

“The Role of Cultural Sector in Development and Cooperation”

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In realizing cultural rights within a development cooperation context one should be focused on the ultimate. Whilst, reviewing and scanning the current development cooperation circumstance, one is qualified to state that there is a need for a more sustained impact that embraces continuity and permanence at all costs. Cultural cooperation creates indestructible bonds from country to country and remains one element of polishing activism of the formerly disadvantaged in South Africa. I am referring to the people who have only embraced democracy in the past thirteen years.

The Cultural sector development scope and its challenges are almost similar in many countries. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality (NMMM) has an established partnership with the city of Gothenburg since 1999. The sustainability of that partnership relies on new and productive partnerships between institutions in both cities. These institutional partnerships exist between the World Cultures Museum and the Red Location Museum and also there is a Gelvandale Library /Frolunda Community Cultural Development partnership. This presentation will not be meaningful if there is no bold mentioning of SIDA as a partner in both projects. This is one strong element of international partnerships established with broad, yet practical views in dealing with promotion Cultural Freedom and diversity, Freedom of expression and access to means of expression and local production, economic growth and increased employment.

I will give a background of the current cultural development activities within the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, an area observed as the hub of culture in the Eastern Province of South Africa. The presentation will comprehensively look into the historical set up of the cultural sector and this will assist in providing a genuine opinionated context and an understable wayforward.

Historical Context

There is currently a shift from ‘settler’ cultural heritage to a monumental heritage in post apartheid South Africa, in Port Elizabeth in particular. This particular heritage is characterized by the “great man” theory of history, isolating Nelson Mandela and other male figures to define the struggle for freedom. Port Elizabeth’s new heritage in post 1994 is also being refracted through a male centered history of national heroes and their biographies. This notion permits the old and the new to sit easily alongside each other, where the old can easily adopt an ‘add on’ approach by assuming the mantle of Mandela. For instance, the names change of the King George Art Gallery into the Nelson Mandela Art Museum and many other occurrences.

1994-2000: The additive moment

Within the heritage context South Africa the first five years of democracy can be classified as the transition period where community initiatives and ‘add-ons’ to ‘old’ museums took center stage. In this period very little change could be traced in the municipality with an exception of the conceptualization of a museum in Red Location in 1998, the naming of Olof Palme Street in Red Location and the renaming of the Main Street to Govan Mbeki Street in 2000. In this same period the city witnessed the construction of monuments in the townships beginning with Emlotheni Memorial in 1998 and Langa Memorial in 2000. It was also in this period that the South End Museum was opened. Country wide museums to commemorate the past were established, for instance the Hector Peterson Museum in Soweto, Johannesburg, the Apartheid Museum and the Freedom Park Concept in Pretoria.

Whilst museums were places of racial anthropology, studying the ‘other’ (African people in particular) through body parts and human remains, and places of misrepresentation of the cultures of the majority of South African, it was during 1994-1995 where museums in South Africa were faced with major challenges that required a frequent use of the word ‘transformation’. There were also high expectations from old museums’ staff and management as well as some negative perception and skepticism about the democratic government from within the museum sector. This delayed the joyous epoch of South Africa’s cultural transition and inclusive redevelopment of cultural the cultural sector.

In the former Port Elizabeth Museum report (1994/95) there is an acknowledgement of the launch of the Arts and Culture task group set up by Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology to make recommendations on arts and culture policy at a national level for the new South Africa.¹ Reath reveals that he was appointed to the Eastern Cape Provincial Arts and Culture Task Group (PACTAG) by Nosimo Balindlela, member of the executive committee (MEC) for Sports, Arts and Culture. One of its aims was to find effective ways to redress past imbalances while at the same time utilizing existing services to the public. Reath submitted to PACTAG that, “the problem of redress in formerly marginalized areas should be addressed by the implementation of a mobile museum services into the remotest areas of the province by means of specifically equipped mobile units staffed by trained staff”.² He was thus calling for broadening the use of museums in the province and not tackling the need for altering existing museums

¹ Reath, M 1994/1995 Director Review, Port Elizabeth Museum.

² Ibid

systems and narratives. This was the first intervention by the democratically elected government and it became a major challenge for the transformation of this museums sector.

Red Location Museum in NMBM and World Cultures Museum in Gothenborg – Play Picture insert

In June 1998, the Municipality of Port Elizabeth decided to launch a national architectural competition for the transformation of Red Location. The project formed part of the City Council's strategy of upgrading previously disadvantaged communities and creation of cultural institutions. Red Location was chosen as the site for this project because it bears major political significance and has an interesting architectural legacy of corrugated iron houses which were remains of the Uitenhage barracks of the Anglo Boer War in 1899-1902. Erected in 1903 as a 'model township', the original structures in Red Location had never been upgraded. Essentially, the concept was to develop the site into a major tourist attraction that would focus attention on life in the township by restoring the corrugated iron houses and erecting a museum. The competition started on 10 August 1998 and the winner, Joe Noero, was announced on 10 December 1998.³ For budgetary reasons no progress was made with the Red Location Museum until 2004, when building was started. During that time the city continued to seal its cooperation with Sweden by naming a road adjacent to the Red Location site Museum site after late President Olof Palme.

³ Herholdt, A. Competition Coordinator, South African Architect, June 1999.

Political heads have expressed interest and visited the new Museum of World Culture which opened its doors in December 2004 in Gothenburg, Sweden, and have acknowledged the good spirit and methods with which the museum is developing its place in the community. Resulting from this visit was a working visit by two delegates, Jete Sandahl (Museum Director) and Catharina Bergil (Head of Public Programs) to the Metro in 2005. With different priorities, yet like objectives the two museums collaborated with an outlook of mutual beneficiation. This partnership is still continuing and is based on the following principles,

Areas of cooperation within cultural institutions,

- Promotion of democracy,
- Promotion and development of sustainability,
- Promotion of institution development,
- Promotion of cultural exchange, support, development,
- Promotion of activities aligned to national development priorities,
- Promotion of accessibility to culture for all citizens,
- Promotion of processes that lead to artistic renewal
- Development of audiences and artistic markets.

Programs for Collaboration were: Play inserts

The following areas of partnership and exchange were identified:

- Exhibition exchange with regard to the following Themes: –
The Struggle”UNDERGROUND”
“AIDS IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION”
- Staff Exchange – Three staff members from the Red Location Museum to visit the World Culture Museum annually over three years with the approved DAC and Cultural Fund funding
- Red Location Museum Shop as scout and distributor of local crafts to the Museum of World Culture. This could serve as a source of income for the Red Location Museum but also beneficial to the World Culture Museum.
- A ‘webcam’ link between the two museums to form part of the ‘Partnership Exhibition’ at the Red Location Museum.

The project was inspired by successes achieved with the previous co-operation with the City of Göteborg, which resulted in a planned series of art workshops with children, presented by library staff at 22 libraries within the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality. The new project focuses on one library within the metro and on the Frolunda Culture House. It envisages the development of a community cultural centre in a library to serve the disadvantaged community of Gelvandale in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality, and extending the cultural activities of the Frolunda Culture House to include immigrants and single mothers in Sweden.

The youth of Sweden and South Africa will be engaged through cultural expressions and exchange, using the Gelvandale Public Library and the Frolunda Culture House as base. A sense of pride and self-confidence will be inculcated in the community by ensuring broader community support for the participants and their efforts. The present proposal is for a one year period, but it will develop further over three years in total, with new art and cultural forms being introduced into the programme each year. In the long term it is envisaged that the participants in the programme can form a drama/puppet/storytelling company that can put on performances as a means of generating income.

A mutually beneficial project engaging the youth of the two countries was decided upon, with the main objective of providing a means for cultural expression and exchange, as envisaged in the partnership. In the NMMM the disadvantaged area of Gelvandale would be involved, with the further objective of empowering unemployed people with a means of alleviating poverty, and the Swedish partners would benefit from the introduction of new cultural forms from southern Africa such as performance art. The Frolunda Culture House has, inter alia, a vibrant puppet theatre programme; this would be introduced to the community in South Africa, and could thus become part of the southern African cultural experience. At the end of the first year a manual will be produced containing guidelines for similar projects and detailed teaching of the techniques to be used for future reference.

Mutual benefits:

- facilitating cultural exchange and introducing new cultural forms
- assisting in poverty alleviation

- increasing HIV/AIDS awareness
- increasing environmental awareness

In the background of cultural development, Nelson Mandela as a struggle figure and a liberation icon has become branded as a commodity. The city of Port Elizabeth has done so with the integration of Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, and Despatch as the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality. This was followed with projects like a planned statue of freedom in the bay that was meant to have Mandela as a full statuette. The creation of the statue of freedom forms part of what Rassool, refers to as a “discourse of monumentalizing the lives of individual resistance leaders and heroes of the liberation struggle.”⁴ Whilst looking at the discourse of biography and resistance in South Africa Rassool views the life of Nelson Mandela, “whose ‘long walk’ came to symbolize the new nation’s past as the centre of this ‘biographic activity’”.⁵

Sam Radithalo, a lecturer in English at the University of Cape Town, whose thesis focused on the South African autobiographical writings, including Mandela’s, explained that “the medium of television has played a big role in constructing Mandela as ‘Tata’”⁶.

In an interview with the *Sunday Times* he elaborated by quoting Mandela’s biographer Anthony Sampson pointing out that “Mandela watched his iconic status being formulated

⁴ Rassool. Individual, Biography and Resistance. p20

⁵ Ibid, p1

⁶ Radithalo, S. Interview with *Sunday Times Lifestyle Magazine*, 8 May 2005.

while still in Robben Island prison”⁷. Raditlhalo confirmed that Mandela, “knows the pitfalls of believing in the myth of himself, and is aware of the changes of personality cult, opting for ‘We’ kind of discursiveness rather than ‘I’ mindful of the fact that he rushed to be seen as a regular person, which of course he was not.”⁸ Raditlhalo reasons that, “it is history and myth that are conflated so that Mandela becomes a sort of a messianic figure.”⁹ Rassool alludes to this reasoning when stating that, “While Mandela had acquired near messianic status during his imprisonment, it is the cultural production of the Messianic Mandela that became a fundamental feature of South Africa after his release.”¹⁰ Rassool confirms that the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a veritable ‘scramble for Nelson Mandela’s life as biographies in virtually every medium were produced.’¹¹ As Solani points out the post apartheid era has seen “many attempts to reconstruct narratives of heroes, with Nelson Mandela’s life as central to this.”¹²

Marschall locates the veritable explosion of Mandela’s biography within what she sees as the ‘requirements of a tourist economy’. She explains that, “one way of solving the tourist’s problems of access and security is to conveniently bring the heritage to the tourist and this may involve erecting monuments that are primarily addressed to tourists,

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Rassool. *Individual, Biography and Resistance*. p28. See also Rob Nixon, (1994) ‘Mandela, Messianism, and the Media’, in his book *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*. London: Routledge. pp 175 – 192.

¹¹ Rassool. *Individual*. p28

¹² Solani, N. (n.d.) *The Saint of the Struggle: Deconstructing the Mandela Myth*. Bellville, University of the Western Cape, Institute for Historical Research.

set up in places designed for tourists.”¹³ Mandela statues, such as the one in Hammanskraal near Pretoria, are referred to by her as post colonial symbols which are responding to differing packaging needs of the cities.¹⁴ Mandela, in her opinion, becomes a socio economical ‘commodity’.

Marschall views the flashing of the Mandela card as a way to attract foreign investment and by projecting Mandela as an image of peace and stability to an international investor community.¹⁵ This is one of the functions of the latest Mandela statue, unveiled in April 2004 in Sandton Square, and later renamed Nelson Mandela Square. The Sandton statue represents the popular image of the relaxed, laughing and dancing man of the people. At Sandton Square, “Mandela has essentially become a kind of décor that lends a local flavor to the international-standard shopping experience. Culture, concludes Jameson, is the ‘new logic’ of capitalism.”¹⁶

An even more gigantic statue of Mandela with his arm raised was envisaged for the coastline at Port Elizabeth. Newspaper reports included preliminary sketches in which the monument was seen “to imitate the Statue of Liberty in New York, exceeding this model in height by almost 20 metres.”¹⁷ Intended to become South Africa’s foremost tourist

¹³ Marschall, S. *Commodifying Heritage in South Africa: Post Apartheid Monuments and Cultural Tourism*. In Hall, C.M. 2004. *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested Discourses, Identities and Representations*. London: Routledge.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Jameson, F. 1991. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of late Capitalism*. London: Verso; Durham: Duke University Press.

¹⁷ Van Heerden, D 2001 ‘Mandela – beeld kry getalte’, *Oos Kaap Rapport*, 3 June; Van Niekerk, L. 2001. ‘Oorsee hulp stroom in vir beeld.’ *Burger*, 10 July; Philp, R. 2002. ‘Giant Mandela Statue Planned.’ *Sunday Times*. 20 October.

attraction, the statue was meant to rotate and be equipped with all the trappings of a successful, commercial tourist enterprise according to western standards, including a restaurant and conference center and a wax museum à la Madame Tussauds in London. These particulars might not apply to the implemented project, as it was been decided (after the positive outcome of the feasibility study) that the design should be solicited through an international competition.

On Friday the 10th March 2005, The Freedom Enterprise, a private group that initiated the statue project, displayed about one hundred designs at South End Museum for public viewing and adjudication. The winning design was that of Equilibrium Studios and in form of a 122 metre tower. The monument was meant to be higher than the statue of Liberty's 96 meters and was meant to be the prestigious symbol of freedom for South Africa. The design concept owners explained that "the strength of the design was its ability to portray an icon visible from land, sea and air – a distinctive feature of Nelson Mandela Bay."¹⁸ The winning design was explained as "a tower like structure, with the base depicting the start of Nelson Mandela's journey leading up to freedom platform representing South Africa's first democratic election."¹⁹ This tower like structure is meant to provide infrastructure for the development of the cultural sector.

¹⁸ South Africa's Official Gateway. 2007. A Freedom Tower for Mandela, 20 July 2005. www.southafrica.info/mandela/freedomstatue.htm International Marketing Council of South Africa. (accessed 08/02/07 at 12:41am)

¹⁹ Equilibrium Studios design and illustrations displayed in South End Museum for public viewing, 10th March 2005, Port Elizabeth.

Conclusion

As a researcher for Projects on Public Pasts, a research area I have pursued in the past 7 years on growth and changing dynamics of the cultural sector, I have come to a conclusion that South Africa's cultural development is primarily phased and tailored to deal with the challenges in a moderate approach. South Africans have used the cultural set up to liberate themselves through artistic impressions. This follows the heroism of Dr Miriam Makeba, Hugh Maseka and many others who used cultural expressions in indemnifying South Africa of its atrocious past .