Maps of Knowledge

Public Art Implementation from the Ground-Up – the Case of the Singapi Street Environmental Upgrade

By Amy Shelver – 16 May 2016, SACO Researcher
Background to the Singapi Project

- MBDA’s mission to **reshape nodes**
  - Economy
  - Services & beautification
  - Jobs
  - Cohesion
- Singapi in the **puzzle piece** of urban revitalization/ golden thread
- Public art’s role
- Township upgrades
- The road & Numb City’s role
Singapi Street: Sports Oval
New Brighton – contested space

- New Brighton now & in history
- A contested space
- Red Location Museum & Cultural precinct
- Grand narrative vs. micro-narratives
- Getting to public art by acknowledging real needs, negotiating
Norms for community engagement for the development of public art

- Status quo & norms
- Public Art Guidelines
- **Process**: Consult, conceptualise, commission or competition, construction and then celebration
- Participation leveraging off specific community **skills**
- Vs. **full community ownership**
Community On-boarding

- **Master plan and design** for the rollout of infrastructure upgrades
- **Emergence of uncaptured narratives** – maps of knowledge
Negotiating participation

- Original plans from 2012 = 22 pieces of art & big ticket items
- **Delays and conflict** on the bigger project
- 2014 and a whole **new landscape**
- A new consultative group and way.
Conceptualising relevant public art

- Re-starting public participation
- Focus on themes
- Heritage, undocumented everyday stories education, music and sport

What art?
- Book
- Mosaic benches & bollards
- Performance/ event
- Mural
- Another art to master
Re-negotiating participation

- Dynamic, consultative, confrontational, but always evolving & progressing
- Merging groups & conflict
- Volunteerism vs. consultation
- A labour force
- Taking real needs into account
Basic Training

- 10 workshops
- Photography & objects of affection
- Graffiti
- Mosaicking
- Capturing oral history
The tale of two troupes

Youth

Veterans
The outcomes

Youth
- Public infrastructure: 32 benches & 70 bollards
- Pamphlet
- Skilled mosaickers
  - Incredible photo bank
  - Mural drawn from Objects of Affection images
  - Temporary pieces
  - Skilled youth team that is working on other mosaic projects
  - Enough content for a large-scale exhibition
  - Social cohesion?

Veterans
- Booklet
- 60 stories from veterans
- 8 oral histories
- Equipped story-tellers
I was born in Graceland and started school there. In 1950, I led the knot with a gentleman from the ANC. During the times of arrests of the leaders, together with Reverend Caista and other people, I escaped from home and came to Port Elizabeth in 1958.

When I came to Port Elizabeth, I never relented because I arrived here to find people fighting for freedom. In 1976 school children were complaining about being forced to learn Afrikaans saying they didn’t want to learn it. Shortly after the break out of school, about 400 school children were arrested in a meeting in St. Steven Hallam taken to Algoa Police Station. And that’s where the trouble started. It became extremely chaotic in the neighbourhood. People were shot at. Some were detained. High numbers of 10, 15 and 25 people were buried in one huge cemetery.

During this time, things were turning uncontrollable, I was busy helping the school children. Some of them didn’t have parents. I got arrested and repeatedly beaten until I bled from my ears – that was 1976. I still cannot hear very well from that beating. I remained in custody for three years and came out in 1979 to find that there were other organisations helping the school children: CURSA, BECO, Black Power, and ANC. During that era, children didn’t stay at their homes.

In 1976, the first member of the youth that evolved as a significant leader was Mkhulu Jack. He studied in Cowan High School and as already mentioned, life was very difficult throughout the time of struggle in Port Elizabeth. Police were very brutal with school kids. The Freedom Fighters fought to help these children during those times, and so doors were kicked in by police looking for school children whom they knew to be resistant youth. These youth, known to be living at home, would go about the neighbourhood seeking food and shelter from neighbours.

I had my own share of the predicaments during the time of detention – my body was kicked all over. Even now, it still aches. I used to eat porridge with bugs and drink water from the toilet. I was moved to the Grahamstown (Vasi Nek) Prison. There, I was made to remain in solitary confinement. I was brought back to Port Elizabeth where I again endured another period of solitary confinement where a bucket was my toilet. It stank when it was opened.

When I came there from Vasi Nek, I was handcuffed – even now my arms still aches. It is hard to wash my clothes – wringing the water out is particularly painful. My head still aches too much. This is why I go long periods without speaking. Throughout all this, I see the children, now adults, in significant places among society of working people – some are lawyers; some work in banks; some in offices – for which I am thankful.

In 1982, I used to work in a leather works factory where cow, goat and sheep hides were worked. The factory did not provide proper care for its workers. We worked hard and the place always stank of chemicals, against which the employees were not provided protective gear. There were workers with long service records ranging from 8 and 10 years to 15 years. I had only been there 6 months. There were no unions allocated to that factory lack then to protect workers’ rights and black workers were always diminished. I went to the union office and told the union representatives that there were also the union members – Mr. Ilosha, D. Nave, T. Duze, S. Duze, G. Zim and others what

I had seen. The next day they came to visit our workplace to see for themselves and proposed a meeting with the workers. The meeting took place in Daku Hall. The Makuska started an investigation.

All of a sudden, it was uncovered that we were being paid a lower wage than what should have been paid. It was decided that reparations should be paid and people should be given what they deserved – these reparations needed to be allocated during the strike. It brought me back to when individuals had started work there. Imagine what that meant for those having provided long service to the factory.

The management called me to the offices and convinced me that I was to blame for having caused the union to become involved and for causing the company such significant financial loss. I was made to acknowledge this responsibility and told to leave until Friday, when I was to return to collect my money and possessions. I told the union about having lost my job. As a consequence, I became permanently unemployed from 1983 onwards. I never found employment again – because having had that job as my most recent reference, any potential employers were warned not to employ me. I gave up trying eventually. Throughout all of this, I was happy because I had isolated others who had been exploited for years.

by Funeka Lizzy Msizeni

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– Funeka Lizzy Msizeni
Mosaicking the benches
Challenges

- The big stuff like:
  - Contested space
  - Conflict
  - Money
  - Intra-group friction
  - Expectations of job creation as a primary outcome not the public art
  - Strikes
  - Crime
Challenges

- The logistical stuff like:
  - Cash flowing, stipend management
  - Communications systems
  - Uniforms
  - Catering expectations
  - Personality clashes
  - Transport
  - Entry
  - Social facilitation/ partners
Successes

- **Negotiated** public art, not top down
- An **invested community**
- Tangible impact on people’s lives
- **Skills** development
- Incredibly authentic, **stories** & a booklet of untold community stories
- **Documentation** of previously undocumented histories
- 32 benches and 70 bollards
- **Social cohesion**
- **Template/method** for doing public art in contested spaces
Replicability

- Consult, conceptualise, commission, carry out and celebrate approach is not always appropriate.
- Taking ownership means more vested community interest.
- The results were more authentic, accepted and acceptable to the community and in that regard a more public.
- It is a model that should replicated not only in contested spaces but across all spaces where the public lives.
Proposed Mural/ Building Wrap
Thank you!

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Q&A?