

9 The cultural centre of GugaS'thebe as a transformative creative space

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Introduction

Creativity is central to contemporary urban development and placemaking approaches, as also seen in South Africa and Cape Town more specifically (Duxbury, Hosagrahar and Pascual, 2016; Minty and Nkula-Wenz, 2019; Oyekunle, 2017). In South Africa, as in other developing countries, the policy emphasis on culture is developmental, that is, employing culture as a resource for creative endeavours to open pathways for employment and poverty reduction, skills training and social upliftment (Duxbury, Hosagrahar and Pascual, 2016; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2011).

Moriset (2014) proposes that coworking spaces are the new places of the creative economy. A culture of coworking is evident at GugaS'thebe, a multi-purpose cultural space which is the anchor of an emerging creative and tourism precinct in Langa, a township on the periphery of Cape Town, South Africa. Townships are “marginalised areas on city or town fringes which emerged historically as a result of the segregation policies of South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past” (Booyens and Rogerson, 2019a: 257). Booyens and Rogerson (2019a) identify creative experiences, spaces and events in Langa as examples of creative tourism and creative precinct development. This observation corresponds with recent work in South Africa which demonstrates that creative activities do not only cluster in larger urban areas, often inner-city areas, as the early creative city literature suggests, but are also found in peripheral urban areas, smaller cities and even in rural areas (Booyens and Rogerson, 2015; Drummond and Snowball, 2019; Gregory and Rogerson, 2018).

This chapter draws on site visits to GugaS'thebe and a focus group discussion with creative workers at the centre ($n = 13$) in June 2019. In addition, one of the authors worked for the Arts and Culture

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Department in the City of Cape Town overseeing GugaS'thebe and other cultural spaces in townships. We argue that GugaS'thebe is a transformative space which not only serves as a cultural production space, but also stimulates social development. The structure of this chapter is as follows. In the second section, we situate townships as creative places and consider the literature on coworking spaces. In the third section we discuss the history of Langa and the case of GugaS'thebe as a transformative creative space. This is followed by our conclusions in the fourth section.

Literature

Townships as creative places

South Africa's townships are considered to be culturally vibrant in terms of arts, music and entertainment and leisure. Indeed, Jürgens and Donaldson (2012) observe that townships are repositioning themselves as niche markets for leisure and tourism on the pleasure periphery of cities. This, however, is not evident in all townships, but specifically in townships with rich heritage, particularly in terms of heritage associated with the struggle against apartheid, and especially in townships located close to large cities frequented by international visitors (Booyens, 2010).

At the same time, the multiple and multi-dimensional social and developmental challenges in townships dominate the literature (George and Booyens, 2014; Jürgens and Donaldson, 2012). One critical concern which is receiving increasing policy attention is the lack of economic opportunities in townships, historically designed as dormitory settlements rather than fully functional places (Booyens and Rogerson, 2019a; George and Booyens, 2014; Jürgens and Donaldson, 2012). Creativity arguably holds potential in townships for stimulating entrepreneurship, placemaking and physical upgrading (Booyens and Rogerson, 2019a, 2019b). This is based on observations that creative experiences and spaces linked to cultural heritage and tourism are emerging in townships and that there is a perceived latent visitor demand for this (Booyens and Rogerson, 2015, 2019a; George and Booyens, 2014).

The emphasis on creativity for township redevelopment and upgrading is theoretically underpinned by Southern urbanism notions which underscore that cities in the Global South should not merely be seen as places characterised by poverty and misery, but instead should also be recognised as places which exhibit a certain dynamism, vibrancy, resourcefulness, culture and also creativity (Choplin, 2016; Dovey and King, 2012; Frenzel, 2016, Pieterse, 2011). While Choplin (2016)

cautions against an “over-romanticisation” of the creative capabilities in precarious neighbourhoods, Frenzel (2016) stresses that there is a real need to seek solutions for pressing social issues which include the stimulation of economic opportunities in these areas. One recommended area for creative economic diversification in townships is the establishment or expansion of multi-purpose cultural centres which can also serve as anchors for tourism precincts (Booyens and Rogerson, 2019a). Indeed, tourism can be regarded as a driver and demand generator for the creative economy since the consumers of creative products often are tourists (Adamo, Ferrari and Gilli, 2019; Richards, 2018).

Coworking spaces

Gandini (2015: 194) describes coworking spaces as: “shared work places utilised by different sorts of knowledge professionals, mostly freelancers, working in various degrees of specialisation in the vast domain of the knowledge industry”. These typically consist of shared office spaces utilised by independent professionals who hire a desk, Wi-Fi connection and some shared facilities (Gandini, 2015). Spaces tend to be small-scale initiatives founded by locals, who have strong connections and commitments to their localities, for use by local workers – knowledge and creative workers alike (Brown, 2017; Gandini, 2015). The nature of work is casual, project-based and rather precarious, as is characteristic of creative work (Brown, 2017; Gandini, 2015). The self-organising character of workers involved also comes to the fore in the literature (Brown, 2017). Gandini (2015) underscores that coworking spaces not only are hubs, but also act as relational milieus. Personal networks and social capital appear to be integral to the working of these spaces and the success of individuals (Brown, 2017; Gandini, 2015).

Moriset (2014) observes that coworking spaces emerged worldwide in the late 2000s as a new kind of workplace, initially as private initiatives, but the model has since been incorporated into public programmes for creative city making. There are also examples of not-for-profit organisations (NPOs) and semi-public spaces (Brown, 2017). The policy expectations are that these spaces can stimulate placemaking and neighbourhood renewal (Brown, 2017). Related models are innovation or business labs/hubs/incubators where the emphasis is often on digital and/or information technologies (Brown, 2017). Another more creative model is makerspaces which provide community-based workshops for designers to access shared technologies for digital design and fabrications (Smith, 2017). Smith (2017) argues that makerspaces can stimulate transformational social innovation. Makerspaces have

lower entry barriers and are typically more open and democratic than other kinds of coworking spaces which can be seen as exclusionary. Smith (2017: 2) avers that, while makerspaces frequently “involve people experimenting and exploring technologies in playful ways”, certain projects may “generate awareness of social implications, and be carried through to other areas of social life to attain wider significance for social development”.

The case of GugaS’thebe

History and development of GugaS’thebe: embedded in culture and heritage

GugaS’thebe is situated in the township of Langa, located 11 km south-east of the centre of Cape Town. The township was established in 1927 on the site of the former Ndabeni “location”. Langa township was named after King Langalibalele of the amaHlubi nation who was banished to Robben Island in 1874 for his rebellion against the British Colonial regime because he refused to register the rifles of his people (Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007). Upon sustained protest for his release, Langalibalele was eventually confined to a farm called Uitvlugt, which would later form part of Ndabeni location in 1901 and is remembered as “Langalibalele’s location”. Both Ndabeni and Langa were established as a result of segregation planning at the beginning of the 20th century.

Coetzer (2009) has suggested that the building of both Ndabeni and Langa was informed by a draft agreement developed by the Native Commission for Cape Town in 1900, which outlined plans to build a native location and gradually shift all “natives” or blacks from the inner city. According to Coetzer (2009), the agreement outlined a “native classification model” which categorised “natives” into three classes: those whom the city considered (1) temporary or migratory; (2) permanent or settled; or (3) educated and therefore “superior”. It also proposed two typologies of accommodation to cater for the various “classes” of “natives” identified. For those deemed “stable natives” with families, a few small cottages were to be built; and for those considered “migratory natives”, barracks or hostels would be built (Coetzer 2009). Locations were designed as “dormitory” settlements workers who often were migrants were meant to sleep in locations and work in the city during the day. Pass laws governed the movement of “natives” between town and township during different periods of the day. These dormitory settlements received limited infrastructure and services, designed only to accommodate in urban areas “temporary people” whose “homes” were

meant to be in the “homelands” or “bantustans”, and business development in these spaces was limited by legislation (Beavon and Rogerson 1990; Booyens and Rogerson 2019b).

The township of Langa emerged as a place of great resistance against apartheid. Apartheid was South Africa’s system of racial segregation underscored by an oppressive and fascistic form of white nationalism. Apartheid policies were formally implemented through incremental laws and restrictions by the National Party after they came to power in 1948 and it continued until it was dissolved by the first democratic elections in 1994. In 1954, in protest against apartheid policies, thousands of Langa residents converged on the corner of Washington and Church Streets to burn their pass books before marching to town. On 21 March 1960, Langa residents reignited their commitment to liberation and marched under the leadership of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) in response to Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe’s call to action against pass laws, which resulted in the Langa killings of 1960 when apartheid police gunned down protestors for refusing to disperse.

The GugaS'thebe cultural centre is currently located on the site where Langa residents gathered in protest against the pass laws. The centre was built in 1999, as a self-initiated, community-driven project focused on the cultural heritage of Southern Nguni Xhosa people. The centre is the anchor of the Langa cultural precinct which includes heritage sites like the Langa Pass Office Museum and the Old Post Office Museum. Aptly named GugaS'thebe, the cultural space derives its name from the Xhosa idiom *GugaS'thebe Kudala Usophulela*, which praises an ageing grass mat (*Isithebe*) used for its persisting service. Langa has a distinct sense of place captured visually by murals and mosaics spread throughout the township, depicting struggle heritage, migrant labour histories, the faces of well-known personalities from the area and contemporary culture. The GugaS'thebe space is vibrantly and richly decorated by the work of local artists (Figure 9.1). Street art images also depict the diversity and complexity of rural–urban migration flows and the emergent urban identities that produced the space (Figure 9.2). Migrant resistance against apartheid’s forced-removal programme and racial segregationist spatial planning narratives are etched into the rich history and narrative of the place. Murals of the 1960s’ anti-pass campaign were painted on the walls of the single-sex migrant hostels (now converted into flats) from the 1920s (Figure 9.2, left).

GugaS'thebe was initially imagined by the City of Cape Town as an incubator space for emerging artists and crafters. Following the collapse of GugaS'thebe Executive Committee in 2007, the management of the centre was transferred to the City of Cape Town’s Arts and Culture



Figure 9.1 Street-front view of GugaS'thebe.



Figure 9.2 Murals on former men's hostels. Left: pass law protests; right: village and city life drawing on the theme of migration.

Branch. A series of studies were undertaken during the 2012–2013 period to inform the reimagining of the cultural precinct, including plans for significant capital investments toward improving tourist appeal, creating a space for people to develop their arts and to celebrate their heritage and culture (City of Cape Town, 2016). Today the centre is a vibrant cultural facility which supports local artists in their cultural production, as well as providing a platform for the sale of arts and crafts, cultural exchange, coworking and learning. Makerspaces at the centre engage a diverse group of crafters, artists and designers who share workshops or studios for the production of creative goods. A number of community-based organisations and NPOs like the GugaS'thebe Crafters Association, the Langa Arts Association, the Langa Heritage Foundation, Ombonwethu and Our Workshop constitute a collective of creatives and social entrepreneurs who act as intermediaries for artists and crafters alike. Although individuals or groups lease workshops or market spaces from the City on a monthly basis, there is a strong sense of ownership of the centre by local crafters, artists and designers. The space currently accommodates a range of creative endeavours, i.e. mosaic art (Figure 9.3), ceramics, painting, textiles (sewing), beading and weaving, performance art (dancing, drumming, theatre) and wire craft. The centre was expanded in 2014 to include the award-winning GugaS'thebe children's theatre, a space that has since attracted a variety of users which use it as a venue for events. The centre is often the

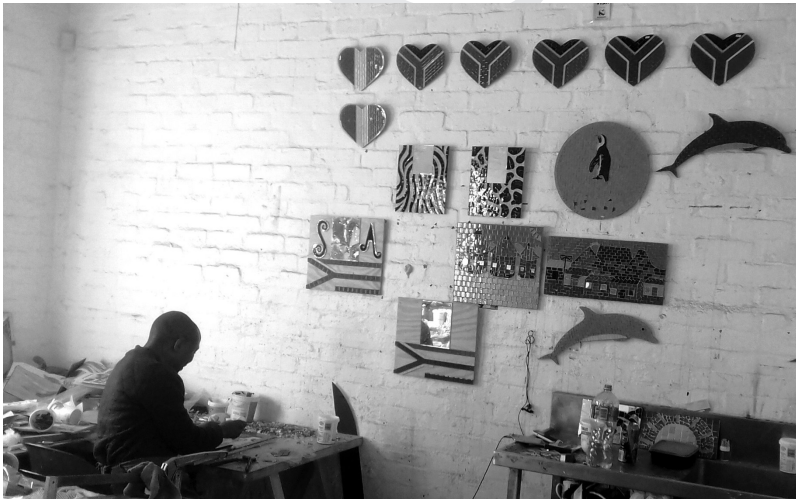


Figure 9.3 Mosaic artist at work in the studio he shares with a painter.

meeting point for walking tours and township experiences and has become a main feature for tourists visiting Langa.

While there are initiatives focused on youth skills training and development, the space is intergenerational. The diversity of the occupants creates the possibility of a meaningful interaction and collaboration between artists and crafters. There is a strong sense among creative workers at the space that they are there to stay as permanent tenants rather than “incubatees” who need to transition to somewhere else. This creates stability and ownership and contributes to the sustainability of the initiatives. This said, the young people who participated in our focus group do want to grow their businesses and some do have aspirations to move their operations elsewhere and expand their market into the greater Cape Town area. Some said they started with a home-based business and are now in a shared makerspace, but they want to grow and move out. GugaS’thebe accordingly is a “stepping stone” for them. Conversely, older crafters see themselves as mentors for up-and-coming young entrepreneurs. This suggests that “incubation” observed at GugaS’thebe is a socially embedded, community-based process driven from below rather than from the top. This is what makes the space work. Mentors and programme managers are locals from the community and this has proved to be important for the sustainability of the space. The space is managed by the City of Cape Town.

At the time that this research was undertaken, facilitators appointed by the City have proved to be responsive to the needs of the community and fulfilled the role of creative intermediaries well. However, staff turnover at the City and changes in funding do pose risks for the future viability of GugaS’thebe. Broader social impacts flowing from the activities at GugaS’thebe are outlined subsequently.

GugaS’thebe Crafters Association

The GugaS’thebe Crafters Association was formed in 2011 by the tenants occupying the cultural centre who had a desire to be included in operational and strategic matters of the centre. A group of older women (beading and weaving crafters) participated in our focus group and spoke as representatives of the GugaS’thebe Crafters Association, of which they are members. The women saw themselves as social entrepreneurs who are passionate about ploughing back into their community. While the primary purpose of the group is to present a voice for the tenants of GugaS’thebe, they are also active in building the social fabric in Langa, promoting education and skills training and encouraging social responsibility as important aspects of their role in the community. Their activities are outlined below in more detail:

- Representing the GugaS'thebe tenants and community by listening, understanding and acting according to the needs of its members
- Providing leadership and enabling GugaS'thebe crafters to speak with a unified voice on matters that affect them
- Offering skills training in beading and sewing to children from a local school. This initiative was however discontinued for the time being because of a lack of funds, but the women are keen to take this up again
- Initiating events to promote social cohesion and intergenerational discourse towards tackling social ills in their community. One event is that of the “War Rooms” – a group of boys meet in a room with older men, while a group of girls meet in a room with older women for an hour. The youths raise any issues and concerns that they may have and discuss these with the elders; the issues are discussed without interruption and without anyone leaving the room. The issues discussed remain in the room and the communication is horizontal. Elders relinquish their “authority” and commit to engage at the level of each participant, without intimidation. A person is placed outside the door at each venue, keeping watch for potential disturbances. After the session ends, youths and elders are brought into a larger venue where they are met by government officials, including facilitators, social workers, police officers, etc. The officials are asked to prepare presentations on specific topic and to facilitate an interactive session for the youths and the elders on issues ranging from crime prevention to reproductive health education. Another event, centred on food and entertainment, occurs in Women’s Month (August) for female children and elders
- Assisting the elderly, a group most vulnerable to violence and depression in black communities. One programme involves training children in drama, dance and music. Pensioners from the community are then invited to be entertained by the learners and treated to a meal prepared by the GugaS'thebe family. This interesting programme brings together two generations separated by age and life experiences to allow for an exchange of ideas and perspectives as the elderly interact with the youths during the session.

Our Workshop

Our Workshop is an initiative started by acclaimed South African designer Heath Nash with the intention of creating a shared workshop space in which aspiring designers and emerging crafters can explore their creativity and engage in design-led thinking processes to overcome their situational

challenges. An informal programme runs through the workshop space, creating a platform for local designers to explore, to share their skills and also to be empowered through working collaboratively. The shared workshop space has recently become a magnet for young creatives and unemployed youths to “hang out” to inadvertently be drawn into entrepreneurship and design processes. Examples of creative work include wire craft and the making of furniture using recycled or upcycled materials.

Performing arts programmes

Dance by Jika Madinga

Local dance star Thabisa Dinga offers free dance classes to young aspiring dancers in GugaS'thebe's dance room, located above the workshops, on a weekly basis. The self-funded programme aims to develop these young girls emotionally and physically through classes strongly supported by an integrated mentorship programme to boost self-esteem and to foster an understanding of teamwork and individual responsibility.

Capoeira

In the light of frequent xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in township areas in 2016, a group of Angolan immigrants living in Langa approached GugaS'thebe with a cultural exchange programme in an attempt to build social cohesion. Angolan instructors facilitate weekly capoeira dance with up to 100 local participants. The dance studio space is also used for yoga sessions.

Drumming

One of the most popular programmes in the centre is a schools-based programme for learners from schools in the Langa community. The programme offers drumming lessons to learners at no cost. Learners are exposed to West African drumming techniques after school, curbing youth idleness and vulnerability to substance abuse and gang culture. This programme is supported by crafters and artists through donations which go towards providing snack packs to the learners.

Outdoor theatre

GugaS'thebe also has performance art spaces (Figure 9.4) utilised by local dance groups. School groups are exposed to the diverse world



Figure 9.4 Performance art space at GugaS'thebe.

of performing through also being featured at local and international festivals, allowing them to gain experience and build their own portfolios in the industry.

GugaS'thebe as a tourism space

GugaS'thebe is frequented by tourists, predominantly foreign visitors. Crafters at GugaS'thebe mostly sell to tourists at the centre or elsewhere in Cape Town, i.e. pop-up markets at the V&A Waterfront. However, for most crafts the tourism market ensures seasonal business. Certain young entrepreneurs are able to offer Airbnb experiences to diversify their incomes. The visitor market mostly consists of young tourists who are interested in arts, craft and heritage experiences, while older tourists reportedly undertake traditional township tours. Examples of creative experiences include street-art walking tours, visiting the Langa Pass Office Museum with a local who provides historical context, making a pair of earrings instead of simply buying them, participating in drumming sessions, etc. These experiences are said to be profitable for the crafters and artists at GugaS'thebe, and they allow cultural practitioners to connect with the global community through participatory culture-based experiences.

Conclusion

Langa as a place functions as a curative hub for the long and rich histories of Eastern Xhosa migration to the city of Cape Town. Its history is part and parcel of the heritage and culture of the township and its rich historical narrative is the focal point of many of tourism offerings. Within this environment, GugaS'thebe is a compelling example of a creative space which not only serves as a makerspace for local creatives, but also stimulates a number of social and developmental spinoffs. This is ascribed to social embeddedness and entrepreneurship supported by community-based organisations, NPOs and the City of Cape Town as intermediaries. Indeed, Brown (2017: 13) avers with reference to coworking spaces that: "More equitably distributed benefits and positive social impacts have been observed with bottom-up, grass-roots approaches, typically where non-profit and small-scale local arts mix with small-scale commercial cultural and creative enterprises". The success and sustainability of GugaS'thebe, furthermore, rest on the sustained grassroots involvement of locals, which contributes to a sense of community ownership of the space. This differs from top-down creative planning interventions which more often than not fail in the long run (see Brown 2017). The role of creative workers is also illuminating; they are not only crafters/designers or artists; but also mentors, facilitators of skills training and community workers. Moreover, facilitators appointed by the City have fulfilled their roles as creative intermediaries well.

GugaS'thebe is not a typical incubator through which young entrepreneurs come up and move out. There is a critical mass of local creative workers who are permanently involved and who keep it all together. Notwithstanding, the space should support different life and career pathways or trajectories for individuals and it should be recognised that the individuals' measures of success differ. In other words, young entrepreneurs who want to expand and move on should be supported. However, support for entrepreneurs who leave incubator programmes is often not forthcoming in South Africa. Permanent creative workers, mostly older women, have a wider social development vision and have support from community-based organisations with a wider mandate. GugaS'thebe is a platform for some of their activities. It should however be mentioned that some community-based organisations are more active than others and some lack staying power.

The emphasis at GugaS'thebe is art, culture and heritage and not necessarily digital technologies, as is often the case in coworking spaces (Brown, 2017; Smith, 2017). The centre can also be regarded

as a makerspace (see Smith, 2017), although a focus on digital design and production is not the priority. GugaS'thebe is an intergenerational space compared to coworking spaces typically occupied by young entrepreneurs and independent creative professionals (Brown, 2017). Workers at the centre are self-organising, and social capital, local embeddedness and networks and a sense of community are integral to the success of the space not only commercially, but also for achieving social development outcomes. This corresponds with the experience of other coworking spaces and creative city dynamics (Brown, 2017; Comunian, 2011; Gandini, 2015; Smith, 2017).

The emphasis on art (murals and mosaics) to curate a place narrative corresponds with Marques and Richards (2014). This is significant for placemaking which goes beyond creative city marketing or branding. Street art in Langa is socially embedded, curating its rich cultural and heritage stories. This is important for locals in terms of belonging, remembrance and heritage preservation. However, street art also has visitor appeal and education value.

It is recognised that not all stakeholders are necessarily in favour of the development of GugaS'thebe as a tourism space as intended by the City. This said, certain locals benefit from tourism and are positive about it and the area is largely welcoming to visitors. We suggest that tourism consumption emerged because of the demand for township tourism by foreign visitors. We also propose that centres like GugaS'thebe can be developed as a multi-purpose centre and that it holds potential for stimulating broader creative and tourism precinct development. It is argued that a greater focus on tourism can afford direct benefits to locals and open up opportunities for other tourism services like restaurants, shops, attractions and experiences which diversify the tourism mix. The heritage resources in Langa like the Pass Office Museum and Old Post Office are underdeveloped as tourism attractions and are also underutilised as heritage spaces. Creative tourism and creative placemaking should also stimulate physical upgrading in Langa (Booyens and Rogerson, 2019a). In addition, creative forms of tourism in townships are alternatives to more voyeuristic forms of poverty tourism (see Booyens and Rogerson, 2019a, 2019b; George and Booyens, 2014).

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