

# CAPE TOWN AND THE HOUSING QUESTION

Cape Town is a city divided by race and class. It has a metropolitan population of close to four million people, many of who live in rudimentary temporary structures or shacks. The National Housing Policy is directed towards producing single freestanding houses of 44 square metres for families who earn below the poverty line—a minimum habitable space on a small piece of land, which they can sell after seven years. Repeated all over the country, with scant recognition of contextual differences, 3.5 million of these houses have been built since 1994.

The result is disastrous: ever-expanding city boundaries to accommodate substandard suburban housing; people living ever further from their workplaces, unable to afford transportation; and unsustainable environments that are not able to support commercial activity. No

matter how well intentioned government housing policy might be, it cannot match supply with demand, causing considerable political difficulty for the state, and continual civil unrest. Outside of state-provided housing, most shelters are built by people for themselves, using cheap recycled materials, on unserviced land that they don't own, resulting in far-flung acres of precarious self-built settlements. The future for housing in South Africa looks bleak in the face of a housing delivery system doomed to fail, and local people who take action and occupy land, but are unwilling or unable to build decent homes. The result is an acute condition of temporariness that the Cape Town URBANXCHANGER team chose to tackle.

## CLIVE'S HOUSE

Clive is a member of Hands of Honour. He lives in a house that he

built himself over a two-week period after it burned down in a fire that also destroyed his neighbours' homes. He was issued with a city-sponsored emergency kit for victims of fire, and constructed his house using these materials, together with other found scrap pieces. His resourcefulness was remarkable, but the house itself is not adequate for human occupation. It is cold in winter and hot in summer, is not waterproof and has no services at all. Water is collected from a nearby public standpipe, and sanitation consists of a portable toilet that is emptied regularly by the city.

In extensive discussions with Clive, it became clear that he was deeply upset by the conditions under which he lives. He has a wife and a young son, and two older daughters who would love to live with him, but there is no space. He is angry, as he is a proud man who wants to

take care of his family, but cannot do so. This condition of uncertainty and powerlessness is one shared by many other people in Clive's community, who are convinced that their shacks are temporary homes while they wait for state-provided houses. Sadly, some people have been waiting for more than 25 years. The approach proposed by urbanxchanger was immediately understood and supported by Clive: to find a way to convert the temporariness into a sense of permanence, rather than just adding a floor or two to the existing shack as seen elsewhere.

## THE TABLE STRUCTURE AS AN ENabler FOR SELF-EMPOWERMENT

The idea of the table structure was born out of discussions with Clive and Paul Talliard, and over time developed into a design concept that would achieve a number of benefits: firstly, enable Clive to take charge of extending his house

### CAPE TOWN

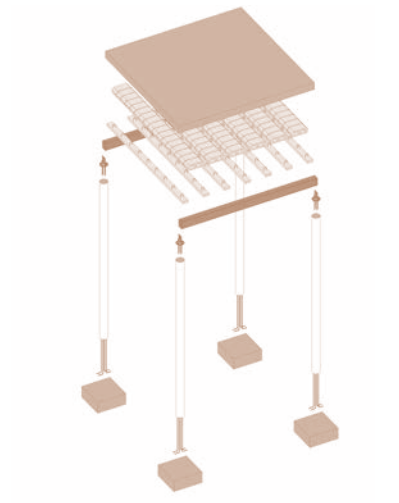
### PROJECT DESCRIPTION



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to accommodate his family; secondly, transform the temporary nature of the structure into a more permanent one; and finally, develop the house vertically since the ground level is overcrowded. The Table achieves all of these objectives in a cost-effective manner, and also engages the imagination of the homeowner, giving them control over the home, and in turn, empowering them. The table structure is a minimal, permanent structure that requires little work to construct and allows the homeowner to decide how he or she wants to organise the internal spaces of the house. The construction of the Table is well within the capacity of local people, with the only capital cost being the materials, and with labour being provided by Hands of Honour. There is also the option



**Table construction rendering: the prototype with further extensions (if something is already built on top of the Table)**

of developing additional components—staircases, cladding systems, etc.—that can, over time, form the basis for profitable businesses run by local entrepreneurs.

### THE PROTOTYPE

The first *Tafelhuis* was built with a grant of €2,000 from the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft. Clive, the original client, encountered complications within the local community, apparently having assaulted his wife, and was deemed an unsuitable recipient for the table structure.

**Construction process—various actors participating in the construction of the prototype**



**The Table as enabler for self-empowerment —future scenario for assisted self-construction**

Consequently, the team had to find another site and client. They were granted permission to construct a Table on a large site owned by a group of families who were descended from slaves and had been given the land by the Methodist Church. Melissa, a young married woman with two young children, was the recipient chosen by that community. She lives in a state of heightened insecurity as the area and adjacent informal settlement is riddled with criminals, gangs and drug addicts, so the idea of living one floor above the ground appealed very strongly to her desire for safety.

Hands of Honour provided the

labour for construction, while a local builder managed the process. The architects spent considerable time designing a system of connections that would enable lateral expansion of the table structure in all four directions. They also had to design a support system for the four columns to ensure that they were correctly placed relative to the shack, and were straight and true. They developed a diagonally-braced sliding system which could be adjusted to create a table top in the different sizes (from 2.4x2.4m, to a maximum of 4.4x4.4m) necessary to accommodate different sized shacks. The construction took only two working days, but the build

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extended over six days in order to allow for the concrete foundations to set. Given the opportunities that the Table offers, the final cost of R12,000 is deemed affordable for low-income families.

### **FUTURE OUTLOOK**

The response to the project has been nothing less than phenomenal, with many families wanting similar structures erected over their shacks. Once people understand the concept of making permanent homes for themselves where they live, the permutations are endless, and the potential limitless. The biggest challenge facing people is the skill and technical know-how to build upward, which is the only way that growth can take place, given the

overcrowded nature of these settlements. The Table easily overcomes this problem by creating a stable new ground plane above the existing one. The resulting system allows for vertical densification, offers a relatively cost-effective and safe way to expand a dwelling, and is open-ended enough to allow the owner to take charge and shape the home to suit their particular needs. Lastly, the Table offers hope to shack dwellers that they too can put down roots and create more permanent homes for themselves.

## **CAPE TOWN**

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**



**Capacity building for local production—assisting Hands of Honour as social entrepreneurs for slum-upgrading**

## **Project Credits**

### **PARTNER COMMUNITY INITIATIVE**

Hands of Honour

### **CAPE TOWN TEAM**

Noero Architects

Office participants: Jo Noero, Uno Pereira, David Long, Oliver Brown and Nikita Schweizer

### **BERLIN TEAM**

BAU collaborative

Office participants: Rainer Hehl, Philipp Luy, Susie Ryu, Tom Schöps and Justine Olausson

### **CURATOR**

Marcos L. Rosa

### **LOCAL COORDINATOR**

Lindsay Bush