

## Own your city: On creative economies in South Africa's cities

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### Abstract

This paper considers how the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) have a hand in dismantling Apartheid's spatial violences and the potential to foster a renewed sense of belonging and good citizenship in public spaces. Three South African case studies are presented: the Maboneng Township Arts Experience (Johannesburg and Cape Town), the Infecting the City public arts festival (Cape Town) and the Open Streets initiative (Cape Town). The three initiatives are attempting to change how people interface with their cities and exemplify the potential role the CCIs play in mediating feelings of belonging, promoting access and supporting socio-economic development. The case studies can be categorised in different ways, but they are driven by common interests in how they view cities, spatialities, public attitudes, and the 'real' and symbolic economy. They all have to negotiate challenging bureaucratic boundaries that regulate public space. These are the policies generated and managed by city governments that have become critical mechanisms for negotiating how public life is enriched with and by art and culture. They also have to negotiate these bureaucratic boundaries alongside commercial interests. Accordingly the paper will examine how these three public development and support initiatives are yielding positive socio-economic and symbolic results in the South African CCI landscape.

**Keywords:** Culture; creative industries; creative economy; Maboneng; Infecting the City; Open Streets.

## **1. Introduction**

City centres are dynamic geographic and social spaces with the potential for individual and different communities to work together “as equal citizens and for civic agency to manifest and be exerted” (Sanchez-Betancourt, 2016, p. 257). In many African cities, the connection between public space, urbanisation and economic development have not been as strong as these connections are in many other parts of the world. While Africa is experiencing rapid urban population and economic growth, “it remains the world’s most precarious and poorest continent, raising the spectre of ‘urbanisation without development’” (Turok, 2012, p. 143). All over on the continent, more and more people are flocking to cities in hopes of making a better life. These migration patterns, together with the challenges of globalisation and structural constraints on local business are leading to urban decay, that is, the gradual deterioration of a functional city or town as a result of an increased number of people working and living in that city or town. Urban decay is caused by a growing informal economy, strained economic conditions and precarious political leadership and will. Over-populated cities are burdening infrastructure, attracting crime, creating conditions of extreme squalor, water and food scarcity, homelessness and undesirable pollution.

To remedy the tough challenges presented by urban decay, cities have responded by establishing by-laws, zoning laws and campaigns that promote clean streets, among others. Cultural and creative industry-driven activities are often overlooked as alternative strategic approaches to promoting safer, cleaner, more inclusive cities with an eye towards economic development. Undeniably, cities are more than a mere increase of capital and labour, they are also grounds on which many other kinds of social, cultural and political spectacles flourish (Scott, 2006). Booyens (2012) makes the case for a more deliberate linkage between the creative industries in the global South and socio-economic objectives such as decreasing poverty, creating jobs and improving community involvement. That the creative industries should be “deeply embedded into the local urban environment and political economy because creative production creates symbolic value that can facilitate place making and city branding” (Gregory, 2016, p. 160-161) is increasingly recognised. With the exception of growing policy recognition in South Africa, there has otherwise been very little research on the cultural and creative industries in most of Africa. Even in South Africa, the largest metropolitan cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban are usually where the policy interest is focused (Evans, 2009, p. 1009). Indeed

Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg's growing creative industry strategies are being incorporated into city development and renewal efforts (p. 1009).

The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) include festivals, music, film and television, publishing, craft, visual arts, multimedia, heritage, design and the performing arts. "Common characteristics of the creative industries is that they are often project-based, comprising of time-bound opportunities linked to specific initiatives such as film or theatre production or a specific commission or order" (Joffe and Newton, 2009, p. 235).

The creative industries are often viewed as providing short-term income-generating opportunities (p. 235). In his 2011 budget speech, former President Jacob Zuma reiterated this rather limited view of the creative economy, reducing its importance as solely a means for catapulting South Africa's tourism industry, providing low-skilled workers with jobs, and for reducing poverty through trickle-down economics (Wenz, 2012, p. 18). A short-sighted view of the potential of the cultural and creative industries has unfortunately been the outlook of many government officials, policy makers (reflected in public policy), municipalities and city planners – ignoring the potential the creative industries have in promoting real public-sector innovation and social cohesion.

Flew and Cunningham (2010), emphasise the need to reinforce a positive relationship between "the development of culture and the creative industries and economic growth and innovation" instead of viewing "cultural provision as a rent extracted from the 'real' or 'productive' economy on the basis of social or cultural value rationales alone" (p. 121). They suggest that we can begin to think about such cultural institutions as "public-sector social innovation incubators" (2010, p. 121). In other words, cultural industries should not be seen as less than or separate from the 'real economy' – these activities should function alongside one another.

Scott (2004) describes the modern cultural economy as broadly represented by sectors in which "the subjective meaning of goods and services produced is high in comparison with their utilitarian purpose" (p. 462). Bourdieu (1971) refers to the outputs of these sectors as having socially symbolic connotations. In South Africa, these symbolic connotations can be described as the fostering of social cohesion which takes into account issues of belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and social justice. The sectoral growth of the cultural consumption of, *inter alia*, art, food, fashion, music, tourism have fuelled the 'symbolic economy' of cities and regions, encompassing the 'living culture' and

the experience of places in regards to safety, activity and recreation (Richards and Wilson, 2006, p. 1209). Now cities and the three interventions presented in this paper are mindful of their 'symbolic economy' through the growth of cultural consumption and the potential of the creative industries to aid in supporting identity building, participation, intercultural trust and freedom.

Maboneng Township Art Experience, Infecting the City (ITC) and Open Streets<sup>1</sup> are three initiatives attempting to change how people interface with their cities and exemplify the potential role that the CCIs play in mediating feelings of belonging, promoting access and supporting socio-economic development. The interventions can be categorised in different ways but they are driven by common interests in how they view cities, spatialities, public attitudes, and the 'real' and symbolic economy. Maboneng and Open Streets have even collaborated on some occasions. They all have to negotiate challenging bureaucratic boundaries that regulate public space through policies generated and managed by city governments that have become critical instruments for dealing with how public life is enhanced with and by art and culture. These are the policies generated and managed by city governments that have become critical instruments for dealing with how public life is enhanced with and by art and culture. They also have to negotiate those bureaucratic boundaries alongside commercial interests. Accordingly, this paper will examine how these three public development and support initiatives are yielding positive socio-economic and symbolic results in South Africa's cultural and creative industry landscape.

This paper uses descriptive narrative analysis to interpret meaning through an examination of the design, themes and the social and cultural referents of the different interventions. Further to this, the self-articulated goals and missions of the different interventions are analysed and interpreted. Finally, the author draws upon her affiliation with and personal experiences of attending these events. The initiatives are described and discussed in relation to South Africa's urban landscape and the historical politics of space, as tools for urban and economic regeneration and as valuable conduits of the knowledge economy and overall human wellbeing.

## **2. History, place and space**

Although South Africa's creative industries have been recognised in policy

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<sup>1</sup> Maboneng Township Art Experience will hereafter be referred to as Maboneng. Infecting the City will hereafter be referred to as ITC.

frameworks, there remains a dearth of scholarly research on creative industries and their relationship with the urban landscape (Gregory, 2016, p. 159). Furthermore, in South Africa, contemporary urban space cannot be explored without considering persistent racial and economic inequalities (Wenz, 2012, p. 17). Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets not only point to the impact the creative industries have on urban regeneration but on urban geographies as well. The spatial impact produced by these interventions has meant the economic, social, physical and symbolic transformation of neighbourhoods and zones. Whether they are conscious of it or not, these three initiatives are slowly dismantling Apartheid's spatial violence's – still evident in the way people move through, feel about and occupy cities – using art and culture to ameliorate some of the current challenges around racism and economic inequality so that public spaces might foster a renewed sense of inclusivity and good citizenship.

In South Africa, the demand for black labour led to mass urbanisation in the 1930s, but segregationist policies displaced black communities to the outer perimeters of the city. The dissatisfaction of black communities manifested itself in organised politics leading to their systematic and persistent economic marginalisation (Makhubu, 2013). The Apartheid system legally institutionalized practices of racial segregation and forced removals implemented during Apartheid, shaped and continue to shape the urban form and fabric of cities (Sanchez-Betancourt, 2016, p. 258). Nowhere is this legacy of violent dispossession more evident than in the still overcrowded, under-serviced and resource-poor settlements or townships that characterize South Africa's cities. Despite the new democratic dispensation, cities have struggled to completely transform and remain fragmented and exclusionary, with most people of colour relegated to congested townships usually on the outer limits of the city. Moreover, even with democratic inclusive local governance, living within an “urban system that rejected diversity and social and racial mixing, and slowly undermined the potential for cultural diversity in a rich cosmopolitan city” deeply affected and continues to affect generations of urban dwellers who have grown in this system (Sanchez-Betancourt, 2016, p. 258).

This fragmentation is quite obvious in Cape Town which has served as host city to Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets. Cape Town has the most sordid spatial and geographic history. Cape Town was transformed “from one of the least segregated cities into the country's most divided urban environment” under the apartheid regime (Wenz, 2012, p. 19). The introduction of legislative acts, namely the Population Registration Act of 1950 and the Group Areas Act

of 1953, formalised a system of separate development. As a fundamentally spatial regime, the Apartheid government reconstructed the city to further its repressive ideology and political agenda, legalising the separation of 'Black' people from 'Coloured' or 'Indian' and "driving all three groups out of the city centre, controlling public space and consequently keeping the different cultures from interacting" (Wenz, 2012, p. 19). As a result, a large majority of people still navigate Cape Town urban space as units of labour rather than as inhabitants (Makhubu, 2013). Nevertheless, Cape Town is now an aspiring global city, aiming to grow its competitiveness on the global stage. Praised for its natural beauty combined with a cosmopolitan feel, the city is deliberate in its embrace of the cultural and the creative industries as a tool for local economic development and urban renewal. Cape Town now brands itself as a 'creative city', experiencing major inner city renewal over the past decade (Booyens, 2012, p. 44). Regardless of all of this promotion and progress, Cape Town remains a deeply divided and unequal city as the legacy of Apartheid still weighs heavily against this contemporary, romantic perception of the city (Wenz, 2012, p. 19).

Similarly, "post-apartheid Johannesburg carries the scars of decades of apartheid city planning and is currently struggling to balance the pressures of establishing a new urban image that seeks to elevate it as a world-class city, against the demands of meeting the basic needs of the poor" (Gregory, 2016, p. 161). Following its launch in 2001, the Maboneng Township Art Experience was devised and initiated in Alexandra Township in Johannesburg. The name Maboneng is a Sesotho word meaning 'place of lights'. Alexandra had been given the name 'Dark City' by inhabitants due to the lack of electricity – a common occurrence in under-resourced townships. After the government introduced electricity, the residents renamed their township to Alexandra Maboneng meaning Alexandra, a place of lights. Now Johannesburg is also one of South Africa's leading centres for creative industries with much policy effort over the last fifteen years focused on reinventing and reviving the inner-city (Gregory, 2016, p. 162).

Indeed policy discussion and interventions about creative industries and urban regeneration have concentrated on bringing economic re-development and social change to deprived areas like inner-city neighbourhoods and potential post-industrial areas – both Cape Town and Johannesburg have followed this trend (Gregory, 2016, p. 159). What is distinctive about both Maboneng and Open Streets though, is that they are also taking their interventions out of the inner-cities and into over-burdened townships – areas with immense social

and economic problems. Not only is this increasing economic activity in these under-resourced areas, but it is also shifting the meaning of these spaces in ways that attempt to reverse the spatial violence caused by Apartheid, the remnants of which are still evident in these townships today.

### **3. Bringing the three initiatives together**

While the cultural and creative industries are being touted as a means of urban and economic regeneration and are used increasingly “as tools for the... transfiguration of urban spaces of consumption” (Rogerson, 2006, p. 150), they can also be so much more. Whereas we typically witness development based on cultural-product industries occurring in richer countries, middle-income countries such as South Africa now recognize that the cultural economy offers important opportunities to policy makers in regard to local economic and social development (Scott, 2004, p. 482). The union between the economic and the cultural currently occurring in modern life “is bringing in its train new kinds of urban and regional outcomes and opening up new opportunities for policy makers to raise local levels of income, employment, and social well-being” (Scott, 2004, p. 482).

The idea of “thematization”, a strategy for urban regeneration, “involves cities seeking to distinguish themselves by focussing on a specific theme, such as culture, sport, arts or entertainment” and marketing themselves accordingly (Rogerson, 2006, p. 149). In considering the ‘thematization’ of South Africa’s three major cities, Cape Town sells itself as the fashion and design capital, Johannesburg is known for its inner city cultural precincts or hubs and Durban bills itself as the tourism capital. These are all commercially viable attractions aimed at promoting the idea of ‘creative cities’ but Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets address a host of additional matters other than commercial sustainability – they are beneficial to the knowledge economy and human wellbeing in general.

In South Africa, most creative industries rely on the state to differing degrees either for infrastructure (theatres, music venues, concert halls) or funding (through state mandated funding strategies) (Joffe and Newton, 2009, p. 236). One of the reasons why Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets are so outstanding is that they rely very little, if at all, on conventional infrastructure, nor are they entirely dependant on state funding. The three initiatives rely more on public policy that supports the culture in cities and “the development of public spaces to allow for cultural production and neighbourhood engagement towards



promoting cultural diversity” (Booyens, 2012, p. 58). All three initiatives can be categorized as ‘creative spectacle’ in that firstly, they are not held in fixed spaces; secondly they move from place to place; and lastly, the creative and innovative activities they produce form the basis of more passive tourist experiences (Richards and Wilson, 2006, p. 1216). Richards and Wilson (2006) name travelling art exhibitions (such as Maboneng), for instance and major arts festivals (such as ITC) as other kinds of ‘creative spectacles’.

All three initiatives aim to harness the power and creativity of art and culture to change the way people move through cities in ways that positively impact quality of life. The Department of Art and Culture’s revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (2017) has a section dedicated to the role of the cultural and creative industries in developing an inclusive, cohesive and proud society.

The White Paper specifically outlines national goals to shape and preserve a common identity and to promote moral regeneration. The policy actively notes nation building as key among its goals: “to foster a sense of pride and knowledge in all aspects of South African arts, culture and heritage to encourage mutual respect, tolerance and intercultural exchange between the various cultures and forms of art, in order to facilitate a shared cultural identity constituted by diversity” (p. 9). I highlight these objectives specifically because these are the objectives to which I feel Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets are directly responding. The next sections are dedicated to a discussion of Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets, respectively.

#### **4. Diversifying the township experience and economy: The case of Maboneng**

Launched in 2001, the Maboneng Township Art Experience is a public art initiative that works with artists and families in townships to convert their township homes into art galleries and museums. Alexander Township-born artist Siphwe Ngwenya, the founder of Maboneng started it as a way to create opportunities and awareness around creativity for a community who typically lacks exposure to the cultural and creative industries. Since its 2001 launch, Maboneng has been held in Alexandra (Johannesburg), Langa and Gugulethu (Cape Town) and to a lesser extent KwaZulu-Natal (eMadadeni). Maboneng’s ethos is one of exchange in that local artists are (economically and socially) empowered in their own neighbourhoods but also, art-lovers are able to venture into parts of the city they might otherwise never visit, and parts of the city that are often spatially marginalised become racially integrated cultural hubs.



Maboneng's self-articulated philosophy describes the initiative as "a national public arts exhibition that turns homes in townships into galleries and the outdoor spaces into performance districts, it aims to integrate the township and the city and end the negative notion of townships through arts"<sup>2</sup>. The product for sale is usually visual art and crafts but the overall festivities include contributions from dance, film, theatre and music. Ngwenya says, "I'm hoping to foster an artistic culture that connects the township and the city into one creative bubble. I see this as a great opportunity to create social cohesion through a shared experience" (Sanchez-Betancourt, 2016, p. 266). This is critical because "the spatial economy constitutes an intrinsic part of the real economy and can facilitate the process of economic diversification and integrated development" (Turok, 2012, p. 149). Not only does Maboneng offer an opportunity to change "the perceptions of 'the other' through public space platforms" but it also explores the potential of art to create new social and economic spaces, shifting the barriers between private and public space (Sanchez-Betancourt, 2016, p. 266).

Limiting negativity and judgement about (South) Africa's urban poverty, Maboneng is key in drawing attention to the energy and creative spirit of informal urban practices so that people in under-resourced communities are not viewed as ill-fated victims but that they become active agents who possess the resilience and imagination to negotiate and endure hostile environments through their inventiveness, resourcefulness, and experimentation (Turok, 2012, p. 144). Moreover, Maboneng offers real tangible outcomes; from artist training, to participation in the economy for those artist's whose works are showcased and sold. Maboneng's training programmes and home gallery infrastructure are supported by funds raised from ticket sales to visit the gallery homes. The main function of the home gallery project, over and above economic development for artists who otherwise cannot access elite galleries to exhibit their work, is to drive business and tourism through whichever township Maboneng is being held in, at the time. Furthermore, Maboneng's purpose is to provide residents the space to express their identity, pride and culture in their own neighbourhoods. Maboneng also works closely with existing government programmes, the city administrations, local art galleries and NGOs that prioritise artistic development to achieve its desired outcomes.

Some questions that might arise about the Maboneng experience are, what are the advantages of having outsiders in your home? What are the benefits of Maboneng to the larger host community? What is the value of buying art

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.maboneng.com/>

in the township when you can access that same art in galleries in the city? My response to these questions is that the spatial transformation of townships is necessary to improve the economy. Townships should not be afterthoughts in discussions about economic development but instead, central to urban economic development. Part of this means townships becoming desirable places to access entertainment, arts and culture. It is useful to share my experience of attending a Maboneng event in an attempt to capture some of the more symbolic significance of an intervention like this one.

I attended the inaugural Maboneng Cape Town event held in Gugulethu Township in November 2012. On the cordoned off street of NY147 in Gugulethu, an isiXhosa children's dance troupe dances energetically, a band plays jazz at a local tavern and the sounds float onto the street. The festival does not provide food, encouraging visitors to eat at local shops which on that day meant 'amagwinya neRussian' from the corner shop for me.<sup>3</sup> I remember each home gallery having its own flair and activity – it was oddly reassuring to walk into someone's home unannounced, while retaining the feeling of being in the right place. In some cases, the home's occupants would leave their home for visitors to peruse the art undistracted. In other cases, the home's occupants remained in their homes and continued with business as usual – winding down, sitting, having their tea and watching TV – completely unperturbed by the strangers in their home. There was something incredibly humanising about this experience. I specifically remember one older man acknowledge me entering his home with an ever-so-slight nod but he did not pay much attention to me after that, leaving me to wander off into his kitchen to look at the art exhibited there.

In another house, I remember admiring the furniture and looking at the family photos displayed on the living room mantle as well as the art exhibited on the walls. 'Real' life and art merged as I became a voyeur to another way of life. In another house, three men talk animatedly about soccer and look up and smile as I walk in. In another, a 92 year grandmother struck up a conversation with me as I playfully feigned disbelief at her age. All of these exchanges, some vocalised, others felt and many occurring in silence were emotionally meaningful to me. Though I had visited Gugulethu prior, Maboneng made me feel as though I now knew it in a more intimate way that encouraged me to make subsequent visits to the township outside of attending the event.

Maboneng has done well to strategically align itself with Cape Town's identity as a 'creative city'. The township arts festival was chosen as one of the official projects for the 2014 World Design Capital programme, highlighting the initiative's focus on design as a means of enhancing lives and inspiration

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<sup>3</sup> A popular street food made from a 'fatcake' and cured meat.

and, more importantly, making the concept of design accessible to all (Franklin, 2014, p. 84). Since then they have won other awards and are enjoying growing recognition. Maboneng essentially explores the ways in which public art can transform urban space and stimulate social interaction in more varied ways. ITC does the same but also attempts to reconfigure space so that city spaces are seen not only as problematic but as spaces of enchantment and great possibility.

### **5. Challenging historical spaces: The case of Infecting the City (ITC)**

Infecting the City follows the trend demonstrated by the broadening of the cultural and creative industries to a knowledge economy incorporating the arts (Evans, 2009, p. 1009). The knowledge economy is a fluid and not purely economic qualifier. It is not measured by economic impact alone – other things such as social cohesion and nation building are critical. ITC is the embodiment of this growing practice.

ITC is, for the most part, a free public arts festival held annually in Cape Town between 2007 and 2017 and as a biennale beginning in 2019. The festival includes productions from South African and international talent, and is the longest running public arts festival in the country<sup>4</sup>. Each year, over 150 artists (including artists from the inner city and the surrounding townships of Cape Town) are involved in transforming public city spaces, as they try out new ideas and interventions for the diverse people that move through the city every day, from civil servants and the homeless to corporate employees, tourists, students and the like. As the week's festivities unfold, Cape Town's most contested city spaces are afforded new meaning as they are transformed into lively, inclusive and electrifying spaces where the artists invite the public to engage with art that comments on our South African condition in different ways; through dance, performance and visual art, music, video, public talks and poetry. Commended for its efforts to democratize art, its varied audiences and its local talent anchored in contemporary South African life, ITC produces "critical debate among myriad multi-cultural voices each year" (Breyne *et al.*, 2017, p. 12).

One of the recurring debates is around ITC's use of space. These debates materialise in the context of "the legacy of Apartheid spatial planning, post-Apartheid gentrification, property speculation and foreign land ownership that have led to the isolation and proletarianization of indigenous people in Cape Town" (Makhubu, 2013). Most of the festival occurs in the Central Business District of Cape Town where contentious historical buildings and monuments

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.africacentre.net/infecting-the-city/>

provide the backdrop for the juxtaposition of a country fighting to reverse its oppressive past – while that past and its infrastructural reminders are pervasive. For instance, one of the focal sites for activity is Church Square. “Church Square is in close proximity to a number of significant buildings: the Parliament buildings, Groote Kerk (a colonial Dutch church), and the Iziko Slave Lodge museum that once housed about 9000 slaves, convicts and mentally ill people between 1679 and 1811” (Simbao, 2016, p. 15). A noticeable feature in the square is an arrangement of granite memorial boxes created by the artists Gavin Younge and Wilma Cruise, revealed on the Square in 2008 to memorialise the slaves brought to the Cape by the Dutch East India Company, an acknowledgement of their contribution towards building South Africa (Simbao, 2016, p. 15). The memorial boxes are etched with the names of slaves and text that reads “resistance, rebellion, [and] suffering” (p. 15). Spin Street runs adjacent to Church Square where a “modest plaque on the Spin Street refuge island marks the place where a tree once stood under which slaves were auctioned” (Simbao, 2016, p. 15). Set up in 1953, the plaque reads, “On this spot stood the old slave tree” (p. 15). Close to these two monuments, on Church Square stands the statue of colonial-era politician and journalist Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr raised upon a large plinth. On Adderley Street (another prominent performance site for ITC), one more imposing statue stands, this time of Jan van Riebeeck, the Dutch colonialist who ‘founded’ the Cape in 1652 (Simbao, 2016, p.20). Van Riebeeck’s statue overlooks Adderley Street in what Ruth Simbao describes as “an imperial gesture of ownership” (2016, p.20). Simbao also points out the significance of Adderley Street as a prominent site of protest during Apartheid where black people’s right to march was forbidden and often violently cut short.

These historical sites, contested spaces and edifices (slave monuments, exclusive elitist galleries, and colonial statues) reflect very real histories of colonialism, bondage and oppression. Except now these histories are mediated by the post-Apartheid project of nation building. Now these sites that memorialize history’s figures and the events of a racially unequal past, become shared spaces of pain and possibility...making public space, public once again. This supports ITC’s mission to help the public reconcile their personal and often emotional relationship to private and public spaces. I have had the privilege of participating in the Infecting the City festival twice as a performer in 2009-2010 and subsequently as a spectator (2011-2013). I will narrate one moment that stood out for me was when I was performing in Meet Market in 2010 on Church Square.

I provided the score; singing, screaming, wailing and humming haunting melodies on top of the very same plinth that supports Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr's statue. When I descend the plinth, during the performance with the help of a ladder, I continue to sing melancholically, walking around the contested Church Square, troubled by those ancestors who lay buried, but still haunt the site. Onlookers move around, some nervous to be in such close proximity to the action, others engrossed in the action and others just attempting to carry on with their city business but stopping to glance for a minute or two. Towards the end, my performance reaches a fever pitch where my vocals are especially strained and desperate. I fling my body down at the foot of the statue in distress and at that moment, a homeless lady walks up to me mid-performance and sits next to me. She carries around some food in a bag, food that she offers to me since I am so clearly distressed. She tries to lull me, she tries to feed me and she embraces me in an attempt to soothe me as I continue to perform. Some of the spectators laugh nervously, others are touched by this moment, and others find it comical, while most are convinced that it is a part of the production. Infecting the City facilitates this kind of collective integration and relatedness; an opening for people to connect on a human level in ways that everyday spatial and class divisions do not encourage.

The potential for cultural and creative experimentation to reconfigure space and social interaction is beautifully demonstrated by ITC. Attention to the symbolism of performance fosters an appreciation for the ways in which city spaces can be seen not solely as challenging but as spaces where magic can happen, opening urban space up to the imagination (Daya, 2011, p. 492). ITC consists of a combination of larger and small-scale interventions but all are a reminder that the possibilities of the city are in a very real sense constituted through movement. The very nature of the festival is to destabilise the reality of limited mobility for many by creating 'a flow of movement' through the city: "this is itself a means of reconfiguring as open and enabling the spaces of a city where pedestrians are marginalised and public spaces often perceived as threatening, especially by women" (Daya, 2011, p. 492). The festival becomes a project of imagining an alternative city and how life in it can be different if access to space is reformed.

## **6. Safer and more inclusive cities: The case of Open Streets**

Metropolitan cities around the world are under constant pressure to renew, rebrand or re-invent new experiences in keeping with the notion of 'creative cities'. As a result, it is common for cities to borrow and adapt regeneration ideas from other successful cities (Rogerson, 2006, p. 150). Taking its inspiration

from Bogotá's *Ciclovía*, a recreational programme that creates 120km of car-free streets in the Colombian capital every Sunday and public holiday, Open Streets is one such idea. Following Colombia, more than 400 cities around the world have since adopted their own versions of open streets that provide space for recreation and social interaction.

Open Streets Cape Town is a volunteer-based citizen-driven initiative working to change how people use, perceive and experience streets. Open Streets works to contest the idea of urban mobility by carrying out campaigns, temporary interventions, dialogues and walks that raise citizen awareness, spark public debate, and ultimately drive behaviour change around the role of streets in the life of the city. They are most known for their leading programme, Open Streets Cape Town, the first of its kind in Africa. "With no financial resources it has been powered by the agency of five volunteers who rely heavily on personal and professional networks to engage with communities and key stakeholders (such as city officials) in an attempt to get institutional support to roll out these kind of public space experiments" (Sanchez-Betancourt, 2016, p. 264). To describe Open Street's manifestation, an arterial road is officially blocked in a city or township to allow people to move freely and openly on the streets. Children are able to play in the streets, without the threat of vehicles, in the safety of their community. "The aim is to get the way of life experienced on that day – to be how we always experience our cities as shared spaces, integrated, equal, safer and more vibrant streets" (Sanchez-Betancourt, 2016, p. 263). While cyclists and other forms of non-motorized transport rule Open Streets in other cities in the world, in Cape Town these events so far have been dominated by cultural and creative activities staged and provided by local residents and recruits. The temporary urban space that is created on the street is mainly facilitated through community meetings with local residents at the beginning and through ongoing community engagement, the arranged activations of the day (games, music, performances), spontaneous acts and improvised home businesses are realized (Sanchez-Betancourt, 2016, p. 264).

Of course an experiment that attempts to obstruct public space needs complete buy-in from the city. Open Streets enjoys the full support of the City of Cape Town, as well as civil society organisations and many individual volunteers from across the city. However, founders admit that building and maintaining these relationships with the City is not easy. Citizen-city engagement can be difficult and Open Streets fell victim to this when tensions between the City and organizers were aired in the media at the early stages of the process.



Complex regulations and institutional processes restrict efforts “to utilize urban infrastructure in different ways and to support community-driven initiatives that fall outside of traditional institutional boxes” (Sanchez-Betancourt, 2016, p. 265). Urban governance structures make these kind of initiatives challenging even when these initiatives offer practical ways to help bridge the city's social and spatial divides. Although I have never attended an Open Streets event, I know the founders and therefore have some insight into the event. I have also observed some video footage taken from one Open Streets event held in the Cape Town township of Mitchells Plain in 2016<sup>5</sup>.

In the video you see young people roller-blading, skateboards swishing down the street, children playing hopscotch and other games. One lady jokes that for the first time in Mitchells Plain, she can carry her phone in her hand without the threat of being mugged. Young girls play with a skipping rope, gyrate their waists playing with hula hoops, use the pavement and tar road as a canvas on which to sketch out images with chalk. Children ride their bicycles freely through the streets and the lack of cars make it so that even wheelchair-bound people can experience the freedom of open streets, unaccompanied. The energy is positive, the mood elevated and cheerful with people using words like ‘welcome’, ‘smiling’, ‘love’, ‘people coming together’ and ‘fun’ to emphasise the sense of unity and community. A woman highlights how diverse the event is with people belonging to all race and cultural groups – not a common occurrence in the predominantly Coloured Township of Mitchells Plain. Everywhere there is some kind of visual or sonic stimulation and creative intervention. Boys and young men play basketball, cricket and local musicians and cultural groups are invited to perform if they want to. The police presence is visible and even takes on new meaning – often policing of young people tends to be distasteful, discriminatory and increasingly disproportionate in terms of the force and measures employed. But during Open Streets in Mitchell’s plain (where young people, especially may not feel amenable to the police), relations between police and citizens seem warm and participatory as the police become involved in the festivities.

The idea is that being at one of the Open Streets events drives one to fully re-imagine public life because for that day, our neighbourhoods and communities reflect the kind of neighbourhoods and communities we want to live in, and by extension, the kind of country we want to live in.

Since its inception, Maboneng Township Arts Experience claims to have helped create 50 jobs, 20 new businesses and continues to add a growing number

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuC2akaun7o>



of Gallery Homes per year. Infecting the City has introduced the country to many now renowned artists and certainly contributes to the economy of the CBD – which is always busier than usual – as it plays host to visitors from other provinces as well as international visitors. Open Streets has ongoing campaigns and advocacy groups but as yet, I am only aware of Maboneng being able to assess impact in ‘real’ economical terms. If such data exists for ITC and Open Streets, I am unaware of it. While enabling economic empowerment is the goal of two of the three interventions, what is more significant is the ways in which they decolonise how people think about and move through South Africa’s cities.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that the growing cultural and creative industries in developing regions have the power to impact many factors: wellbeing (socio-economic, educational and cultural), society (inclusion and belonging) and economy (access). Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets draw upon the uniqueness of place, for the purpose of re-imagining public place and public life, or how life in cities can be different or better. Nevertheless these interventions also raise a number of questions: does activation encourage transformation? How can we quantify this transformation? What evidence do we have of this societal impact? Answering these questions makes a case for why such initiatives and the social benefits derived from them “may be as or a more important outcome than economic viability” (Booyens, 2012, p. 48). Public policy intervention is essential in this regard (ibid., p. 48).

Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets illustrate how city redevelopment strategies can be influential when based on creativity. They present a charge to create new innovatory cultural forms and products, while nourishing the cultural economy (Richards and Wilson, 2006, p. 1215). They are offered as a “set of living, embodied geographies which provide a new source of value through their performative push” (Amin and Thrift, 2002, p. 125).

Additionally, one of the ways we can continue to decolonise urban spaces using the cultural and creative industries, is through a culturally sensitive approach to urban and regional planning. Finally, though more difficult to quantify, greater attention needs to be paid to not only the economic value of the creative industries but also the social and intrinsic value, because it is not possible to find substitutes for the intrinsic value of art for individuals and communities. Mechanisms such as the Global Creativity Index attempt to measure the return on social investment of art both qualitatively and quantitatively. As more

interventions such as the Maboneng Township Art Experience, Infecting the City and Open Streets emerge, planners, policymakers and people will begin to move closer to methods of quantifying the social (and economic) impact that such interventions have on the South African landscape.

### **Biographical notes**

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