15 Public Space as a generator of growth in African Cities

uclg peer learning

Blantyre
December
2015

Public Space as a generator of growth in African Cities
December 2015

City of Blantyre

City of Lilongwe

City of Mzuzu

City of Zomba

City of Nairobi

City of Durban

Malawi Local Government Association—MALGA

International Union of Architects—UIA

UN-Habitat—Urban Planning & Design Branch

Municipal Institute of Learning—MILE

Asiye eTafuleni

The Polytechnic—University of Malawi

UCLG Urban Strategic Planning Committee - UCLG USP
United Cities and Local Governments—UCLG

FOREWORD

Cities across Malawi experience similar challenges – neglect and degradation - but how they manage their public spaces in future will make the real difference. The City of Blantyre – and other cities in Malawi and Africa in general - need to develop a winning recipe for the creation and management of one of their most important assets - public spaces. It is therefore imperative that African Cities should on occasion bring together management and leadership to benchmark and review their status quo against the rest of the world. On-going peer to peer learning will come up with solutions to some of the existing challenges. It is well known that cities that embrace public spaces are successful in providing world class services and satisfying their communities and stakeholders. By promoting public spaces, African Cities will be able to leverage and mobilise support for maintenance and ownership.

It is also understood that public space is a new concept in the African context that requires to be anchored in plans and policies in local, regional and national strategies. However, the concept of public spaces is fast attracting the interest of cities all over the world, such as Blantyre. This emanates from the public space discourse that has been initiated by active members within UCLG and featuring high on the agenda of global development. It is of great importance to change the mind-set and foster a paradigm shift in African cities, influence planning agendas as well as create integrated and comprehensive strategies. The integration of public space in policies and development models in African cities needs to occur NOW and cannot be delayed.

It is well agreed that public space should be people centred. The definition should be context specific because public space is a complex reality of social, economic, political, cultural, religious and geographical interpretations and origins. The "mal-functionality" of public spaces in African cities requires them to develop a methodology and tools to diagnose the problems. They need to embark on a process of dealing with challenges in order to reap the benefits of improved quality of public spaces.

The development of public space should be aimed at transforming the city towards the betterment of the lives of people from all walks of life. International organisations have a critical role to play in the promotion and development of public spaces across the world. African cities must partner with these organisations in order to take advantage of the opportunities that they offer. Planners and urban designers need to understand the surrounding behaviour, culture and history of the place so that the development of public spaces can complement the texture of the environment and create the ability to connect people.

African cities and local governments should be urged to consider freedom, security, as well as rules and regulations in the development and promotion of public spaces. There are a number of unique opportunities in Africa that can be explored. Cities should therefore start experimenting with public spaces in order to find possible solutions. SDGs – now a universal phenomenon - have created opportunities for local leaders to develop policy frameworks and strategies aimed at the planning and development of public spaces. Peer learning as a knowledge management methodology will certainly help African cities explore public spaces as a generator of growth now and in the future.

Councillor Noel Chalamanda Rangeley, His Worship the Mayor of Blantyre, Malawi

This publication is a culmination of presentations, discussions, ideas, insights, experiences, and lessons learned during Peer learning event: Public Space as generator of growth in African cities that took place on 07 – 09 December 2015 in Blantyre, Malawi. The event was hosted jointly by the City of Blantyre, UCLG, UN-Habitat, UIA and eThekwini Municipality. Over the three days, at least 40 participants attended the event and represented management and political leadership from the Cities of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Zomba, Nairobi, Durban and Mzuzu, practitioners from the respective municipalities, NGOs and other stakeholders. The theme of the learning session was to explore public space as a generator of growth in African Cities with a particular focus on Blantyre, and covered the following topics:

1.   Introduction
2.   Setting the scene
3.   Inspiring Examples
4.   Public Space in Blantyre
5.   Practical Considerations for Public Space Development
6.   Key Lessons Learned
7.   The Way Forward

"Public space centred urban development is a new concept in Africa that requires to be anchored in City Development Plans and Policies for sustainability"
Rose Muema, Nairobi City Council

01 INTRODUCTION

The concept of public spaces has become a very important subject in many cities across the world, including Africa. It is now understood to have a potential to become a key generator of socio-economic growth in African cities. In his introductory remarks, Costly Chanza, Director of Planning and Estate Services, stated that the concept of public spaces has attracted much interest in the City of Blantyre. Sharing knowledge and learning among peers is an opportunity to discuss and envision with solutions to some of the challenges that Blantyre is currently experiencing. Puven Akkiah, member of the UCLG Committee on Urban Strategic Planning also stated that the issue of public space features high on the agenda of global development as reflected in the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The Mayor of the City of Blantyre, Honourable Councillor Noel Chalamanda, highlighted the fact that public spaces are often overlooked yet the character and image of the city is defined by these spaces. In 2015, the United Nations approved the sustainable development goals, putting the cities in the heart of sustainable development in an urbanized world (SDG 11). Moreover, the target 11.7 focuses explicitly on public space.. UCLG has been instrumental in the approval of this goal.

Fabian Llisterri from UIA stated that public spaces should be centred on people and people should be centred on public spaces. It was acknowledged that there are a number of definitions and explanations of public spaces and this depended largely on the context. Public spaces, therefore, are a complex reality, particularly in the African city. Jemaa el-Fnaa in Marrakech is a good example of a public space that is extremely complex to understand yet it is very successful. On the other side, markets are frequently becoming a mix of public service and small business. Education also has a great deal to do with the public spaces because it is where children converge, play and ultimately grow. Public spaces should be seen as a combination of the function of the city and its people as well as a scenario that helps bring happiness and prosperity at the same time. The city, therefore, must be tailor made to its inhabitants if it is to experience growth, success and prosperity. It is critical that an analysis be undertaken in order to understanding how the community is using the public space. Public spaces should be characterised by flexibility, shared use, evo-

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (2015 – 2030)

Goal 11: "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Target 7: "by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities"
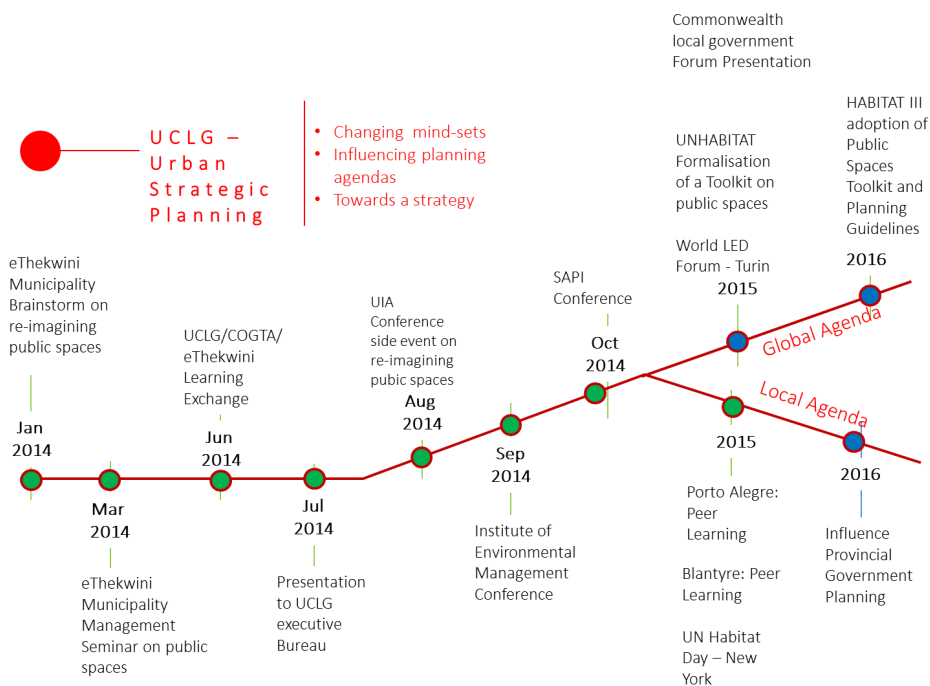
lution and future outlook. There may be many reasons why a public space is not functioning optimally, and often it relates to the social, economic, political, geographical and cultural interpretations of its origin. There are many causes of malfunctions in public spaces and these may include imbalances between needs of all types and available resources, poor quality, and so on. To rationalise the most frequent causes of problems in public spaces, and to develop the methodology and tools to diagnose them, is an important task.

02 SETTING THE SCENE

An overview of the Public Space Discourse at UCLG

UCLG has created a platform for Cities to learn and share with each other across the world. UCLG Committee on Urban Strategic Planning intends changing mind-sets, influence planning agendas and create integrated and comprehensive strategies. Public space development is critical in cohesive cities especially in the developmental context of Africa. The learning session is a culmination of a number of learning events and exchanges undertaken by a network of stakeholders and partners that responded to a global and local agenda.

Commonwealth local government Forum Presentation

HABITAT III adoption of Public Spaces Toolkit and Planning Guidelines

UCLG – Urban Strategic Planning

- Changing mind-sets
- Influencing planning agendas
- Towards a strategy

UNHABITAT Formalisation of a Toolkit on public spaces

2016

World LED Forum - Turin

2015

eThekwini Municipality Brainstorm on re-imagining public spaces

UIA Conference side event on re-imagining pubic spaces

SAPI Conference

Global Agenda

UCLG/COGTA/ eThekwini Learning Exchange

Oct 2014

Local Agenda

Jan 2014

Aug 2014

2015

2016

Jun 2014

Sep 2014

Mar 2014

Jul 2014

Porto Alegre: Peer Learning

Influence Provincial Government Planning

eThekwini Municipality Management Seminar on public spaces

Presentation to UCLG executive Bureau

Institute of Environmental Management Conference

Blantyre: Peer Learning

UN Habitat Day – New York

The outcomes of peer learning will contribute to the existing body of work that cities are currently undertaking. The various engagements have led to a set of outcomes:

1. There is a urgent need for greater conceptual clarity on the notion of public space

2. Public space as a resource has been undervalued! It is up to us to reclaim this space and ACT NOW!

3. Putting people FIRST

4. Recognising the art of PLACE – MAKING

5. Making our bureaucracy work for us: changing policies, structures and systems

6. Maximising and leveraging existing resources for public space development and management

7. Connecting POLICY and PLANNING FRAMEWORKS with action

8. No one size fits all solution: need to tailor make responses, given that many African cities face rural challenges

Some of the take away points that we need to consider:

- How do we cater for rural public space development?

- If public space is a structuring element in cities, where does it feature in terms of strategic planning?

- Are public spaces centred on people or do people centre on public spaces?

- Why is it that citizens do not view public spaces as a component of service delivery?

- Does centralised or decentralised model of governance promote effective service delivery?

Furthermore, the committee on Urban Strategic Planning, to which the City Council of Blantyre is a member, has focused the work around public local policies on public space since 2014 and is developing several city to city learning sessions on this topic, towards a policy paper on public space that will be presented in the World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders, in Bogotá, October 2016. This process is nurturing the process of Habitat III, where public space will be considered as a lever of change. The following are some of the advantages of public open spaces:

- Increased property values
- Development of multiple retail activity
- Enhanced safety and sense of security
- Fosters social cohesion and equality
- Improved health and well being
- Improvement in the environment
- Makes the city more attractive
- Promotion of more effective and efficient transportation and mobility
- Provision of social and recreational infrastructure and services for example aquariums, cultural and historical sites, and community centres that contribute educational and other benefits
- Prevention of youth crime through park and recreation programme

"There are no viable public spaces that can exist without a community and there are no viable communities without public space"

Sibusiso Sithole, City Manager, eThekwini Municipality

It is considered crucial to integrate public space in policies and development models of African

cities. The design, use, management and maintenance, decision making, regulation are complex. African cities need to be considered not only in spatial but also in economic and social management. Further, the profile of public space needs to raised, African cities grow fast, often informal and with little attention to public space.

Why the need for the Peer Learning Session?

The post 2015 developmental agenda and the global arena dictates that local government needs to engage, reflect and propose to improve public space. With the advent of the Charter of Public Space, cities are now considering the importance of this strategy and structuring element of the urban form. Some cities have fully embraced the concept of people centred public space. Through learning events, cities are able to tap into their knowledge and experience of one another to assist in designing, developing and maintaining public space.

There is a growing need for Municipal practitioners to continue learning and sharing ideas and creative ways to develop, design, implement and manage public spaces. The UCLG Committee on Urban Strategic Planning has, over the past years, actively developed and influenced global policy through its learning events in Durban (South Africa) and Porto Alegre (Brazil) on public space dialogues with local elected representatives, experts and technicians..

The outcomes of the learning events were documented and shared as Peer Learning Notes. Key inputs also were shared with members and partners in order to contribute to processes by United Nations, in particular into the UN-Habitat Global Toolkit for Public Space, as well as, the Chart of Public Space, leaded by the National Urban Planning Institute (Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica) - IDU, and influence how each of the above documents view and implement public space by adding the city perspective. Blantyre has also been representing UCLG in the UN high level events around public space.

To complement the international discussion about public space and provide a political input to Habitat III, UCLG Committee on Urban Strategic Planning is currently working on a policy paper that focuses on the role and power of local governments on public space. It is with this intent that Blantyre manifested its interest in hosting a peer learning event to expand on its current experiences in public space design and development with a view of consolidating the African experience to public space and further influences the development of a public space policy for local governments, strengthening at the same time the UCLG Urban Strategic Planning network.

What were the objectives of the learning session?

- To expose and provide municipal practitioners with hands on practical experience on the assessment of public space in cities.
- To explore the possibilities of public space development in the urban environment

- Encourage participants to develop a strategy for public space in their cities
- Share experiences and good practices between cities on public space
- Develop and encourage a closer relationship with the UIA on public space design
- Share the experience of Blantyre with other members and partners through a Peer Learning Note
- Contribute to the UCLG Committee on Urban Strategic Planning policy paper by strengthening the African perspective on public space.
- Raise awareness of the importance of public space in the urban context
- To change mind sets of municipal practitioners to recognise the importance of public space development in terms of sustainability
- To provide a neutral space to discuss how each profession can assist in building people centred public space
- To highlight the importance of public space as part of basic service delivery
- To contribute to the overall global dialogue on public space development
- To assist in providing content to develop an African context to public space
- To provide meaningful input into the development of a public space policy for local government
- To commit key stakeholders and the City Council on public space and the SDG 11

03.INSPIRING EXAMPLES

Role of the Markets in Public Space

Richard Dobson, from Asiy' eTafuleni (NGO) stated that there are unique opportunities in the African public space landscape such as the public transport system (i.e. minibus taxis), existing active activities (e.g. urban agriculture) and the periodic time dimension (e.g. annual festivals). African cities need to start experimenting with public spaces in order to find possible solutions. Sustainable Development Goals have created opportunities for local leaders to develop policy frameworks and strategies aimed at the planning and development of public spaces. Once the politicians and communities are sensitised with the SDGs it will become easier because public spaces have become a universal phenomenon. However, there are five sets of challenges that face the African Cities face due to congestion, mitigation and assimilation:

Urban Challenges.....but there are Prospects for Greater Public Spaces

An Approach to Urban Spaces

1. There is an increased demand for public space resulting in road and sidewalk congestion.

2. Urban aesthetics are heavily compromised as a result of inappropriate equipment and infrastructure.

3. There are extraordinary demands on the existing urban environment because there is an obligation to accommodate diverse informal activities and cultural preferences.

4. Urban spaces are being colonised and there is evidence of diametrically opposed activities and land uses

5. Urban safety is a concern because of the personal risks associated with activity hazards and inappropriate street furniture, equipment and obstacles.

Creating Public Spaces for Wealth Generation in African Cities – The Case of Nairobi
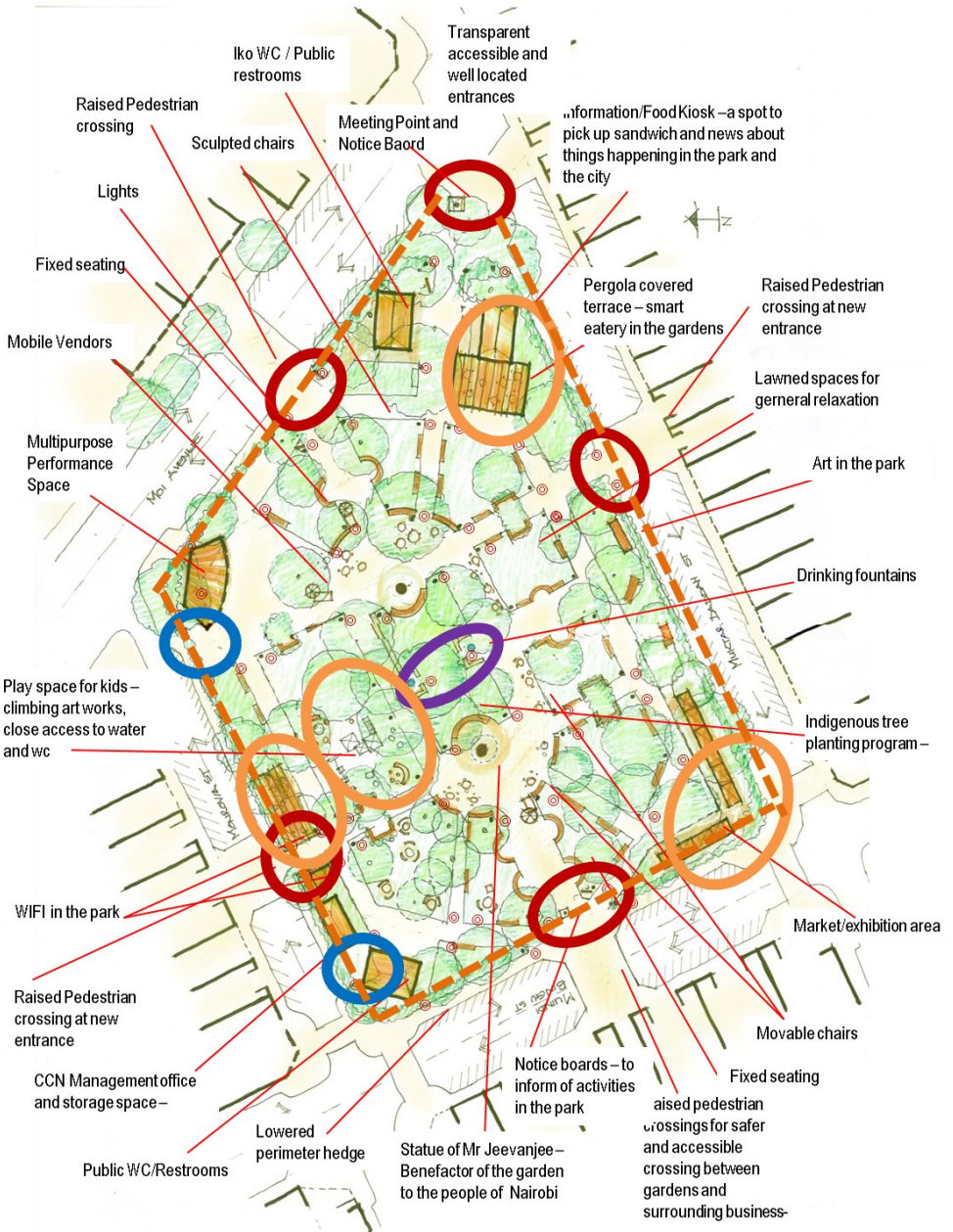
As Chief Officer in charge of Urban Planning and Housing in the Nairobi City Council, Rose Muema shared some insights and experiences with regards to open spaces and latest developments in Nairobi. Cities in Africa are fast accommodating the majority of the population and hence there are now calls for planning approaches that are more responsive to the reality of rapid urbanisation. Most of these rapidly urbanising cities in Africa are faced with challenges of quality public spaces. Nairobi, an African City, was originally planned as a "Garden City" with protected public spaces and resources were allocated for development and maintenance. As part of the "garden city" plan, it was mandatory for developers to provide public spaces. However, over time, the value of public spaces has faded and the quality of the environment of the city has declined with increased urbanisation. The City of Nairobi has lost a lot of public spaces through alienation to other uses.

It all started with a crime survey.....

Nairobi was an "unhappy city" and this led to the formulation of the city's Crime Prevention and Urban Safety Strategy which outlined a series of interventions that included the recovery and rehabilitation of public spaces. Of significance, a tree planting and beautification programme was rolled out across the city. Street vending activities were restructured, developed and retail markets were refurbished to become trading facilities. Streets and parking lots were redesigned for use as public spaces.

"Public engagement in public space making is very critical because the city structure must prioritise people"

Nina Saunders, Acting Head: Architectural Services at the eThekwini Municipality

Iko WC / Public restrooms

Transparent accessible and well located entrances

Raised Pedestrian crossing

Sculpted chairs

Meeting Point and Notice Baord

Information/Food Kiosk – a spot to pick up sandwich and news about things happening in the park and the city

Lights

Fixed seating

Pergola covered terrace – smart eatery in the gardens

Raised Pedestrian crossing at new entrance

Mobile Vendors

Lawned spaces for gerneral relaxation

Multipurpose Performance Space

Art in the park

Drinking fountains

Play space for kids – climbing art works, close access to water and wc

Indigenous tree planting program –

WIFI in the park

Market/exhibition area

Raised Pedestrian crossing at new entrance

Movable chairs

CCN Management office and storage space –

Notice boards – to inform of activities in the park

Fixed seating

aised pedestrian crossings for safer and accessible crossing between gardens and surrounding business-

Public WC/Restrooms

Lowered perimeter hedge

Statue of Mr Jeevanjee – Benefactor of the garden to the people of Nairobi

Jeevanje Gardens

In order to enhance the right to the city, women and the youth were prioritised in the allocation of space. As a way of enhancing youth engagement in public spaces, crafts, fairs, events, sports, performance, cultural festivals were supported by the city in order to give the youth a platform to showcase their talents and celebrate culture.

Schools were transformed to become community public spaces as an entry point to safe and harmonious neighborhoods. In 2011, Kenya led other member states in adopting a **Governing Council Resolution 23/4: Sustainable Urban Development through Access to Quality Urban Public Spaces** which mandated UN-Habitat to promote public spaces within the sustainable urban development agenda. Subsequently, the City of Nairobi requested UN-Habitat for support to access international experts with diverse experience and networks on the art of place making. This resulted in participatory design workshops for a public space such as Jeevanjee gardens and the Silanga Sportsfield in Kibera.

Silanga Sportfield, Kibera

Mustard Seed Court, Dandora

Korogocho streets

Mustard Seed Court, Dandora

Beyond the pilots!

The City of Nairobi committed itself to reclaiming, restoring and rehabilitating public spaces across the city with the inclusion of the community in the governance and management of the spaces.

City wide public space inventory and analysis of public spaces to establish per capita provision, quality, distribution and network, accessibility and preparation of city wide restoration and rehabilitation plan. The plan was integrated into other Urban District Plans in order to enhance inclusion of the agenda into development planning. In association with other partners and stakeholders, the city has established a team to ensure that the selected public spaces from this project are subjected to participatory planning and design.

What are the benefits so far!

Capacity Building from the grassroots level

Employment opportunities created, especially for women and youth

A vibrant business environment

Improved city environmental quality
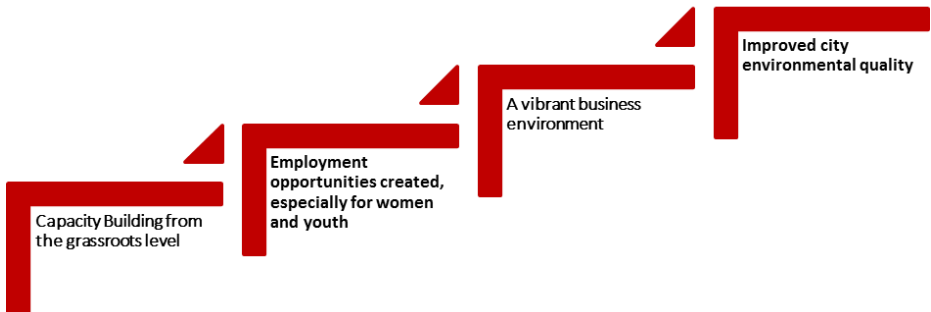
The Way Forward!

The Nairobi Integrated Urban Development Master Plan suggests a new shift in how the citizen relates to public space – as well as its management and governance. This shift is being promoted extensively by the city as it recognises that public spaces are an integral part of the built fabric of the city; provides variety and character; as well as enhances the quality of life. Detailed Urban Area Plans have been prepared in line with the plan and along the principles of building safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces.

2014 Durban: Spatial Legacy Projects

Nina Saunders, Acting Head: Architectural Services at the eThekwini Municipality reflected on the UIA 2014 Durban spatial legacy projects (i.e. Rivertown, Pocket Parks and the Pixley ka Seme Walk.

Key events often catalyse action and this could be seen after the 2010 World Cup and a number of other events hosted by the City of eThekwini. In light of these events, traditional planning is often reconceptualised and redefined as planning in action. Durban celebrated the first UCLG peer learning event on public space, in which the opportunity to re-imagine the public space strategies led to the promotion on public space as a key structuring element of city development, both within and beyond UCLG.

Also during 2014 and concurrent to the UIA event, the city experimented with the different projects with the hope that they would materialise into long term sustainable projects. The pedestrianisation projects involved a set of negotiations with a number of users with a varying set of concerns. For instance, preconditions for pedestrianisation included the removal of taxis along Dr Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street in the long term. This development needs to occur incrementally and must be phased to accommodate the needs of the users. The programme also needed to take into consideration the Inner City Local Area Plan that determines where other pedestrian routes will be located and the full network of routes. The "inner city distribution system" needs to be finalised. In parallel to these processes, the city needs to continue with negotiations to terminate the taxis from the inner city.
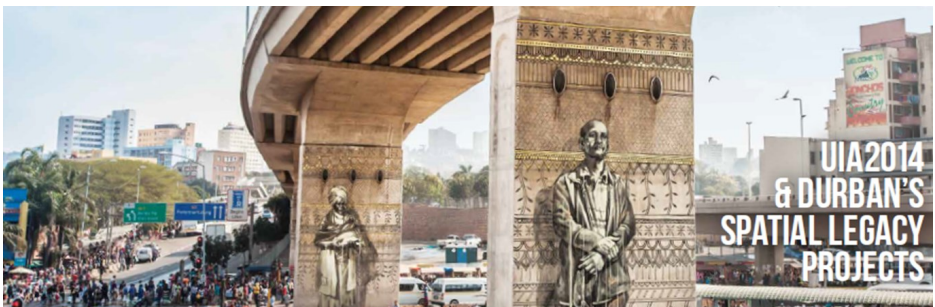
DR PIXLEY KASEME **LINEAR PARK**

TRANSFORMING OUR CITY: 6 KEY OBJECTIVES

ECONOMIC

1. BUILD VALUE [cost to benefit]
Realign historic infrastructure investment with economic, social and cultural amenity and productivity

2. SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURIAL ENTERPRISE, ESPECIALLY CREATIVE & RETAIL
Enable more individual, unique, and entrepreneurial creative and retail activity by providing more, and more diverse footfall

PERCEPTUAL

3. RESTORE THE 'CENTRE'
Redefine the inner-city as the perceptual, economic, social and cultural centre of the eThekwini Metro

4. EXTEND THE SUCCESS OF THE BEACHFRONT
Extend the leisure, social cohesion and imageability successes of the beachfront promenade through the heart of the city

SOCIAL

5. ENHANCE THE LIVIBILITY OF THE CITY
Create a high quality public space for people who live and work in the city to relax, exercise and play

6. ENABLE SOCIAL COHESION
Link the city's diversities with one inviting, inspiring and safe public space

KINGSMEAD

MARKETS OF WARWICK

CIVIC & CULTURAL CENTRE

LIBRARY [PROPOSED]

ICC

RIVER TOWN

BEACHFRONT

YUSUF DADOO ST
JOE SLOVO ST
DR PIXLEY KASEME ST
DOROTHY NYEMBE ST
BANDARA RACHEL ST
CHURCH ST
CITY HALL
STALWART SINGANE ST
MONTY NAICKER ST
SYLVESTER NTULI ST
OR TAMBO PDE

HARBOUR

OLIVER TAMBO PRIDE

BROOK ST

2'600M (1/2 HOUR WALK)

OCEAN TERMINAL BUILDING [PROPOSED]

STEERWHERE

BEFORE   AFTER

designworkshop : sa

architecture OTHERWHERE durban 2014

uia

www.uia2014durban.org

Hey Bra, Howzit...

RIVERTOWN

TRANSFORMING OUR CITY: RIVERTOWN

The rivertown precinct lies to the east of the formal Durban CBD and adjacent to the city's Convention Complex

The area is formerly Durban's light industrial area with several low-rise warehouses

A canal traverses this area along John Milne street. Currently the canal is enclosed and water from areas that were formerly the 'vlei's' or wetlands in the City Bowl drain into the canal and are dispersed into the harbour at Cato Creek

The area provides an opportunity for a 'new (revitalised) city' for the city of Durban - an area currently derelict which could be revitalised and regenerated to draw interest back to durban's CBD

In the post-apartheid years there was significant 'flight' from the existing CBD with several large businesses and corporations relocating their premises to the north of the city at la Lucia and Umhlanga Ridge.

Currently the city is investigating the feasibility of Arts & Culture as principal drivers for the revitalisation of the area with the attendant retail, commerce and housing elements required to bring sustainability and vibrancy to the area

www.uia2014durban.org

POCKET PARKS

TRANSFORMING OUR CITY: POCKET PARKS

Lack of green spaces?

Pocket parks are the answer!

Pocket parks otherwise known as vest parks are urban spaces at a very small scale, the size of tennis courts or much smaller

These small splashes of green either tucked in between buildings or scattered anywhere/otherwhere and even traveling throughout the urban fabric

Bring mother nature back to the city, provides a place for relaxation, a playground that parents can visit with their children under the African sky – a small space for activities or events, street cafes where you can socialise with your friends, share your lunch, your laughter and conversation!

Dig the green, mor...

Some lessons learned from the pedestrianisation project.....

- Piloting and activation of proposed projects demonstrates a planning in action methodology

- Public participation and information campaigns provide the community with a sense of ownership and certainty that they can use the project.

- Major events play a major role in the conceptualisation and implementation of projects such as the activation of space and pedestrianisation project.

- The use of surveys and questionnaires can indicate greater positive and negative responses that were not initially thought about.

- The most negative concerns about pedestrianisation relates to the reduction in parking and the impact on business whilst the key positive perception was that it made it safe. Public activation can lead to a change in the perceptions on how space can be used. However, the creation of public spaces can cause conflict with existing businesses and it is therefore important to engage with all stakeholders.

- Creative solutions can also be proposed by the communities themselves. For example, there were interesting requests for outdoor gyms and playgrounds for children.

- Pedestrianisation projects must be integrated with Inner City Distribution projects and other urban development plans across the city.

"African cities can draw from international perspectives in order to derive lessons for their own context"
Nina Saunders , Acting Head: Architectural Services at the eThekwini Municipality

04 PUBLIC SPACE IN BLANTYRE

Public Space in an African Context: Its problems and Challenges

In considering African Cities and their needs, Fabian Llisterri urged local governments to consider the development of a Master Plan with a realistic Road Map to enable the commissioning of small units, according to their resources and possibilities, that can be used freely and securely Participants collectively observed other considerations which included political will, social integration and inclusion, availability of budgets and resources, multi-functional uses, community value based systems, socio economic conditions, peoples aspirations, private, traditional versus public land ownership, governance issues such as corruption, community perceptions and awareness, and so on.

"The urban development decisions we make today will be seen across the faces of our cityscapes for generations to come"
Costly Chanza Director of Urban Planning in the City of Blantrye

Current State of Public Space in Blantyre – Problem and Challenges

Costly Chanza, Director of Urban Planning in the City of Blantrye informed us that the city is facing "open space" challenges. The utilisation of green open spaces and urban parks has been very marginal in Blantyre due to the poor state of the parks. Since the early 90s, urban parks have been neglected and this has led to illegal use and degradation, particularly in Njamba, Rangeley and Queen Parks, Chimwankhunda and Chiwembe Dams. The neglect of these parks can be attributed to a number of factors, namely:

- The lack of benchmarking and implementation models
- Lack of cost effective solutions and innovation
- Inadequate mobilisation of resources
- Vandalism of public facilities (e.g. toilets and play equipment)
- Land ownership by different stakeholders
- The lack of community participation in issues relating to open space utilisation
- Poor utilisation coupled by the lack of community awareness of the benefits of open spaces
- Absence of a clear policy framework and strategy on public spaces

Environmental degradation is a major challenge in the City of Blantyre. Blantyre City is home to most of the commercial banks and industries. The City offers numerous economic opportunities such as retail trade, construction, manufacturing of food products, transport, textile

manufacturing, and motor vehicle sales among others. Both at national and international level, the City is linked with road, rail and air transport. These provide an important contribution to the functioning of the City as the commercial and industrial hub of the country.

Public spaces have significant importance in the life of the settlements. The areas with high green-coverage rate have ecological and environmental importance. These green spaces can improve the urban climate, abate the urban heat-island effect by their ecological-balancer function and reduce environmental damages. Through their social importance, the open spaces can help the residents in adjusting to the healthy lifestyle. By their aesthetic importance, they determine the characteristic of the settlements, ameliorating the built-up character of the cities.

The utilization of green open spaces and urban parks has been marginal due to poor state of the parks. Until early 90s, our urban parks have been heavily neglected while others have changed usage and the surviving ones degraded to the point of non-use e.g. Njamba, Rangeley and Queens Parks, Chimwankhunda dam and Chiwembe dam. Reasons for the neglect have been attributed to the following:

Challenges faced by Blantyre City Council

- Lack of implementation models that favour speed, quality, innovations and cost effectiveness
- Inadequate resource mobilisation
- Inadequate operating and capital budgets
- Vandalism of public toilets and play equipment
- Multiple land ownership – different players
- Lack of community participation in issues of open space utilisation
- Poor utilisation of open spaces
- Lack of awareness by residents on the benefits of open spaces

"Nature surrounds us, from parks and backyards to streets and alleys. Next time you go out for a walk, tread gently and remember that we are both inhabitants and Stewarts of nature in our neighbourhood"
David Suzuki

- Lack of policy on public open spaces
- Institutional meddling

Why are public open spaces important for Blantyre?

The City of Blantyre has recognised the fact that public open spaces have advantages, namely:

- Increased property values
- Multiple retail activity
- Enhance safety
- Foster social cohesion and equality
- Improve health and well being
- Improve the environment
- Make the city more attractive
- Promote more effective and efficient transportation and mobility
- Provide facilities for zoos, aquariums, cultural and historical sites, and community centres that contribute to educational and cultural benefits
- Prevention of youth crime through park and recreational programmes

"Even with all the technology and the inventions that make modern life so much easier than once it was, it takes just one big natural disaster to wipe all that away and remind us that, here on earth, we are still at the mercy of nature".....

Neil de Grasse Tyson

MY CITY, MY BLANTYRE
KEEP IT CLEAN & GREEN

The city of Blantrye is engaging with the private sector to form partnerships in order to deal with challenges as well as upgrade public realm. The community cannot be left out but looking at the culture, to most people, a park is a "leftover" landuse that can be used as you wish. This has led to serious environmental degradation, informal settlement, and perhaps disasters as a result of natural catastrophes. To mitigate the situation, the City of Blantrye is proposing establishing a steering committee (council, organised civil society, business, stakeholders, partners, and academia, NGOs, FBO) to deal with issues of public space.

Developing an Assessment Tool for Public Space

Cecilia Anderson from UN-Habitat shared some insights on open public spaces assessment on a city wide level. According to Anderson, public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive and this includes streets, public open spaces and public facilities. Open public spaces by definition also include avenues, boulevards, streets, squares, sidewalks, passages, galleries, playgrounds riverbanks, waterfronts, parks, gardens, public beaches and urban forests.

The data revolution should be used for sustainable development. African cities can benefit through the integration of new data sources thereby increasing the usefulness of data and empowerment of people. This will result in better policies, decisions, participation and accountability.

Analysis of the Data Collected (left tables)

Network	Ratio	400m buffer areas of Networked OPS/ Total surface area	GIS Map

Quantity	Green per capita	Total green area / total population in the area	M2/inhabitants
	Percentage of Land amount to OPS	by Typology	1. GIS Map using Kobo tool box.
		by Form	2. Percentage
	Estimated total land surface occupied by the identified OPS	by Ownership	3. Total area
		by Management	

Spatial Accessibility to Open Public Space	Circular buffer zone	400m (~5 min walk)	GIS Map ~ Minutes to walk
		1000m (~10 min walk)	
	Using Distance along streets	400m (~5 min walk)	GIS Map ~ Minutes to walk
		1000m (~10 min walk)	
	Using distance based Service area	100*(Urban area located near Public Space-area / total urban area (build up area))	

Location and Spatial Distribution	Locating OPS geographically		
	Spatial distribution of OPS	Concentration	GIS Map
		Balance	

Analysis of the Data Collected

Quality	Accessibility to OPS	Over all Accessibility level	Kobo tool box + graphs and charts %
		Visibility	
		Infrastructures condition	
		Connection to neighbourhood/city	
	Use of OPS	Scale of use	Kobo tool box + graphs and charts %
		Types of functional activities	
		Number + type of visitors	
	Comfort in OPS	Air quality	Kobo tool box + graphs and charts %
		Noise situation	
		Clearness	
		Visual amenity	
		Safety	
	Physical facilities in OPS	Lighting	Kobo tool box + graphs and charts %
		Seating furniture	
		Garbage bins	
		Toilet facilities	
		Signage	
		Drainage	
		Shades	
		Vehicular parking	
		Cycle parking	
		Fire emergency	
	Green area coverage	Availability + sufficiency of Grass coverage	Kobo tool box + graphs and charts %
		Availability + sufficiency of Tree coverage	
		Availability, sufficiency + types of urban agriculture	

The SDG recommends a ratio of 50% of public space is common in successful cities and at least 35% of the city area allocated to street space and an additional 15% for other public uses. The amount of public space in Nairobi is 11% of the urban land allocated to streets and X% allocated to open public space. The open public space assessment tool measures (a) accessibility (spatial) (b) Quantity (c) Distribution (d) Network (d) Quality – accessibility, use, comfort, facilities, green coverage. The assessment cuts across safety, gender, youth, children, older persons and persons with disability issues.

The process of assessment starts from inventory to implementation:

Inventory / audit / visioning

Needs assessment / Community dialogues /Forums

City-wide strategy and policy/ development and approval (includes management, and legal frameworks as well as finances)

Implementation and action plan

Monitoring and review

Assessment Tool Development for Site Visit in Blantyre

In order to identify opportunities and challenges during the site visit to some of the parks of the city of Blantyre, participants engaged in the design and implementation of an assessment tool. The assessment tool was inspired in methodologies developed and implemented by the PPS, which were tested in Durban during the first peer learning event on public space in June 2014. Participants agreed on the priorities in order to analyse and diagnose public space and by doing so, an analysis grid was developed and further implement in groups. The implementation of this tools sets the common ground for the assessment, and it also allows the identification of possible interventions, which is crucial for the development of a detailed and tailor made Action Plan for future interventions. This assessment tool can be further modified and implemented according to the needs of the different cities.

Assessment / Criteria		Definition	😊	😐	🙁	Comments
People Centred	Diversity	Does the park cater for a diverse range of users e.g.: Women, children, ages group				
	Neighbourly	Does the public space fit in with the surrounding land uses				
	Welcoming	Is the public space hospitable				
	Ownership	Is there a sense of ownership by the community				
Accessibility	Proximity	Are there other land uses in close proximity that support the public space				
	Connectiveness	Is the public space connected to the public transport system				
	Walkability	Can the public space be accessed within reasonable walking distance				
	Convenience	How connected is the public space to the public transport network				
	Accessibility	How easy is it to get to the public space				

	Assessment / Criteria	Definition	☺	☺	☹	Comments
Amenities	Safe	How safe do residents feel in the public space				
	Areas for Seating	Are there sufficient areas for seating				
	Attractiveness	How attractive are the public spaces				
	Historic	Is the historic value of the public space celebrated				
	Cultural	Is the cultural value of the public space celebrated				
Activities	Diversity	Does the public space lend itself to active and passive activities				
	Fun	Is the public space fun to be in				
	Vital	How vital is the public space in this area				
	Special	Is the public space seen as a special area by users				
	Realistic	How realistic is the development of this public space				
Operations	Maintenance	How easy is the public space to maintain				
	Revenue	Does the public space require consistent funding operations				
	Value Add	Does the public space add value to the surrounding land use				

Report Back of Site Assessment: Njamba Park
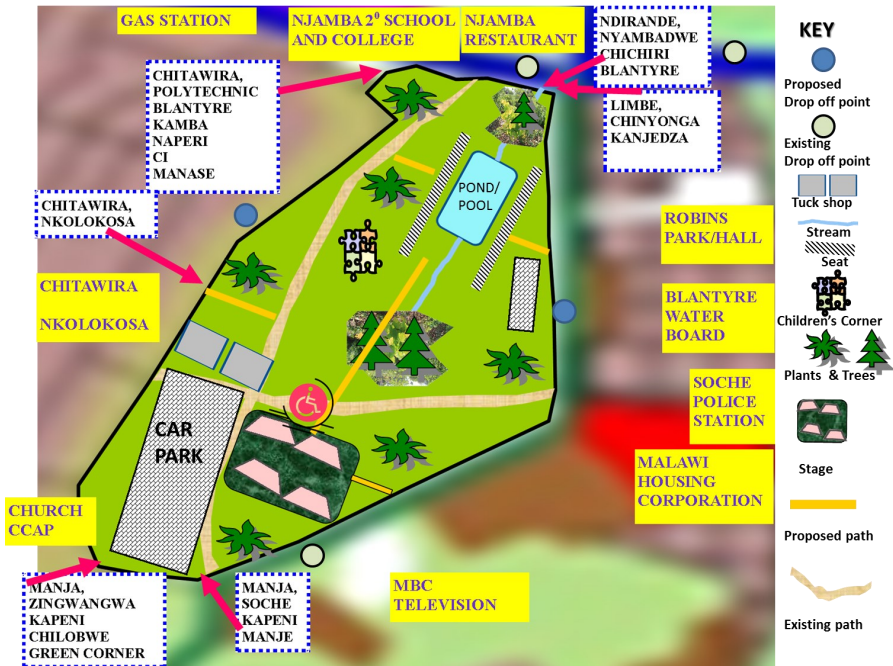
The objective of the exercise was to establish activities and amenities in the park; establish solutions and opportunities; as well as possible short term interventions. Consensus was reached on the following aspects:

- **People Centeredness:** There is a diversity of users at the park – women, youth, men, older persons and so on. It is located in a fairly neighbourly environment that seems to be very welcoming. The City of Blantyre owns the site but there seems to be an influence from national government as well as religious organisations. The park is of political and religious significance and hence decisions to make interventions at the park lies on multiple parties

- **Accessibility**: The Park is well located within the proximity of the surrounding communities and schools. It is located along the main road leading into the city centre making it accessible by walking or public transport thus making it convenient. The site is within close proximity to the community and connected to major access and arterial roads leading into the CBD. It is also within walking distance from the surrounding neighbourhoods making it highly convenient and accessible.

- **Amenities**: The Park does not have amenities and infrastructure is limited to a fallen pedestrian bridge and a disused outdoor auditorium making it less attractive. Users often bring their own tables, chairs, braai equipment etc. to enjoy the Park – there are no areas for seating. Trees have been planted to reduce the cost of maintaining the Park. There is no parking for cars hence vehicles can be seen under trees where it convenient to park. To find your way around the park, you can follow the natural footpaths that have been developed by people using the park or walking through.

- **Activities**: Activities are very limited in the park. It is often used extensively for political rallies or by followers of the Catholic Church as the park was used to host Pope John Paul III on 6 May 1989. However, the park is currently being used by people from all walks of life and diverse backgrounds. There is limited fun as there is no equipment and amenities. However, the existence of the park is of vital and special importance, not only for political or religious reasons but also social, economic, cultural and environmental reasons as well. The decision to maintain the park is a realistic option and can be done using innovative and creative ways.

- **Operations:** Maintenance at the park is very poor or non-existent and limited to certain political and religious occasions and events. The City of Blantyre continues to plant trees in order to reduce the need to maintain the park. Currently, the park does not generate income or any form of revenue due to the fact that there is no value add or investment to the park.

05 PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PUBLIC SPACE DEVELOPMENT

UIA has a critical role to play in the promotion and development of public spaces across the world. Representing region 5 (Africa), Hyder Ali from UIA alluded to the importance of promoting public spaces in Africa which he believes is a complex phenomenon. International Architects, through UIA, across the world have committed themselves to play a critical role in public spaces in partnership with its member states. Public space, in general, is a focal point of many cities historically. It is part of an old civilisation that the public met in such spaces to better their lives. Public spaces comprise a list of activities (i.e. cultural, religious, recreation, and so on) and all of them serve as a melting point where people from different walks of life meet and have an interaction.

Public spaces must compliment the texture of the environment and have the ability to connect people and nature. Architects, Planners and Urban Designers must adopt and update traditional design principles to construct modern buildings that truly suit their environment.

Horticulture, urban gardening and Public Space

Yotam Mtafya, Assistant Director of Parks, Recreation and the Environment from Mzuzu City Council provided an account of Mzuzu – a neighbouring and third largest city in Malawi. Mzuzu is an "evergreen" city with natural vegetation that is made up of Brachystegia Species. The city has two large forest reserves, namely Lunyangwa and Kaning'ina, covering at least 140.55 hectares. However, Mzuzu is also facing major challenges similar to Blantyre – deforestation, encroachment and climate change. Mzuzu City Council is defining public spaces as all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. Examples of such spaces include streets and avenues, pavements, parks, gardens, playgrounds and so on. Some of the functions of public spaces are open air markets, performances, events, political rallies, demonstrations, informal sector activities etc.

There are major benefits of blending public spaces with horticultural activities because there are often tree/flower establishments and management issues in public spaces. For example, selecting the right tree for the right place can save time, money and perhaps other disappointments. Initial species selection, proposed landscape function, adaptation to the site and care…are all important aspects that horticultural activities can help mitigate. For instance, site conditions help to minimise the maintenance programmes, water requirements as well as the extensive use of services and utilities.

However, horticultural services also experience challenges in public spaces – high costs to maintain amenities; high mortality rates of fauna and flora due to climate change; deliberate

and casual vandalism; unorganised waste disposal (i.e. public spaces used as dumping sites rather than recycling waste); establishment of informal settlements; and so on. Anyway, despite the existing challenges, there are opportunities in Mzuzu – existing parks; improved road infrastructure; establishment of environmental NGOs; and so on.

So what! Blend public open spaces with Horticultural activities.

Some of the major challenges…

- In the context of African cities, there seems to be no active championing of public spaces by management and political leadership. Public space is not viewed as an asset that can create value and a more equitable city. Hence, public spaces in African cities are not mutually owned or maintained by municipalities in partnership with other stakeholders.

- City officials are frustrated by systems, structures and policies that hamper development. In certain cases, "Upper" level government authorities interfere in the affairs of the city yet public space does not feature in national and regional plans.

- Funding is also a challenge. There is limited commitment from other stakeholders with regards to investing in public spaces.

06 KEY LESSONS LEARNED

i.   In line with the SDGs, African cities need to develop Action Plans for Public Space development in a context that will take into consideration religious, political, social, geographical, economic and cultural aspects. There seems to be a strong need for a multi-sectoral approach to dealing with public spaces. Participation is the cornerstone of public space development.

ii. Public spaces in the context of African cities is seen as "residual space" that is not important until it generates economic value. So, dealing with public spaces in areas of informality where public space is viewed as an asset for socio economic development. The original expression/definition of public space in the African context is the "Market Place".

iii. A major challenge in African cities is rapid urbanisation that involves the "take over" of public spaces.

iv. Land ownership patterns are also perceived to be a major stumbling block in municipalities securing public space as a public good or the purchase of land for public interest.

v.   The community is demanding public space but underdevelopment requires tangible service delivery. Public space is often matched against service delivery imperatives.

vi. International initiatives can be beneficial to African cities. However, local innovation can be more grounded as opposed to "copying" the west. Communities are more likely to respond positively to home grown solutions. Solutions for public spaces need to be tailor made and also deal with the rural nature of African cities.

vii. Cities need to plan holistically and showcase public space as a reflection of its spatial, cultural, economic, safety and environmental values. Communities need to be educated to understand that public space has the ability to play a transformative role in city development. In doing so, municipalities need to be innovative and resilient towards reimagining public space.

viii. People must remain the central focus of public space. In other words, despite the fact that public spaces are a complex reality, it should be people centred and context specific. Public spaces can be used to build citizen culture and values as well as new attitudes.

07 THE WAY FORWARD

The learning exchange on public space is a continuation of the debate and discourse which would culminate in an overall policy framework for Local government to implement at a city level. This learning exchange offers the Blantyre City Council and the partners in the exchange to actively participate in shaping global policy whilst at the same time developing implementable solutions at the city level that will realise tangible results that the citizens of Blantyre can enjoy.

The proposed recommendations are based in two parts and some conclusions. All recommendations are based on the debates, discussions and outcomes from the 3 day learning exchange. They are put forward to the Blantyre City Council for their consideration, review, adoption and implementation. Should the Blantyre City Council adopt the above conclusions, a detailed action plan should be developed to ensure that the calendar and results are clearly identified.

Should the Blantyre City Council be keen to engage further on the outcomes of the Public Space Learning Exchange, the UCLG Committee on Urban Strategic Planning would welcome a follow up process to monitor the progress of the recommendations and conclusions listed above.

Recommendations for Long Term Approaches

- The park is a long term investment for the city and as such the city should consider any development option to be phased according to the needs, and priorities of the people and the possibilities of the City Council.

- There should be a logical approach to the development of the Park and as such, a master plan should be used to ensure that specific implementations occur in a logical manner and no arbitrary decisions are taken which could foreclose any future options

- The development of the park should be seen as a catalyst for public space development and all opportunities to engage with the private sector as partners in the project should be actively pursued.

Recommendations for Short Term Approaches

- The Blantyre City Council should consider piloting spots within the park with limited dimensions so as to develop multifunctional uses which could change as the park develops in the future

- One of the recommendations would be to define the size of the pilot project as the area on the park that can be maintained by two people working for one morning per week

- Pathways and limits of the park should be demarcated with simple elements such as painted stones or similar objects

- Walkways should be defined so that there is connectivity between selected spots in the park

- As a further design element, the Blantyre City Council should consider connecting the spots with the accesses to the park

- Areas with scenic and special value should be highlighted and enhanced

- Any proposed project should look at creating a more legible and safer environment for all users.

The Second Set of Recommendations are related to the Strategy for Public Space development. The following recommendations are to be considered:

- The Blantyre City Council should develop and adopt an endearing and all-encompassing vision that would spur action and development of public space in Blantyre

- The Blantyre City Council should pioneer the development of an integrated strategy for public space with all stakeholders, including the public and sector departments

- There should be active championing of public space development at both the administrative and political level

- An appropriate assessment tool should be develop to assess the current condition of public spaces in the city

- The Blantyre City Council needs to ensure that when solutions are being developed, the users of the public space are actively engaged and are part of the decision making process

- Success in the development of the public space lie in the ability of the Blantyre City Council to actively partner with business and academia so as to create an enabling environment for public space development

- Community participation is key to the development of public space in the city, the Blantyre City Council should actively involve communities in the decision making processes

- The city should consider actively partnering with institutions that can assist in developing public space, such institutes are – but not limited to- Malawian Institute of Architects, UIA, Academia and NGO's.

Conclusions

The sequence of actions that can be undertaken from this moment on, are the following

1. The strategy to be followed by the Blantyre City Council in relation to public spaces should be agreed and planned.

2. The Master Plan of the Njamba Park should be developed: with the major guidelines to be followed by any punctual development.

3. Interrelated analysis of the following issues:

    • priority uses and needs of the city and its inhabitants

    • possible agreements with private companies

    • possible public management - correlation between the extension and complexity of the selected spots, and the available man/hours for its maintenance (second short term approach)

4. Selection of spots and walkways that can be immediately developed and preparation of the immediate actions

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