

Own Your City: improving access, belonging and inclusivity in South Africa's city centres using Cultural and Creative Industries

In our 23 years of democracy, questioning has become the language of South Africa: who has access to what spaces, whose voice is privileged, whose legacy is memorialized, who lives where, what names we give to places, who speaks for whom and who decides on what symbols remain. In the spirit of this line of inquiry, a program of research I am exploring called '**Own Your City**' (OYC), questions the ways cities in South Africa function as extensions of the geographical segregation enacted by Apartheid laws - the implications of which are still evident in the way people move through, feel about and occupy cities in contemporary South Africa. Included in this line of inquiry is how many Arts, Culture and Heritage institutions were, and remain located in major cities therefore, inaccessible to many (people who live in rural, peri-urban and township settings) and are overlooked by the millions of people who move through South Africa's cities every day. This talk considers how the Cultural and Creative Industries (or CCI) have a hand in dismantling Apartheid's spatial violence's and proposes that we use art and culture to ameliorate some of the current challenges, so that public spaces might foster a greater sense of belonging and good citizenship. I present 3 case studies: the Maboneng Township Arts Experience (Maboneng for short), the Infecting the City public arts festival (or ITC for short) and the Open Streets initiative. These 3 projects are attempting to change how people interface with their cities and exemplify the potential role CCI play in mediating feelings of safety and belonging, access and socio-economic development in our cities.

These 3 case studies of happenings or events can be categorised in different ways but they are driven by common interests in how they view cities, spatialities, public attitudes and identities. They all have to negotiate difficult bureaucratic boundaries that regulate public space, that is, the policies created and managed by city governments that have become critical mechanisms for negotiating how public life is enriched with and by art. They also have to negotiate those bureaucratic boundaries alongside commercial interests. While these 3 initiatives are by no means the only projects running that accept the charge to 'reclaim cities', there are still too few examples that have had the same consistency and support as these 3.

The **Maboneng Township Art Experience** is a public art initiative that works with artists in and families in townships to convert their township homes into art galleries and museums, this way, art-lovers – especially those who are unlikely to set foot in townships or peri-urban areas – are able to venture into parts of the city they might not otherwise visit, and parts of the city that are often (spatially) marginalised become racially integrated cultural hubs. In many ways it is both public art and a touring venture. Maboneng also offers artist training and economic development for those artist's whose works are showcased and sold. The funds raised from tickets to visit the Gallery Homes, as well as a portion of the product sales, go directly to support Maboneng's training programmes and home gallery infrastructure. Really the main purpose of the annual home gallery project is to drive business and tourism through to Gugulethu (or whatever township it is being held at, at the time) in that way providing residents the space to express their identity and the culture in their own neighbourhoods.

Following its launch in 2001, Maboneng has subsequently been held in Alexandra (Joburg), Madadeni (KZN), Langa and Gugulethu (Cape Town). The product for sale is usually visual art and crafts but the overall festivities include contributions from dance, film, theatre and music. Maboneng works closely with existing government programs, the City, local art galleries and NGOs that prioritise artistic development. Maboneng essentially explores ways in which public art can transform urban space and stimulate social interaction in more varied ways.

Infecting the City is – for the most part – a free public arts festival taking place in Cape Town annually. The artists involved in ITC use public city spaces to 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, students and the like. Over a week period, 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. These contested spaces and edifices (slave monuments, exclusive galleries, concert halls, forgotten theatres, colonial statues) 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. Infecting the City's mission asserts that the festival "works to reclaim the streets of Cape Town and re-imagine civic existence" in ways that help the public reconcile their personal and often emotional relation to public, private and internal spaces. ITC collaborates with city authorities and local arts organisations as well as curators and artists.

Open Streets Cape Town is a citizen-driven initiative working to change how we use, perceive and experience streets. Founded by a group of volunteers in 2012, Open Streets works to challenge this 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. But they are most known for their flagship programme, Open Streets Days which takes 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. More than 400 cities around the world have since followed suit with their own versions of open streets that provide space for recreation and social interaction. Open Streets Cape Town is the first formal Open Streets programme in Africa, offering a practical way to help bridge the city's social and spatial divides as a result, 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. OSCT has its roots in street action, as well as research, and has grown as a dynamic and organic movement of street-minded citizens. To describe it quite literally, 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 idea is that being at one of the Open Street Day 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. 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.

All 3 initiatives in a nutshell aim to harness the power and creativity of art to change the way people move through cities in ways that hopefully impact their quality of life. The Department of Arts and Culture's revised White paper on Culture and Heritage has a section dedicated to the role of the Creative and Cultural Industries in developing an inclusive, cohesive and proud society and I believe that Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets live up to this mandate. The ACH policy specifically outlines what should be 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". I highlight these objectives specifically because those are the objectives to which I feel Maboneng, ITC and Open Streets are directly responding.

Having attended all 3 events myself; my impressions are related. First with Maboneng, I attended the event in Gugulethu in 2013. I remember each home gallery having its own flair and activity – it was quite odd to walk into someone's home unannounced and with a sense of being in the right place. Especially if the home's occupants are – in the privacy of their space - winding down, sitting, having their tea and watching TV. I remember one older man acknowledge me entering his home with an ever so slight nod and he didn't pay 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 – the inhabitants of the house weren't there, the house was impeccably clean and I looked at family photos as well as the art exhibited. In another house, 3 guys loudly talked about soccer and looked up and smiled as I walked in. In another, a 92 year grandmother stood trying to convince me that she was 92 and I just didn't believe it. All of these exchanges, vocalised, felt, or in silence were meaningful to me and really I would never have known Gugulethu in a more intimate way, were it not for attending the festival. On the cordoned off street of NY147 in Gugs, a children's Xhosa dance troupe showed off their moves, a band played jazz in a local tavern and the festival did not provide food, encouraging that visitors eat at local shops and so my lunch that day was *amagwinya neRussian* from the corner shop.

With ITC, I have had the pleasure of participating in it myself 2 years in a row so my experience is both as a spectator and as an actor. One moment that stood out for me was when I was performing in *Meet Market* in 2010 on Church Square. I provided the score and sang, screamed, wailed, hummed melodies from atop the plinth that holds Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr statue in the middle of Church square, to the right of the statue are slave monuments commemorating those who are no longer with us and across in the distance, is the contested slave museum. When I descended the plinth, during the performance with the help of a ladder, I continued to sing walking around Church Square, involved in the action as onlookers milled about, some nervous, others enveloped in the action and others just attempting to get on with their city business but stopping to glance for a minute or two. Towards the end, the 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 walked up to me, sat next to me (during the performance), she had some food in the bag she carried and she offered it to me since I was so clearly distressed. She tried to lull me, she tried to feed me and she embraced me, trying to calm me down while I continued with the performance. Some of the observers laughed, others were touched by the moment, others thought it was comical and most thought it was part of the production. This is the kind of integration and relatedness that events like this encourage; for people to connect on a human level in ways that spatial and class divisions do not encourage.

My experience with Open Streets was last year in Mitchells Plain and though I did not stay for very long, I remember clearly children roller-blading, skateboards swishing down the street, children playing hopscotch, one lady joked that she could carry her phone in her hand without the threat of being mugged, youngsters played jump rope, circled their waists with hoola hoops, using the pavement and tar as a canvas sketching out images with chalk. Kids rode their bicycles freely and the lack of cars made it so that even wheelchair bound people could experience the freedom of open streets, unaccompanied. The energy was positive, the mood elevated and cheerful, I saw people belonging to all race groups. Everywhere there was some kind of visual or sonic stimulation and creative intervention. People played basketball, cricket, local musicians/ theatre/dance/cultural groups were invited to perform if they wanted to. Another thing that stood out to me was how even the police got a facelift, usually these events have law enforcement on hand but what was lovely was the different way people were policed. The police become involved in the festivities – often policing of the young tends to be distasteful, disrespectful, discriminatory and increasingly disproportionate in terms of the force and measures employed (as we saw with our national student protests). During Open Streets in Mitchell's plain (where young people, especially may not feel amenable to the police), relations between police and citizens was warm and participatory.

To date, Maboneng Township Arts Experience claims to have helped create 50 jobs, started 20 new businesses and added 15 new Gallery Homes per year. ITC has promoted the art of and introduced the country to many now renowned artist and Open Streets has ongoing campaigns and advocacy groups but as yet, I am only aware of Maboneng being able to assess impact in socio-economical terms. If such data exists for ITC and Open Streets I am unaware of it and open to anyone sharing it.

I've shared with you 3 projects that I feel are successful in working towards this buzz phrase of 'reclaiming the city' – I didn't enter into the politics around these events and some of the critiques. My point is they have common goals to change, even decolonise the way people think about and move through South Africa's cities. In fact Maboneng and Open Streets have even collaborated on some occasions. What I am also interested in, is exploring measures to assess impact or existing evaluative data and then how to take similar ideas and make them sustainably work in Durban, or Nelspruit or Kokstad for instance – this has to be driven by communities. They need to want this for themselves. One bias is that these events have capacity and support because they happen in Cape Town (although I think Maboneng has happened in Johannesburg on occasion) where maybe the structure of the city lends itself to interventions of this nature. But what about the rest of the country? I am based in Durban for

instance where the cultural, political, language and socio-historical workings of the city offers its own uniqueness and set of challenges.

Durban has a busy and vibrant city centre which tens of thousands of commuters enter by rail, taxi or bus every day but there are significant problems with congestion, both vehicular and pedestrian; conflict between people and vehicles; and conflict between informal traders, pedestrians and retailers, theft and issues of harassment and sexual safety. Right now priorities for the city include crime reduction, more green space, markets for informal traders, managed parking, more taxi facilities, public toilets, and safe walking space for pedestrians and cyclists. With this background in mind, my prospective project interests considers the city of Durban. For instance, the city is credited for being the 'most transformed' having gone through over 100 street name changes from 2008 to present day. These name changes were contested and celebrated as the names of colonial/apartheid figures were replaced with the names of South African struggle heroes. Some argued that the name changes were political propaganda in attempts to garner more votes, others could not understand why innocuous names (e.g. West Street or Essenwood Road) were also changed and others thought the name changes signalled the symbolic redress of our oppressive past as geographical naming becomes a way of educating people politically, personally, culturally and historically. What is evident is that the name changes remain largely unquestioned and little has been done to conscientize the public about the new names, their significance and impact on the bodies that occupy the city streets every day. Instead, what should have been a significant historical moment is marred by politicized in-fighting instead of using the opening to empower and educate young people about their inherited legacies. This is an example of something **Own Your City** would attempt to take on.

Some questions that I'm hoping we can discuss that might help me get closer to my envisioned program of research (which is still in an exploratory phase):

- 1) What does it really mean for citizens to reclaim cities? From what and for whom?
- 2) Does greater activity in cities impact positively on cities i.e. economic growth, issues of safety, social cohesion, feelings of ownership/belonging.
- 3) What evidence do we have that public art interventions have positive societal impact?
- 4) What are some criticisms that you have of similar interventions?

Open Streets partners with the City of Cape Town – you need full buy in from the City.

Rather outsource an organization who are already working in community work, urban development, tours, I need to guide it but they do the bulk of the work. Who is doing work in this space that you can partner with. You need transport engineers to figure out the logistics of such an endeavour.

Muizenberg festival concept – look up. Over a week with a program – this is what I need to do.