



**ISSUES OF IDENTITY:  
THE SEARCH TO EXPRESS A SPECIFIC NAMIBIAN CHARACTER  
IN ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS, AS WELL THE INDIGENIZATION  
OF ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE.**

**SOCIAL SECURITY COMMISSION OF NAMIBIA - WINDHOEK**

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The Social Security Commission of Namibia has commissioned a competition for the design of a multimillion Namibian dollar, multi-use, investment project in the Central Business District of Windhoek, Namibia. Local climate and social and physical contexts of the site must also be integrated into the design concept.

The design proposal to satisfy green architecture principles to a minimum of a four-star Green Building rating as well as conform to the urban spatial development framework. The framework includes the conceptual design of some definite urban architectural elements and their layout within the "Freedom Plaza". The Spatial Development Framework that was given needed to follow the standards: allowable building form, 2) heights and setbacks, 3) utilization of bulk, 4) parking ratio, 5) proposed public structure, 6) entrances to buildings, 7) green structure and landscaping, 8) vehicular entrances, 9) public transport interchange, 10) public amenities, 11) guidelines relating to scale, height, bulking materials, 12) articulation of facades, 13) temporary and final accommodation of informal / formal traders, 14) phased project development; and permissible retail areas as per the Retail Plan for Freedom Plaza.

**DESIGN:** The following design elements was implanted: 1) Articulated Massing - Faceting of the building shape by "form follows function" principle while retaining the required urban density. The economic value of land and compact functions of the city necessitates a dense bulk. The proposed building shape takes into consideration height restrictions and offsets the surrounding urban fabric. 2) Geographic concept: Spitzkoppe - Mimicking and incorporation of a national icon in the abstract use of its shape and colour to soften the urban environment. The use of the Spitzkoppe Mountain with its warm copper coloration is a familiar and identifiable icon to the Namibian People. Its shape and colour in its abstract form serves in breaking up the solid mass of the proposed building into a human scale within the existing language of the cityscape. 3) Vernacular concept: woven baskets / huts - Articulated use of the endemic vernacular as a representation of the architectural vernacular context. The "woven baskets" hug the building, also softening the South Colonnade. The structure translates into screens for solar control against the penetrating rays of the Namibian morning sun. 4) Design concept: Atria - Providing light & ventilation into the interior as well as creating a dynamic human interaction and immediate sense of orientation. Natural ventilation and light influx via atrium spaces provides occupants with a healthy and comfortable environment, also using the forces of air buoyancy to help air move naturally through a building, saving on expensive energy intensive fans. 5) Thermal chimneys - Heat extraction in summer & thermal displacement in winter. By the use of the "stack effect" glass fronted chimneys draw hot rising air from all the floor levels. Fresh air is then drawn into the building which in the summer serves to cool the building by expelling the hot air and re-routing the cool air into the wanted rooms. In winter the hot air again gets channelled into the wanted areas to warm the building.

6) Building orientation - Fragmentation of east / west facade to minimize solar gain, while employing heat gain control to north & south facades. The east-west orientation of the building has been articulated by breaking the building's mass into fragments of building with East-West orientation or fin-like structures that allow for maximised natural lighting and ventilation whilst providing adequate facade shading and cool recessed patios. 7) Green space - Green spaces cut into the building to provide additional daylight for central office areas and natural ventilation opportunities as well as break-away zones for the building users. 8) Recycling / Reduce / Re-use / Recycle / Sustainable

- What criteria would one use to define an identity – style, or materials, or functionality, Influence of the vernacular, climate, landscape? Or is it the expression of a similar outlook towards space and place? The consideration of materials, response to climate and landscape, as well as the understanding of the urban fabric and existing social interactions in this design proposal create a unique response to a context. Herein the building not only seeks to express a Namibian architectural aesthetic in doing so but to also accommodate and enrich the Namibian culture and social interactions. In considering the vernacular composition of the built form as well as a socially informed articulation thereof, a Namibian identity is created.

- What is a Namibian identity anyway?

As exemplified by this building, a Namibian identity is not some specific archetype, but rather a building designed and created by an informed composition of the built form through vernacular responses and considerations, which respond to and are informed by the Namibian culture and social interactions.

- What are the global influences on current Namibian architecture?

Namibian architecture is taking root in a very connected and global setting. Ready access to information and technology allow architects to be informed and influenced by a wide range of things, be it in design process, architectural theory, social trends, technological advancements and building systems. This not only allows for more diverse architecture in the Namibia but in a land full of young passionate designers seeking a design image/identity, risks our National identity being diluted by international trends. The Social Security Commission design attempts to synthesise these international trends and technologies with the Namibian context and vernacular responses in order to create a socially relevant architecture without betraying the context in which it is located.

- Is this search for identity informed and/or accompanied by an environmentally and socially sustainable approach?

Yes, as previously stated the vernacular, environmental and social responses within this building go towards creating a Namibian architectural identity. These responses have been described and elaborated on in the accompanying text.

- Questions on projects, how has location and immediate context influenced the design?

Explained within the accompanying text.

