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# Finding the mother in the mother city: reclaiming Cape Town through design

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## Abstract

The current macro-trend of unprecedented population growth in developing countries, specifically in the global South, calls for an increased focus on urban planning and development. To this end, many discussions in urban planning and design acknowledge the need for cities to be managed creatively in a way that empowers their inhabitants and creates better living conditions for them. In its successful bid to be the World Design Capital in 2014, Cape Town, South Africa's mother city, has embraced the idea of being a creative city, with a specific mission to improve community cohesion to rebuild the city, to reconnect communities by means of infrastructural enhancement and to reposition the city for the knowledge economy. By drawing specifically on the writings of Henri Lefebvre, this paper aligns the Cape Town World Design Capital bid and subsequent designation with the concept of the right to the city. One characteristic of Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city is not about being nostalgic for the past but rather, like the theme of Cape Town's bid, to *Live Design. Transform Life*, is anticipatory of a better urban situation. Following from this, the article explores the way in which design may serve as a driver to facilitate Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city in Cape Town and it also considers the implications of a design capital city within the context of an African creative economy.

**Key words:** design, creative city, World Design Capital, Henri Lefebvre, citizen participation, community development

## Introduction

A common macro-trend in cities in the global South is accelerated urbanisation and population growth (Minty 2008:7). The global South is a term that refers to the geographic South, comprising Africa, Central and Latin America, and a significant part of Asia. As noted by leading anthropologists, Jean and John Comaroff (2012), the term is used as a substitute for the common phrase 'the third world' when referring to postcolonial nations. The nation-states which fall under this classification are synonymous with uncertain development, economic instability and other crises. On the African continent in particular, developing countries are experiencing population growth at an unprecedented rate. Wait (2012), in a recent article on the need for sustainable infrastructures in Africa, cites David O'Brien, financial services firm KPMG Global Center of Excellence for Cities leader, as saying that '[m]ore than 70 African cities would boast a population bigger than one-million people by 2050'. Such statistics necessitate effective management of space and resources for national populations to have a basic living standard and consequently, signal the need for an increased focus on urban planning and development in cities. In this regard, O'Brien called for strong leadership from political and business leaders on urban development and the impact of cities on economic growth, social wellbeing, climate change and sustainability' (Wait 2012). Furthermore, O'Brien

(in Wait 2012) believes that '[f]uture projects in city planning will not be successful if there is no political drive or will behind it. If there are strong leaders, who have the insight to manage their cities correctly, we will see thriving cities.' With regard to leadership, political and business leaders are now viewing and increasingly adopting design as a strategic resource. In keeping with this development, this article explores, from an ideological and theoretical point of view, how design might be adopted in Cape Town, South Africa, in a strategic and operational capacity to lead city development and give inhabitants the right to the city by way of the city's World Design Capital 2014 bid and subsequent designation.

## Cape Town as a creative city

Within contemporary design discourse, design is touted as being an alternative to science as a tradition of inquiry and action to provide leaders with support to meet a variety of challenges that confront them (Owen 2005). The ubiquity of design thinking, in business circles for example, attests to the increased focus on design's potential for change, both from an economic and a social point of view. Similarly, with regard to urban planning and development, the idea of managing cities correctly or successfully is often coupled with the idea of managing cities creatively, where design is viewed as an urban development tool to make cities thrive as a result of being more 'competitive, attractive, liveable and efficient' (ICSID Projects). The concept of the creative city was coined by Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini in the late 1980s and has subsequently become a catch phrase, which has diluted its initial intention of connoting 'a new method of strategic urban planning and examines how people can think, plan and act creatively in the city' (Landry 2000:xii). The concept essentially focused

on embedding a culture of creativity in a city where creativity should be adopted as a driving force for change (Franke & Verhagen 2005:17). Furthermore, Landry (2000) sees the potential of creativity as having both an outward and an inward focus: firstly, to drive innovation and make cities distinct and secondly, to address social problems.

The growing use of the word 'creative' as a prefix for terms such as industry, economy, city, and class found in many publications over the past decade has facilitated the ubiquity of the term creative city, but has also raised criticism and scepticism. In particular, the work of Richard Florida (2002) has been seminal in popularising the term creative class. He introduced the idea of a creative class as one that contributes significantly to economic growth by way of their creative outputs. To him, it is this creative class that characterises cities and regions that are economically successful today. The response to his work has been two-fold, however. On the positive side, many attribute the widespread acknowledgement (in terms of media success) of the topic of the creative class and the resulting creative economy to him. The criticism about his work is that he limits creativity to a special class. This is in contrast to Landry's conception of creativity, which is not restricted to a particular class, but which more explicitly accepts that creativity could be shared amongst all people living in a city. Furthermore, Florida's work in particular has raised questions about culture and creativity being promoted as a fad. Despite the questions and scepticism surrounding the use of the term creativity, it is a quality highly valued in design and has, therefore, driven many urban projects. For example, the view of design as a creative urban development tool forms the basic premise of the World Design Capital initiative.



**Figure 1:** Spread from the World Design Capital 2014 Bid Book. Image courtesy of Cape Town Partnership, producer of the bid book.

The World Design Capital is a city promotion initiative or designation that began in 2008. The designation is awarded biennially, by the non-profit organisation, the International Council for Societies of Industrial Design (more commonly referred to as Icsid), to cities that use design and creativity for social, economic and cultural development. The organisation links national, professional associations and serves as a unified voice to protect and promote the industrial design discipline. Although industrial design holds its own as a discipline, owing to the multi-disciplinary nature of design practice, the World Design Capital initiative is not limited to industrial design. Nonetheless, the initial concept was introduced specifically to the Icsid Executive Board with the intention to motivate cities to recognise and use design as a strategic development tool. From conceptualisation, it was hoped that the initiative would garner interest and support from global design networks and especially governments to consider the value of design for economic and social growth. Furthermore, the intention was for the initiative to encourage dialogue about the ‘impact of design on quality of life’ of inhabitants in the

respective countries (World Design Capital). Icsid therefore saw the designation as an opportunity for cities to consider their accomplishments and to further consider innovative design strategies and solutions to address contemporary challenges within an urban context. The significant link between creative cities and their impact on economy has also helped to position and generate interest for the initiative.

Since the inception of the World Design Capital initiative, cities which have held this title are Torino, Italy (2008) and Seoul, South Korea (2010), as well as the most recent Design Capital, Helsinki, Finland in 2012 (World Design Capital). The city of Cape Town, commonly referred to as the mother city, competed in 2011 against Dublin and Bilbao to win the title for 2014. It is the first city in the global South and also the first African city to be awarded this title. Owing to the country’s cultural dynamics and its popularity as an international tourist destination, it is often debated whether Cape Town is an ‘African’ city or not. Such a question is shortsighted because it supports a simplistic caricature of the city. As Minty (2008:10) also articulates, it plays into ‘simplistic conceptions of African identity as one based upon unchanging indigenous tradition and independence from European influence, or on a stereotyped image of the African city as one filled with predominantly black people in bustling streets.’

It is worthwhile noting that the year 2014 marks the twentieth anniversary of South Africa’s democracy. Even though South Africa is often considered as the beacon of democracy in Africa, South African cities, including Cape Town, are still grappling with their colonial and apartheid past. According to Simone (2005:322), ‘South African urban policymakers have tried hard to fill in the gaps engineered by apartheid – the gaps between a modern urban existence for a few and the life of a refugee camp for the majority.’



**Figure 2:** Spread from the World Design Capital 2014 Bid Book. Image courtesy of Cape Town Partnership, producer of the bid book.

The continuing social and economic inequalities, and consequently the urban disparities in the city, hinder inhabitants' equal rights in and to the city. Reference to the city here is not restricted to the inner city, but extends to the greater Cape Town area as well. Furthermore, the increasing population growth as mentioned above also contributes to the challenges faced by many communities, and puts a strain on access to basic services. In an opinion piece by Tristan Gorgens (2012) in the online, *South African Design>Magazine*, he asserts that '[e]lection after election, "democracy" ends the moment the last vote is cast – all that follows are empty references to "consultation" and desperate running battles over basic services.'

In light of the current challenges many inhabitants are faced with in the city, the theme of the Cape Town's bid, namely *Live Design. Transform Life*, is rather apt. As part of its successful bid, Cape Town has embraced the

idea of being a creative city. This stance is boldly declared in media releases and on the official World Design Capital 2014 website, where Cape Town has pledged to use the 'opportunity to transform [the] city into one of the most inclusive, sustainable, liveable and productive on the African continent' (Cape Town 2014). Ultimately, the aim is to re-imagine the mother city as being one that tries to assign equal rights to its growing number of inhabitants, its children. This idea of re-imagining the city and assigning equal rights to citizens resonates with Henri Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city.

The right to the city, first introduced during the 1960s by French philosopher and sociologist, Henri Lefebvre, has 'undergone a certain revival' (Harvey 2012:xi) and has been adopted for a more general use. It is a frequently used phrase that is often adopted as the slogan for national protest action and initiatives in a variety of

social and political spheres. In South Africa, for example, the Shack Dwellers movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, has adopted the phrase for campaigns in their struggle to be allowed the right to land and housing; one such campaign played out in Cape Town in June 2010 (Abahlali baseMjondolo 2010). Internationally, the concept has also been adopted by organisations such as the United Nations Habitat, an agency for human settlements, in a number of publications and forums to refer to the need for redistributive justice in informal settlements. The UN-Habitat's flagship report, *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011* focused on the right to the city and was titled *Cities for all: bridging the urban divide*. Similarly, the World Urban Forum 5, held in Brazil in 2010, also adopted the right to the city as its theme (UN Habitat).

Lefebvre's use of the term was, however, more radical than its current use; it was initially an attempt to restructure power relations in urban spaces so that control could instead be shifted from the state and capital to urban inhabitants. Lefebvre's thought and writings on the production of space were largely shaped by and in response to the hegemonic urban renewal during the 1960s in France. Firstly, the capitalist economy was having a negative effect on the city and, secondly, industrialisation resulted in the privatisation of urban space and characterised the so called 'new' and divided city that Lefebvre and others were reacting against. Similarly, Cape Town's overarching social and economic inequalities could render it a divided city.

One characteristic of Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city is not about being nostalgic for the past but rather, like the theme of Cape Town's bid, is anticipatory of a better urban situation. Since design is viewed as a catalyst for social change, this article considers, ideologically and theoretically, the potential of the World Design Capital to affect change in the city to

empower inhabitants by allowing them to imagine a better urban future and more importantly, to be proactive in creative problem solving in the city. Following from this, the article discusses how design, in its current conception, may serve as a driver to facilitate and realise Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city in Cape Town. The concept of the right to the city, widely used in the discussions on urban planning and development, provides the theoretical framework for the paper. Three overarching characteristics of Lefebvre's right to the city, namely participation, appropriation, and experimental utopias, underpin the discussion about Cape Town's 2014 bid. The paper also briefly considers the implications of Cape Town being the first African design capital.

## The right to the (mother) city

Cape Town, the legislative capital of South Africa, is a culturally diverse and creolised African city and it was this diversity that fuelled apartheid as an official South African policy of racial segregation. Apartheid, as a designed system, relegated people of colour and the urban poor to the peripheries of the city. In addition, not only did it limit inhabitants' access to space and resources in the city, but it also denied them their right to make their own contributions towards a better city. Since the end of apartheid, the city is still characterised by divisions where 'high levels of poverty, inequality and unemployment persist' (Bid Book 2010:5). This echoes the situation in a number of other national and international cities where, ironically, as 'the world becomes more global, it becomes more segregated' (Minty 2008:7).

Under the current circumstances, the City of Cape Town is preparing a new city development strategy that seeks to address the needs of the city and its

citizens until 2040 (Bid Book 2010:25). It should be noted that South Africa's constitutional democracy gives city municipalities the right to govern at a local level and to provide services to their respective communities. Cape Town's municipality is referred to and branded as the City of Cape Town. In addition to the municipality's efforts at addressing some of the problems that communities are faced with, there are a number of other institutions and programmes in the city that are engaged in intercultural work to the same end. However, according to Minty (2008:2), 'they are working in isolated ways against the backdrop of a weak policy arena.' Despite the operational challenges faced by the municipality and other bodies, there seems to be an increased awareness amongst such organisations about the role that culture, and by extension creativity, can play in addressing the day-to-day realities in the city. Both Landry (2000) and Minty (2008) attest to the fact that diversity is important for a creative city to take shape so the diversity, which was once frowned upon in South Africa, is now an advantage.

In light of this, the City of Cape Town seized the opportunity to bid for the World Design Capital because, firstly, they saw it as an opportunity to coordinate cultural and creative activities and channel them towards a common goal. Secondly, and more importantly, they believed that the process of putting together a bid would help to cement and provide a support structure for processes of development which are underway, irrespective of whether the bid was successful or not. Subsequently, the success of the bid seems to have increased the awareness of using design as a possible and strategic resource, and the World Design Capital is therefore a platform that is providing inhabitants with an opportunity to become proactive and address social and urban development through creativity. Just as Lefebvre's writing intended to

mobilise people to take a stand against bureaucratic organisation in Paris at the time, the World Design Capital is an initiative whose intention has the potential to mobilise Cape Town's inhabitants. Lefebvre (1996:154) was aware that the working class or inhabitants would not be able to contribute solely to the making of urban society, but he believed that without them, transformation and change would be impossible. Sugranyes and Mathivet (2010:18) indicate that within the contemporary neoliberal globalised world, the working class does not hold the political role in the same sense that it did previously. Nonetheless, they believe that this does not mean that inhabitants cannot be proactive in terms of taking a stand for social change. Now, rather than reacting by class, inhabitants do so as collective movements comprising individuals and/or organisations. Accordingly, the World Design Capital can be characterised as one such movement that is working towards change.

It is not within the scope of this article to explore fully the nature of contemporary design. However, in order to proceed with the discussion, it is important to elucidate what is meant by design in the context of the World Design Capital in order to better understand how and why it is viewed as a strategic resource and how it can facilitate the right to the city. The word design can be used as a noun or a verb and can thus denote not only an activity or process, but also the outcome of that activity (Lawson 2006; Borja de Mozota 2003). Traditionally, design, as an activity, was characterised by its tangible outcomes and the designer was the practitioner who 'put a beautiful wrapper around the idea' (Brown 2008:86) at the end of the innovation process. Today, however, the perception of design has changed and it is increasingly being acknowledged as an interdisciplinary problem-solving process (Cassim 2013). Lawson (2006) also views design as being more than just problem-solving. He





**Figure 3:** Spread from the World Design Capital 2014 Bid Book. Image courtesy of Cape Town Partnership, producer of the bid book.

adopts the idea of design as a conversation, and thereby his sentiments echo Donald Schön's (1983:78) concept of design as a reflective conversation where both the design problem and solution are bound by an iterative process animated by a variety of stakeholders, including the end-users of the designed outcome. Most design disciplines today are evolving to become more participatory in nature, and not only are designer's roles changing, but consumers are changing as well. Elizabeth Sanders (2006) supports this by noting that '[t]he everyday people we serve through design are becoming proactive in their demand for creative ways of living.' People are realising their potential to become active participants, and creativity provides common ground amongst them to take action. While reflecting on a human-centred framework of design, Richard Buchanan (2001) repeatedly asserts that design can be regarded as 'a discipline of collective forethought.' The involvement of end-users

is also significant in that it forms the premise of human-centred design, which 'emphasises relevance, sustainability and accountability throughout the process' in order to create design products or environments that 'make life better' (Frascara 2002:39).

Ultimately, these views of design point towards design as a process or way of thinking 'which facilitates the creation of preferred and/or appropriate conditions, artifacts and environments for a specific intent and purpose' (Cassim 2013:191). This definition of design opens up the spectrum of design activity so that it has a much wider reach; it is no longer limited to the traditional disciplines of graphic and industrial design, for example, but extends to new domains such as healthcare design, social systems design, and urban design, to name a few (Nelson & Stolterman 2003:2). In these contexts, design thinking is seen as the obverse of a historically biased, more rational and scientific



**Figure 4:** Spread from the World Design Capital 2014 Bid Book. Image courtesy of Cape Town Partnership, producer of the bid book.

way of thinking. This difference is highlighted by Charles Owen (2005:5), who states that 'where the scientist sifts facts to discover patterns and insights, the designer invents new patterns and concepts to address facts and possibilities.'

The abovementioned ideas of collective forethought and invention of possibilities are neatly captured in the theme of Cape Town's World Design Capital bid, namely *Live Design. Transform Life*. As part of the bidding process, cities are required to choose a theme to guide the planned activities and to brand their bid for promotion purposes (Bid Book 2010:78). The bid therefore provided an opportunity to address the branding of the city. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005:507) position place branding as a device that is used to influence people's perceptions of a place, and if branded successfully, has the potential for citizens to identify with and own the brand. Seminal

branding consultant and theorist, Wally Olins (2008) also believes that a brand can induce a sense of belonging by emotionally appealing to its audience. Following from this, the visual vocabulary chosen for the bid book draws on Cape Town's iconic mountain and the image of a rainbow, drawn from Desmond Tutu's now ubiquitous term, the rainbow nation. However, when reading the bid book, it appears that the graphic elements of the visual identity do not overpower the content and theme of the bid, but are used primarily to present the information in a consistent manner. The decision to focus rather on real life stories to show how design has been used to transform lives and reconnect people, is what distinguishes the visual brand narrative. In this way, the brand is strategic in embracing the city's inhabitants as brand ambassadors with the possible intention that it may motivate others to adopt a similar stance. A great deal more can be said about the visual presence



and promotion of the bid, but the way branding as a practice can impact on a city and its people is a separate topic.

Using the *Live Design. Transform Life* theme as a point of departure for the Cape Town bid, the intention was to recognise and mobilise the city's design resources in a way that would encourage inhabitants to embrace a design culture and urge them to use design as a collaborative effort to shape the city and ultimately identify with it. In the 465-page bid book, the right to the city (in all its idiomatic splendour) is not explicit, but in the rhetoric employed in the book to weave the bid theme throughout the contents, the stance is clearly evident. Apart from the very meaning of design, one example that supports the view of the alignment with the right to the city is the three sub-themes under which the bid is organised: rebuild, reconnect and reposition. These sub-themes in turn relate respectively to social and economic inclusion, community collaboration, and city branding and economic empowerment. The themes group the current and proposed design activities under appropriate sections. All the examples of activities and projects noted in the bid book are presented as relevant models or as case studies. These activities and projects are initiatives and models that may have already been implemented or were conceived in reaction to the decision to bid for the World Design Capital designation. Some examples include the District Six Redevelopment Framework to address forced removals and guide restitution of land, the redevelopment of the Athlone Power Station, the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading Project, Cape Town's Integrated Rapid Transport System, as well as the Safe Spaces Project to promote and create safe spaces for females (Bid Book 2010). These examples stem from both public and private sectors with the intention of

including inhabitants on a much larger scale during different stages of the projects.

Collectively, the themes of the bid are operational in nature and serve as guiding principles for the bid, so it may be useful to refer to them as the three Rs: rebuild, reconnect and reposition. Moreover, the three Rs all point towards two features of the right to the city, namely participation and appropriation. The right to participation requires that urban inhabitants take an active role in decision-making with regard to the production of urban space. Lefebvre was of the opinion that urban planners did not take into account inhabitant's ability to participate and play. He believed that 'play, sexuality and physical activities such as sport, creative activity, art and knowledge are particular expressions and moments' (Lefebvre 1996:147) which can overcome divisions and restore totality in the city. Following closely from the right to participate, is Lefebvre's second right, that of appropriation. As a right, appropriation refers to the confrontation 'with the process of capital accumulation that is centred around the valorisation of urban space' (Purcell 2002:101-103). The act of confrontation is important because for Lefebvre, in order to be able to participate in the city, it would be necessary for civil society to defeat and stand up against dominant strategies and ideologies. Furthermore, it is significant because rights for Lefebvre are anchored in civil society (Kofman & Lebas 1996:41).

The three Rs, as they relate to participation and appropriation, inform both parts of the bid book; the first part presents an overview of the city and the second part is a collection of case studies discussing the design projects, initiatives, and infrastructure already underway, as well as highlighting future initiatives. The information in the bid book is guided by questions posed by Iscid. The past cities designated

as World Design Capitals followed the same trajectory of planning and showcasing projects during their respective designation years. They all met the standard requirements dictated by Iscid; all cities planned signature events such as a Design Week, a Launch event, and a conference. Although the activities and projects were contingent on context and were customised to suit individual city needs, there were commonalities in output and themes in the different cities. Previous themes such as 'Design for All' (Seoul) and 'Embedding Design in Life' (Helsinki) were focused on development and have inextricably linked design to the everyday (World Design Capital).

In Cape Town, the planned initiatives at the time of writing in the run up to 2014 focus on challenges and opportunities in the city. There are too many initiatives to mention here, but one noteworthy design initiative which manages to address all three characteristics of the right to the city is called Design Storming: Igniting change with collective imagination (Cape Town 2014). Creative Cape Town and the Cape Town Design Network are two organisations that have teamed up with the Social Justice Coalition, a member-based social movement to implement this design challenge after the success of winning the bid. The challenge focuses on waste collection and disposal in townships and is based on the philosophy of a design hack.

Hacking has historically been an activity linked to software and technological innovation. Since its inception, however, its focus has expanded and is no longer restricted to computers; it has 'evolved from the software to the hardware of our lives' (Burnham 2009:4). As part of a design report commissioned by England's Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), Scott Burnham, a strategist and creative director of numerous urban

initiatives, has written about the concept of design hacks within the context of the manufacturing process. He speaks largely from a product design perspective and explores how manufacturers today are consciously designing products that can be hacked to allow for customisation and experimentation by end-users. Despite the manufacturing stance, the argument he makes is largely underpinned by the idea of putting more power into the hands of the people in the way that they engage with designed outcomes, be they products or environments. He situates his argument within the larger question of whether hacking is merely a temporary commercial phenomenon or whether it may reveal a genuine civic ingenuity. Burnham (2009) explores the concept of design hacking within the developed world and it is his references to hacking methodologies in developing nations that are striking. He notes that hacking has been 'particularly useful in developing nations for increasing the functionality of mobile phones and deploying the bicycle to serve other needs' (Burnham 2009:7). Design Storming answers well to a developing context, and since it is taken far away from the boardroom and into the community it can be considered as a form of civic engagement. It is intended as a democratic way of addressing situations or problems in communities where inhabitants of the Cape Town community Khayelitsha themselves take on the role of a designer and try to react to unsatisfactory conditions, imagine better scenarios, and arrive at appropriate solutions that are contingent on their unique circumstances.

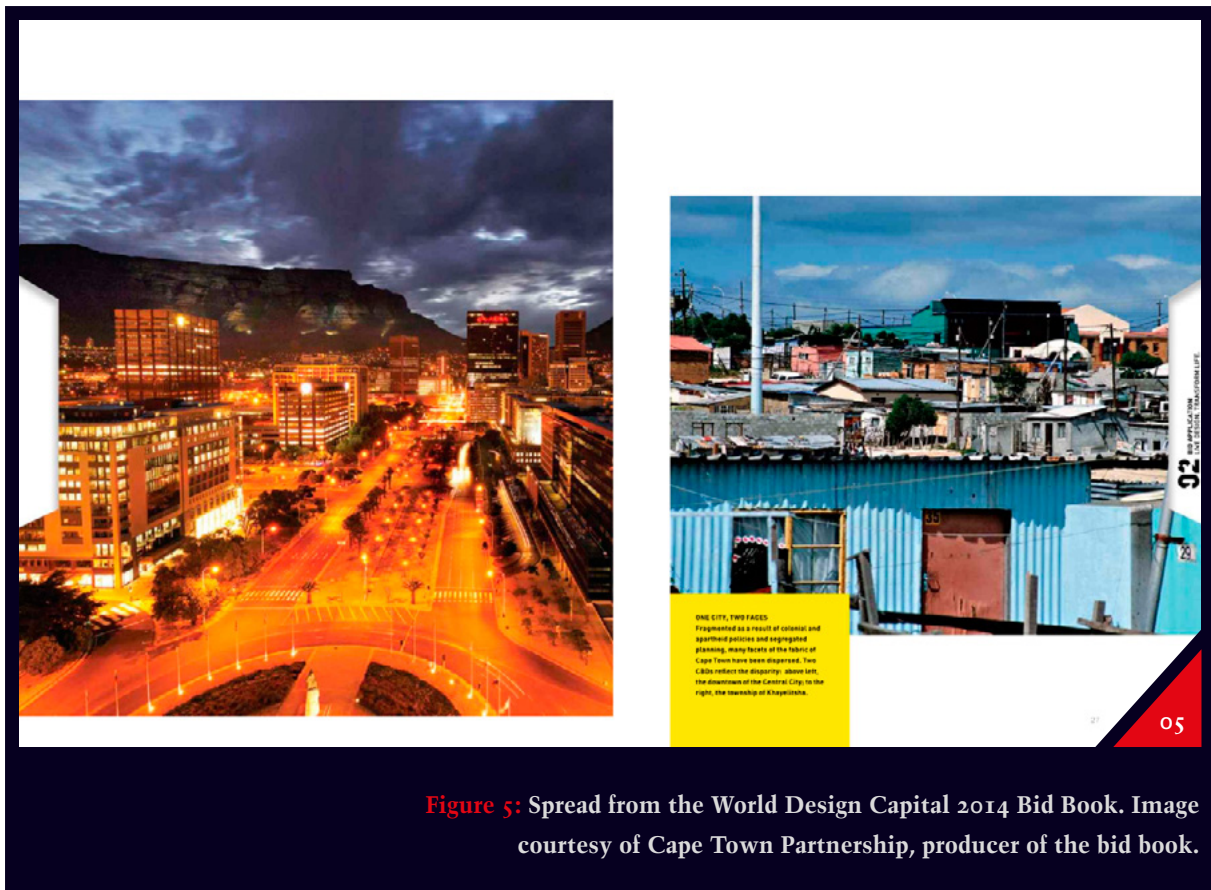
Despite the post-bid initiatives such as the Design Storming, the democratic nature of the Cape Town initiatives could be questioned when reading the bid book since the initiatives were collated by a bid committee, which may inherently connote a top-down managerial approach. The City of Cape Town joined forces with the Cape Town Partnership in preparation

of compiling the Cape Town World Design Capital bid book, a submission requirement by Icsid from all competing cities. The Cape Town Partnership positions itself as 'a development facilitation agency focused on the mobilisation, coordination and alignment of public, private and social resources behind the urban regeneration of Cape Town's Central City' (Cape Town Partnership 2009). The bid team was also supported by Cape Town Premier, Helen Zille and her Democratic Alliance political party. Viewing Cape Town's bid from a one-dimensional perspective could, however, be misleading because since winning the designation for 2014 the initiative has spread virally and in addition to government-supported projects that require a longer timeframe, there are calls for people to participate in activities and to propose tactical urban initiatives online. For purposes of proposing ideas for initiatives, the organising committee has asked interested parties to choose one of the following four themes for their submissions: African Innovation. Global Conversation, Bridging the Divide, Today for Tomorrow, and Beautiful Spaces. Beautiful Things (World Design Capital). At the time of writing, two official calls for submissions have been identified.

Participation is also encouraged across various social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and from anecdotal evidence and a cursory glance at the World Design Capital's online presence, there is evidence that people are engaging. Additionally, information is not just transmitted online by the Cape Town World Design Capital organising committee but also by inhabitants. It is uncertain whether the inhabitants engaging are professionals who work in the sizeable creative industry in Cape Town or whether the larger population is represented as well. However, it would be interesting and definitely necessary to see more information and statistics about the demographics of the participating population,

the rate of participation and the response from the official managers to participating inhabitants. The reason for this is because there may be the threat that such initiatives may allow the Design Indaba elite, Cape Town's 'creative class' who have the spending power to attend design-related events such as the annual Design Indaba conference, to be the sole group of inhabitants to extend their claims on the city. Research is therefore needed in this regard to see whether an initiative like the World Design Capital is, in practice, more closely aligned with Richard Florida's (2002) argument. If so, the criticism against his notion of the creative class as being one which only caters for a special class and which evades a critique of conspicuous consumption and capitalism could possibly be levelled against the World Design Capital initiative. Yet for now, even without more concrete participant information, it is reasonable to say that dialogue on issues such as housing, mobility, and public space is being brought into the public domain and inhabitants are being given the opportunity to participate.

The planned design initiatives are affording urban inhabitants the opportunity to share their 'urban imaginaries' (Minty 2008:5), thus making the mother city more productive or what Landry (2000) terms an 'active city.' The notion of urban imagination echoes Lefebvre's ideas about utopias. Lefebvre's belief in the possibility of a new urbanism was grounded in the idea of experimental utopias specifically. He imagined a ludic city where people would be in charge of their lives by exploring possibilities and alternatives for the everyday through creative capacity and imagination (Kofman & Lebas 1996:15). According to Kofman and Lebas (1996:21), translators of Lefebvre's writings on the city, Lefebvre was of the opinion that an imagining of alternate possibilities would require utopias; utopias were necessary for Lefebvre as the



**Figure 5:** Spread from the World Design Capital 2014 Bid Book. Image courtesy of Cape Town Partnership, producer of the bid book.

basis of action and for any attempt to the right to the city. Kofman and Lebas (1996:21) further indicate that the term 'u-topie' denotes a search for a place that does not yet exist and plays a key role in Lefebvre's conception of the right to the city. Kofman and Lebas (1996:22) acknowledge that such utopias are discredited today, but according to them, utopias need to be rehabilitated since they are necessary to be able to facilitate thinking about the future. They cite sociologist Ruth Levitas (1993) in support of their position because she argues that utopias are necessary since they have the potential to address current state of affairs in an attempt towards social transformation. In this context, Levitas's (in Kofman & Lebas 1996:22) definition of utopia as 'the desire for a better way of living expressed in the description of a different kind of society that makes possible that alternative way of life' reflects Frascara's (2002) sentiments about designed outputs for an alternate or better

life. Levitas notes that, within a contemporary cultural and political context, utopian desire is an active element; there is difficulty in embracing and developing utopias today largely owing to the inability to identify change agents and processes of change. In terms of the World Design Capital initiative, design is positioned as one such process of change.

In keeping with the idea of imagining better places, more recently, Lefebvre's ideas have informed the work of social theorist David Harvey. Harvey is a leading proponent of the idea of the right to the city and he calls for more democracy in terms of the shaping of an urban space and experience. Harvey's (2012:4) view of the right to the city is that Lefebvre's concept is 'far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire.' Once again, the desire for alternative

possibilities is inherent to design and reaches as far back as Herbert Simon's (1969:129) definition of design, which reads as follows: 'everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.' Considering the centrality of imagination and desire, it can be proposed that in addition to the bid book's three Rs (rebuild, reconnect and reposition) a fourth R, namely reimagining can be added to the list. Reimagining operates more on an aspirational level than an operational level, and could equip urban inhabitants with the necessary creativity to recreate the city as understood by Lefebvre. In addition, it will allow for the nurturing of change agents who will hopefully introduce experimental utopias in a way argued for by Levitas. Here, there is also further support for the role of design (broadly as a cultural and creative activity) in facilitating the right to the city. The following views by Minty (2008:16) speak to this point:

Citizens' involvement in decision-making about the type of city they desire is important for their empowerment and their sense of themselves as citizens. The lack of citizen participation impacts on a city's wellbeing and on the sustainability of the social order. However, not all people participate or communicate equally well through documents, public processes or speech-making. For this reason cultural production and cultural mediation processes are important, and the role of citizens in such processes is crucial. City imagination processes using theatre, dance, music and visual arts, often in public contexts, are all ways in which citizens can make their voices heard, and therefore participate in (making) society.

Creative or design activities during Cape Town's designation year may therefore allow for the construction of a creative city that focuses on providing the right facilities or resources and on finding a way to get inhabitants to participate at a collective level. This

can give them a collective identity, or, returning to the metaphor of the mother, find the mother in the mother city. Associated with this idea of a collective identity, Ferilli, Sacco and Blessi (2011:260) see culture and creativity as the cornerstones 'of the local approach to quality of life, social relationships and entrepreneurship.' In this way, Cape Town's designation as a design capital city or a creative city is not merely meant to be a status indicator, but seems to align more closely with the original explanation of the term (as noted earlier in this article).

Despite this theoretical justification of the merits of being a creative city, on the ground, people have been questioning the validity and importance of such an initiative in numerous articles in the South African press and in online platforms. A great deal of the criticism stems from the view that the designation merely supports a mega-event that is diverting attention from more pressing issues. No doubt, in the short term, it can definitely be considered a mega-event, but when looking closely at the long-term strategy of many of the projects discussed in the Bid Book, it becomes clear that the City of Cape Town's intention is to develop a cultural and creative infrastructure in order to make life better for the city's inhabitants. In answer to this, Professor Mugendi M'Rithaa (cited in Botman 2012), an industrial designer, educator and researcher at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, insists that '[i]nvestment in design is investment in our future.' The term investment can more literally be related to issues of economy, and such design activities and initiatives can indeed contribute to by way of falling under the creative industries sector. Landry (2005:43) defines the creative industries as 'comprising those industries that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.'



Within a South African context, Minty (2008:21) believes that when coupled together with leisure management and cultural tourism, specifically in Cape Town, the creative industries sector can potentially influence job growth, poverty alleviation, and city positioning in a way that could be meaningful for inhabitants. At the same time, there is a danger in giving priority to an economic approach to culture and creativity and discounting their intrinsic value (Minty 2008:23). When discussing the idea of an African creative economy at a conference of the same name, Mike van Graan (2011), argued that an African creative economy should be contingent on the African context and should not have to conform to the solutions and models being developed internationally. Mike van Graan (2011) presents another valid argument: he is of the opinion that the point of departure for pursuing the creative industries and the creative economy should be human rights and freedom rather than economic interests. This viewpoint reminds one again of Lefebvre's arguments about Paris during the 1960s and how it was being shaped primarily by economic interests.

The long-term cultural and economic commitment to design that Cape Town is undertaking ties in well with Landry's (2005:53) view that the creative city is not fixed but rather, it is 'about a journey of becoming.' On a national level, the designation is about the creation of a specific mind-set to endure 'a journey of becoming', a mind-set which embraces lateral and creative thinking. Similarly, Kofman and Lebas (1996:8) define being Lefebvrian as 'more a sensibility than a closed system'. This implies that Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city is also about adopting a specific mindset, which in his case challenges hegemony and uses imagination to encourage and facilitate activism and participation. The discussion therefore theoretically substantiates how a pragmatic

adoption of design by Cape Town's inhabitants, specifically as a way of thinking, may be able to creatively and meaningfully shape the city in a way that is in keeping with Lefebvre's call for the right to the city.

On an international level, the designation is also significant because, as mentioned previously, Cape Town is the first city in the global South to be recognised as a Design Capital. Being categorised as such, what works in its favour is the increased focus on the 'global South' as offering new ways of thinking and understanding the complex world in which we live (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012). No doubt, cities in the global South, such as Bogota and Brasilia for example, have been benefitting from the recognition and application of culture and creativity as a means of transforming urban environments, but this designation may help to bring such initiatives from the African continent to the fore and highlight them within a broader context. Cities in Africa have too often been relegated to the margins and it is essential for them to be placed at the centre of global discussions across different disciplines. This repositioning may also help to debunk common myths about African cities because, as Murray and Myers (2007:2) suggest, these cities have suffered by others' obsessions with urban pathologies and have therefore been viewed as nothing more than a 'dystopian nightmare.' Their possible explanation for this is that urbanisation literature is coloured by normative prescriptions for cities, and African cities consequently fail to match up to their Northern counterparts.

In research on early West African urban centres in places such as Sudan, Mali and the Yoruba kingdom, for example, Adekola (2009) also notes this trend. According to him, and contrary to popular belief, these places certainly had early urban centres but the factors that deemed them as such differed from

the Western characteristics and influences such as industrialisation. Through his case studies, Adekola (2009) questions the reliability of research instruments for urban and design studies; he is at once both aware and critical of applying Western measures and sensibilities to varied African contexts. Although Adekola (2009) identifies the need for more research that is contingent on the local contexts of the respective West African cities, his call for a more customised way of looking at individual African cities can definitely be applied to South Africa as well, since that will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the history and current complexities of cities. In light of this, it is hoped that a design-driven mother city will not only empower its inhabitants by affording them the right to their city, but also allow for African cities to be key players on their own terms in discussions with creative cities in the global North.

## Conclusion

Although an argument has been presented above for Cape Town as a creative city to use design strategically in developing and shaping the city in a more democratic way, it needs to be understood that design is not a panacea or a quick fix. This viewpoint is informed by Deloitte's impact assessment of the outcomes of Helsinki's year as the 2012 World Design Capital. Both the impact assessment and the final report observed that Helsinki failed to meet some of its goals. The shortcomings were owing to budget constraints – the project grew significantly and resulted in a larger budget than initially intended – and there was not sufficient design understanding amongst key players such as organisations and other corporate partners to support and/or fund projects. Despite these shortcomings, however, design became a public topic of discussion and the results were positive in that

half (52 per cent) of the projects that formed the official programme of Helsinki's design year would not have been implemented without the programme, or they would have been implemented in a different manner. WDC Helsinki 2012 especially promoted projects focusing on design education, user-oriented services and comprehensive solutions utilizing methods inherent in design. WDC Helsinki 2012 activated citizens and supported the participating cities in creating new types of practices that include citizens. Deloitte estimates that 37 percent of the projects are either likely or certain to produce results after 2012 (World Design Capital).

Similarly, the activities related to the Cape Town designation may not all materialise and/or easily solve the problems faced by the inhabitants, but the intention is to increase inhabitants' awareness and use of design as an alternate and accessible means of addressing the day-to-challenges with which they are faced in the mother city. In the same way, Harvey (2012:xviii) is acutely aware that the right to the city is a 'way station on the road' to eradicate dominant practices which disfavour urban inhabitants, but it can never be an end in itself. No doubt, contemporary cities are very different from the time in which Lefebvre wrote the right to the city, but his vision holds value for mobilising inhabitants and encouraging them to take control actively of the situation in which they find themselves. In relation to Cape Town's World Design Capital 2014 bid, a creative urban strategy has been clearly defined and disseminated, but it remains to be seen whether it is a successful strategy or not because social transformation cannot be based merely on theory, but needs to be coupled with meaningful and sustainable action.

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