

What does transformation look like?

By

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So what does transformation look like?

Is it perimeter blocks, side walk cafes?

Is it towers in the park, low rise, high rise, high density?

Maybe something similar to the imagery associated with the corridors of freedom?



Corridors of Freedom

Re-stitching our City to create a new future

<https://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/research-projects/governing-the-future-city/images/Johannesburg-Corridors-of-Freedom.jpg/view>

Or is it the imagery currently associated with the future of African cities – a Wakanda vision?

What does transformation look like?

What does equity, dignity, inclusion look like?

What does increased density and a mix of functions and income look like?

How does health, safety and increased opportunity translate into space and form?

What tools can be used to include diverse voices in the evolution of cities?

What is unseen in cities and how can it be made evident?

How can we understand negotiation, deal-making and transaction – the invisible forces that make up our cities?

How can we engage with the mess rather than trying to sort it out?¹

How do we create livable and lovable cities?

LIVABLE in the sense of being equitable, beautiful, functional, diverse and responding to culture and climate

LOVABLE by resonating with many, embracing all and allowing for choice and change, while being embedded in context²

How do we provide environments that accommodate for

Stability and change

Formal and informal

Environments that can embrace complexity, the unknown and the unexpected?

There is an importance of making concepts tangible through visualising and modelling

But I believe we need to think deeper about that

¹ Hamdi, N., 2004. Small change: about the art of practice and the limits of planning in cities. Earthscan: New York.

² Leupen, B., Heijne, R., van Zwol, J. (Editors), 2005, Time-based Architecture, 010, Rotterdam

Our visions need to consider what policy environment is needed to achieve transformation as well as how professionals operating at the project level influence strategic decisions. Visions need to be developed with an understanding for the financial and technical mechanisms that may bring them into realisation.

How can we manage project funds differently and how we may we ensure the long term viability of interventions in cities?

We need a system

- where the government is facilitator
- where decision making and control is distributed
- where there are distinct and separate levels of the built environment so that different people make decisions at different levels without disrupting the overall functioning and coherence of a neighbourhood, a city block or a precinct

We need to know how to design/plan for an unknown future and unknown clients, or client with dynamic and constantly changing needs through:

- DISTRIBUTED CONTROL IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT (who makes which decisions, when)
- UNDERSTANDING CITIES, INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT IN TERMS OF LEVELS, SYSTEMS AND CONNECTIONS (an idea of disentanglement – making changes to one system of a city without disrupting others)

And through

- MEDIATING BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND THE COLLECTIVE IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT (through balancing individual and collective aspirations)

We need to facilitate inclusive transformation through the promotion of policy, legal, finance, design and technical models that achieve participative form-giving and space-making

If we do not address all of these issues, any vision will be mere imagery

I propose a system that is inherently PARTICIPATIVE (and I do not mean the “sit around the table and talk” type of participation – though that too is important)

This PARTICIPATIVE PROCESS is achieved through:

- new professional guidelines
- new systems, methods and technologies
- new forms of engagement

and most importantly,

- a method to replicate interventions at scale to achieve maximum impact

I propose a system that self-regulates, increases resilience and reduces control at some levels – allowing for informality at others

A system that is designed only as much as is needed and the processes of emergence are allowed to take over³

In this vision we provide government-funded structures that are beautiful, robust and long lasting⁴
They are not alien structures

³ Hamdi, N., 2004. Small change: about the art of practice and the limits of planning in cities. Earthscan: New York.

⁴ Habraken, J., 1999 (first published in English in 1961), Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing, Urban International Press

They have emerged from the urban field – like indigenous trees, they have grown from the soil of the context⁵
Their visual language, materiality, scale has roots and is familiar to the people of that context
Everyone understands them and how the structures are designed and constructed
These structures have a scale and interface with the public realm that is highly inclusive and inclusionary
They relate to the finer grain of existing urban fabric and imply a relationship with the streets that encourages different levels of commercial activity (that being entry level opportunities being balanced with larger commercial enterprises and anchor developments).

The imagery in terms of architectural character, infrastructure, massing and materiality is innovative and varies from place to place, yet in each context it is a language that is known and embraced by many – over many years
These are structures that are sensitive to climate and context

These structures, and roads and the public spaces that support them, are an expression the collective aspirations of particular communities
They therefore have a unique identity
They are creative and imaginative

Within these structures, individuals, social housing institutions, government agencies and the private sector carve out space, design and sell or rent to develop housing stock within it
Government reserves space for fully funded homes for those unable to co-fund

This is not a place where one can say "my house is my castle"
No home is identifiable as an independent object – as being isolated
Homes merge and disappear in the collective and streets and public space take precedence over individual space in terms of the functions and activities they "hold"
Yet also, the streets and public space sometimes defer to the buildings when they need to do so – in a manner evident in old medinas and medieval city centres
People acting on space and buildings and pedestrians are prioritised

These structures also accommodate other functions that are needed to support residents of this area – educational, healthcare, commercial, etc.
Different agents lease parts of these structures while owning the infill

Perhaps they could even be designed to allow for a degree of incrementality and slow evolution?

In this scenario, and following in the example of vernacular contexts, architecture and planning are not distinct disciplines – architecture is now merged with town planning⁶

In this context everyone is king or queen behind their own front door⁷
These spaces – behind the front door – are an expression of individual aspirations
They are related to financial capabilities, needs and the preferences of the occupants
If the individuals or families want to make changes to their spaces, they may do so without disrupting the overall structure
Conflict is therefore minimised

The roads and spaces in between these structures are shared by everyone and funded by government
These structures – let us call them residential infrastructure – and roads and public space are funded by government funding only supports what is shared

There are no individual subsidies – everything funded by government is for use of everyone
Similar to a road serving everyone – we do not say you earn 3500 so use "that" road – this residential infrastructure serves everyone⁸

⁵ Kendall in Osman, A. (Editor), 2015, UJ_UNIT2 2015, Architecture and Agency, FADA, University of Johannesburg

⁶ Turan, M. (Editor) 1990. *Vernacular architecture*. England: Aldershot & Vermont: Avebury, Gower Publishing Group.

⁷ Acknowledging several Dutch architects in personal conversation

⁸ Stephen Kendall in personal conversation

Multiple funding mechanisms and funding sources are used to fund different components of these structures

Small, multi-skilled teams provide the infill for these structures – allowing for the evolution of small construction enterprises⁹

Large structures are designed and built in such a way that they are constructed by small construction companies; all building components are easy to transport in a small truck, every building component can be carried by two people, can be easily installed and allows for skills transfer¹⁰

The density allows for small businesses to flourish¹¹

Small and subtle interventions – which may not be as visible or compelling as the imagery linked with current future visions of cities – generate small actions which have immense catalytic and transformational potential and are vital for the survival of many

The design of spaces and buildings accommodate these activities

All levels of economic activity are embraced

As this environment evolves – and it is premised on evolution and inclusion and collaboration and learning – so does the society that it hosts evolve

Everybody is involved – everyone is a decision maker at some level of the environment – everybody is a producer – everybody produces something¹²

A dynamic situation is created and growth is enhanced

To achieve this vision, financial, management and procurement systems are aligned with the design intentions

Perhaps this is what transformation looks like?

⁹ Kendall, S., 2006, HOMEWORK, A New American Townhouse, Trafford, Victoria

¹⁰ Andre Eksteen in personal conversation on the Africa Campus, University of Pretoria

¹¹ Dewar, D. and Uytendogaardt, R. S., 1991, South African cities: a manifesto for change, Urban Problems Unit, University of Cape Town

¹² Schumacher, E.F., 1973, Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered, ABACUS, London