such materials like timber, we open ourselves to requirements such as maintenance and treatment. However, if used consistently, contemporary buildings beyond those already found in African traditional ecology knowledge solutions may be created with the material. Thus, the materials chosen are used to the highest level they can be, and consequently with a higher level of intention that taps into indigenous knowledge systems. By the nature of the material limitations, artificial systems that support contemporary façade solutions would give way to the passive, and this change will carry through to higher scales of design interventions. There will be a point at which the limit of materials is reached, and one might have to move from large scale vertical interventions towards four to five storey precinct typologies, thus decreasing the need to use materials such as concrete and steel (Thomas, 2021).

The lens offered by traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems, can be applied to the constructions of today’s buildings, taking advantage of the sustainable methods of living, and building that exist within them.

## 6. Research findings, the conceptual framework

The paper infers that for future interventions to be better informed a conceptual framework can be used. A framework that contributes to the discussion on addressing the climate emergency by identifying indigenous knowledge systems as a strategy, or a basic structure underlying a system or concept, that consists of remembered information within frames (Minsky, 1974: p i). The resultant strategy is needed to contribute towards preventing the further perpetuation of the post-apartheid city while simultaneously proposing cultural dissemination through architectural interventions.

### 6.1 An emerging tectonic

Similarities in the two case studies provide frames for the framework as noted below in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes provided by the similarities between the case studies

Category	Themes
Identity - ecological and indigenous knowledge	The sacred, cultural, and ritualistic.
	Language, form, and function.
	Community and connection.

Category	Themes
Culture - ecological and indigenous knowledge	Heritage concerning identity.
	Placemaking concerning stewardship/ custodianship.
	Design principles, materials, and construction strategy.
	Sacred space concerning scale.
Technology tectonics - ecological and indigenous knowledge	Support a circular economy in utilising replenishable materials.
	Material use and construction detailing strategies, for example, timber and mud, have been chosen over non replenishable materials such as steel and concrete where possible.
Visual tectonics - ecological and indigenous knowledge	Architectural language at odds with the colonial buildings of the post-apartheid city.
Circular economy activities - indigenous knowledge systems	Low carbon cost of culture consumption.
Tourism economy – target local and international markets	Target a local market segment in cultural, social, and economic accessibility.
	Attract international visitors to the region.

## 7. Conclusion

Architecture in built form is complicit in what drives the culture of consumption. Through the exclusion of indigenous practice - the use of sustainable local resources and building practices - the existing architectural interventions, within the post-apartheid city, fall short in their attempts to transform the city away from colonial capitalist linear economy consumption practices that degrade the environment. Indigenous knowledge systems can be the ultimate calibrator of the current culture of consumption and its reverberations through our actions as we construct or deconstruct a world we bequeath to the future. Incorporating indigenous practice can improve future architectural interventions to ensure space and place for diverse cultural inclusion. The paper presents an argument that there is a market for the consumption of culture as an experience, and that such locally produced, and locally consumed culture is vested in indigenous circular economy practices that mitigate the climate emergency resulting from climate change caused by human consumption.

Thus, when the architecture experienced by the international tourist market in their desire for the consumption of culture will come to represent not only the European legacy of colonisation within the context, but the indigenous African people of which it so often serves who live within the contemporary post-apartheid city. Then, we can begin to assimilate indigenous knowledge systems and beliefs to solve the urgent issues of resources, accessibility, and inclusivity within not only the context of tourism but the greater tangible built forms that define our cities.

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**Francine van Tonder, Luthando Thomas and Tihologello Sesana**

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