



BEYOND THE BRIEF:
THE INFLUENCE OF GOVERNMENT AND/ OR DONOR FUNDING/NGO
PROJECTS AS MAIN PATRON OF THE ARCHITECTURAL LANDSCAPE.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE - WINDHOEK

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Recently the necessity has arisen for the Justitia Department to accommodate their various divisions under one roof. Over the year's numerous changes and alterations have been made to the existing building, leaving it in a state of disrepair and chaos.

Justice is the guardian of the Law. It ensures that society can operate in harmony and dictates how citizens should conduct themselves to foster a society of safety and trust, while always being treated equally before the law.

Situated in the bustling city centre of Windhoek, right next to the lush gardens of Zoo Park, the new Ministry of Justice Building is unshackling itself from the city grime and shaping an unforgettable impression in the city skyline.

Symbolically the building manifests the safety of a ship in stormy waters. A safe haven for every citizen to feel secure and safe within, while its impressive modern features evoke a respect for its presence, a towering spire reminding the people of the stern finger of the law of Namibia. The use of a horseshoe-shaped plan allows inside offices to have "internalized" windows that allow natural light in, reducing electrical consumption. The building shape bends-in on itself, casting shadows on its facades and eliminating some heat gaining walls, thus reducing possible consumption for cooling the building in summer. The building will serve the Namibian people with some levels of parking that can be made available to the public.

By renovating and incorporating the existing Justitia building into the design, the site is used to its optimum capacity and creates accessibility from both the Independence Avenue and Lüderitz Street sides of the building, allowing for all-round versatility. Each entrance is equally impressive in its own right, with large internal atrium spaces that draw the eye up several storeys. Minimalistic finishes add to the overall simplicity of design, while keeping within a maintenance-free framework. While being ideally situated near the Courts and the site for the new Attorney General & Prosecutor Buildings, it also lies in close proximity to the lush gardens of Zoo Park. This allows for innovative environmental concepts that can easily be integrated into the city's future urban planning scheme.

- How does such patronage impact on the architectural landscape? Can it be a force for good?

As government projects inherently have a political agenda the resulting building is a reflection of this. This can be a force for good in terms of development of the country's infrastructure. In the case of the Justitia building, a dilapidated building comprised of several disjointed departments is to be re-order and collectively housed in a central building. The result of this is a large building which contributes to the identity of Namibian Justice.

- Has it had an impact on the environmental and social sustainability of buildings and if so, how? Can this be better?

Due to increase awareness on expenditure on servicing a building as well as financing it the government has encouraged increased environmental and social awareness in the design of its buildings. The Justitia building is example of this with it being designed and serviced with systems to maximise savings in its energy expenditure. Social sustainability is also improved in that the building interacts with the urban context on a social level by providing spaces in front of it for social interactions.

- Have changes over time at the Department of Works changed the public sector approach to architectural design and the execution of architectural projects? If so, how? The increased scale of projects provided by the Department of Works, such as the Justitia Building, has brought on the effect of encouraging private sector projects to be larger in size due to increased confidence in the Namibian Construction Industry. The large budgets on many of these projects allows architects to look to and investigate more global precedents, lessons learn from this are then interpreted and implemented in private sector projects. An inverse to this is how the public sector has encouraged the Department of Works to be more malleable and open minded in their projects being mixed use and able to re-use the building for an alternative function in the future.

- Are there implications for a kind of regional vernacular/ approach to architecture?

Yes, people need to be able to relate to the form and space of buildings in their context instead of placing a white elephant to which no one can relate. Government buildings, especially within the same user ministry need to share a common theme which makes their buildings recognisable and relevant within the context of Namibia. In the case of the Ministry of Justice, Justitia Building the intention was to attempt to spark an architectural language from which further justice buildings could be developed from.

- Taking into account the inherent conservatism of state institutions, can any innovative developments in Namibian architecture be foreseen? The conservatism that once was part and parcel of the DOW is no longer there. Young blood working in the department as well as previous projects having pushed the boundaries have allowed innovative projects to go ahead. The Justitia Building has pushed these boundaries not only in its design but also in the material selection and finishes.

- Take a look at the idea of standard designs.

This can be linked to the symbolism within user ministries. Standard designs allow a building to be better related to another within the same ministry. The functional layout, if standardised, also allows for project planning to be expedited.

For example, the requirement of GRN buildings to be stand-alone object buildings, surrounded by a perimeter fence, rather than being used to make urban space. Is that a colonial legacy, or a throw-back to the homestead fence? Is it good or bad?

The norm has been to have GRN buildings isolated behind boundary walls, but with changing mindsets and PPE investment, GRN buildings are increasingly more accessible to the public and accommodate a greater variety functions within a building. This in-turn makes the building more relevant in its context.