

Regenerative Public Space as game-changing option for Thriving Communities

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Abstract

There is currently growing evidence of many conflicts and intolerance at both macro and micro levels in the world. These trends question the future of public space as a peaceful and inclusive commons. This paper focusses on regenerative public space in South Africa and its potential to contribute to thriving communities. By exploring the paradigm, process, and product, the discussion shares critical challenges facing public space development in the Global South while offering pathways for regenerative development and design applicable everywhere globally. The paper argues that regenerative public space can become a game-changer for peace construction and inclusion in diverse societies and contribute to healthy and thriving communities in global South and North cities.

Keywords: Regenerative public space; potential, process, peace, SDG 11.7, South Africa

Introduction

The world is witnessing many volatile situations. Wars are raging, populations are fighting for political justice, and in cities and towns, people are facing desperate conditions in a struggle for survival while the fear of crime creates growing intolerance. These events give rise to growing insecurity and the re-negotiation of territoriality at many scales. Re-territorialisation concerns more than just countries and regions but also spaces within cities. Public spaces are often reconsidered or re-negotiated through appropriation, either by those without space for survival or those who want to reserve the space for a select few through fortification. Hence, public space has become a place of selection based on the various needs contained within the survival or fortified city, and more often than not, creating a maze of juxtaposed entities varying between these two opposites. These trends raise many questions for the future of public space as a common collector and facilitator of inclusion, or as places of peace and prosperity.

Public space is considered to be spaces owned by the state and accessible to the public (Madanipour, 2003). They are very important as the glue in the city that ties together all the private spaces and allow people to move between them. Public spaces are also important as gathering spaces where people can interact and exchange ideas or goods in a peaceful manner. This is critical to allow social relationships to grow, flourish and thrive. Public spaces, such as streets, sidewalks, plazas and parks, also offer access to nature, through trees alongside roads, formal vegetation in plazas and a celebration of the nature in parks. However, exclusion and violence threaten access to public spaces and peaceful co-habitation in these spaces. "One of the important qualities of Positive Peace is that it creates societies that are more resilient. In

other words, better capable of adapting to their changing environments.” (Killelea, 2024). This calls for resilient and regenerative public spaces.

Regenerative development and design extend the work of sustainability and resilience. The emphasis is shifted from existence to potential and recognises the interdependent web of multileveled structures of complex living systems. Regeneration acknowledges the unrealised potential inherent in a given system and its broader system. Its exploration enables the residing systems to evolve by expressing their latent potential (Hes & Du Plessis, 2015; Mang et al., 2016; Du Plessis, 2022). Finding the potential paves the way for a trajectory of responsible design, moving from conventional and green practices to restorative and reconciliatory practices toward regenerative development and design (Reed, 2007). Such an approach is relevant to address the challenges facing public space and urban transformation (Landman, 2019).

This paper focuses on regenerative public space in South Africa and its ability to contribute to thriving communities. Drawing from four case studies in the City of Tshwane (the municipality that includes Pretoria), South Africa, it unpacks an alternative paradigm for public space, proposes a different process for (re)development and design and offers examples of a few regenerating public spaces. These case studies were carried out as part of a National Research Foundation (NRF) funded Project (Grant: 137981) focussing on Regenerative Public Space. The NRF project focusses on the manifestation of regenerative public space and set out to develop a methodology to facilitate this in practice and ensure ongoing collaboration through an online digital platform.

By exploring the paradigm, process, and product, the paper shares critical challenges facing public space development in the Global South while offering pathways for regenerative development and design applicable everywhere globally. The paper argues that regenerative public space can become a game-changer for peace construction and inclusion in diverse societies and contribute to healthy and thriving communities.

Changing paradigm and the call for regenerative sustainability

Sustainable development has become an important concept worldwide to guide development practices to alleviate the harmful impact of urban development in the past century, adapt urban practices to be less dependent on finite resources, mitigate the impact on climate change, and transform cities and urban spaces to regenerative places. In essence, sustainable development is concerned with reducing the use of scarce resources to ensure prosperity for all, while minimising the impact on the planet and people. The United Nations developed the eight Millennium Development Goals to establish a joint base to guide interventions. These were replaced in 2015 by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the Agenda 2030. The SDGs are a collection of goals developed to serve as a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future". The New Urban Agenda, highlights public space as a critical lever to transform urban areas through "multifunctional areas for social interaction and inclusion, human health and well-being, economic exchange and cultural expression" (2016:13). Goal 11.7 of the SDGs explicitly promotes "universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities explicitly".

This goal, therefore, highlights the need for safe and inclusive public space to enable peace and prosperity.

However, to be sustainable, people and places need to adapt to changing needs and environments. Resilience is related to the ability of a particular geographic area, settlement, group of people or person to deal with a specific shock or disturbance in the system. In other words, resilience refers to the adaptive capacity of a particular place or people to respond to a crisis or changing conditions through particular responses in the socio-ecological system. However, change is not linear and emerges from complex relationships between multiple actors and environments (Walker & Salt 2006, Nel et al 2018). Resilience thinking offers a mechanism to work with change to adapt to disturbances in the system and transform those that are not conducive to the reorganisation of the system to bring forth new life, forms and functions (Du Plessis 2022). Urban resilience, dealing with ability of the urban system to adapt and transform, does not only depend on local authorities and their ability to develop resilience policies and plans to deal with natural hazards and disasters. Involving the skills of academics, practitioners and communities is far more likely to produce more robust strategies while enabling some level of flexibility to respond to the actual disturbance through increased awareness and knowledge (Walker & Salt 2006; Nel et al 2018; Orsetti et al. 2022)

Nevertheless, change should not just respond to a crisis or attempt to recreate the same places again. Regeneration is about improvement - not just maintenance – to create healthier and thriving people and places. More recent definitions highlight the importance of regenerative sustainability that goes beyond an attempt to maintain the status quo, and create opportunities for the environment and people to flourish in a harmonious and symbiotic relationship. Regenerative sustainability aims to “cultivate relationships that sustain the ability of the global social-ecological system to provide not just life-supporting, but also life-enhancing conditions for the global community of life” (Hes & du Plessis, 2015:39).

Regenerative development and design incorporate but goes beyond resilience thinking and are concerned with the co-evolution of humans and nature. All living systems survive by adapting in evolving environments (Mang et. al. 2016). This means that people do not need to be afraid of change, but use the opportunities to create different places that relate to the local place and the people living there. The aim is to ensure that both humans and nature can work together to create increased well-being.

“Thriving is possible for life on earth because of regeneration. All organisms including humans, live and breathe and continue to exist because they regenerate ... Thriving is a natural process” (Visser, 2020:3).

Drawing from several authors who pointed out various issues related to regenerative development and design (Reed, 2007, Mang & Reed 2012, Du Plessis, 2012, 2022, Hess & Du Plessis 2015, Benne & Mang 2015, Mang et. al. 2016, Gibbons 2020, Landman et. al. 2019, Landman, 2024) and looking at various initiatives in South Africa, it is possible to highlight a number of principles of regenerative public space. These principles are a) the essence of place, b) evolutionary protentional, c) value-adding role, d) leverage points and e) control the hard lines.

Essence of place

Interventions should be based on an understanding of the essence of place, ensuring that they are specific and fit in the environment to allow co-evolution to occur. The essence of place emerges from the entire network of ecological and cultural systems within a specific geographic area. Revealing the essence of place shows the relation to broader environment and the history of the place to open up the potential of the place. Many stakeholders need to collaborate for this to emerge.

Evolutionary potential

The evolutionary potential seeks to uncover the unmanifested latent energy inherent in unused resources or locked up capital in rigid systems. It is the seed that enables the system's evolution to flourish and thrive. An awareness of the notion of evolutionary potential, together with a substantial effort to look for it in and around public spaces, can enable planners and urban designers to respond to change and transform if necessary, e.g. through spatial transformation.

Value-adding role

Living systems continuously regenerate and depends on many subsystems to do this. The health of the whole-system depends on each member fulfilling its role to benefit each other. Public space, as a subsystem of the larger socio-ecological system in the city, need to add value and contribute to the whole-system's evolution. Examples may include public space's role in contributing to the ecological regeneration of a river system and the socio-economic uplifting of a marginalised community through improvement opportunities linked to the transformation of a space and its broader environment.

Leverage points

Energy or opportunity is created through opportunities for exchange, for example trading goods, sharing ideas and relaxing in nature. These activities happen in various nodes across many scales. Nodes are leverage points for transformation through interaction and exchange. Public spaces have the potential to act as key leverage points to initiate transformational exchanges through, for example, approaches such as urban acupuncture and tactical urbanism. Identifying leverage points implies considering which types of public spaces should be developed in which locations and how many, which links back to the necessity of considering the whole system.

Control the hard lines

Controlling the hard lines means only doing what is essential to meet, support or detract from the objective. It refers to the development of preconditions to enable the system to emerge, thus enabling rather than controlling actions by identifying absolute no-go areas and upper/lower limits. It deals with the 'operating rules' that determine behaviour and what is possible, bearing in mind the characteristics of a healthy system, such as emergence, self-organisation, complexity and open-endedness.

Regenerative sustainability offers a pathway to not only change mindsets to facilitate co-evolution, but also to guide built environment practitioners and other stakeholders to facilitate the process in practice.

Transforming process and the need for regenerative practices

Applying the concept and principles of regenerative development and design in practice is very context-specific and generally centred on three phases. Mang and Reed (2012) describe these

phases as 1) understanding of the place – as a way for people to unify nature and humans in a concrete way; 2) aligning place and people through the harmonisation of buildings and infrastructure with the patterns of the land and the cultural systems and 3) co-evolving mutualism to ensure continuous improvement through beneficial stakeholder relationships.

Broadly guided by this process and the local dynamics and conditions of the four case study areas (see the next section), the NRF project team - representing multi-disciplines - worked with four diverse communities from different parts of the City of Tshwane Municipality to develop a process that would contribute to regenerative public space in South Africa. This process involves three ongoing phases.

1. Reconnect through co-conceptualisation and collaboration

The first part of the process revolves around the potential value and evolutionary potential of the specific public space. This is usually centred upon questions that could involve the following. Why are we doing this? What is it that we want to change? Who is doing it? Who needs this? What do we care about? The value of a specific public space is often hidden in the characteristics of the space, the skills of the people, its distinctive patterns and relationships and the value to the broader environment. For example, linking back to the principles, the role of a public space to contribute to a larger ecological system or boost an existing social system.

The first part of the process requires all the relevant stakeholders to meet on site and think through a variety of issues. Delving deeper into the story of place, could involve the following questions:

1. What is distinctive about the place? (e.g. special places, structures, trees, vegetation, etc.)
2. What is distinctive about the people? (e.g. history, memories, skills, knowledge, etc.)
3. What is the value-adding role of the public space in the broader environment (precinct, neighborhood and city)?
4. What is the higher potential of the public space for all the people involved?

This part of the process can involve storytelling, interactive mapping, dashboards, surveys, etc. The main goal is to assist with the determination of the role of the space for the everyday users and the broader community or environment. Given this, it is important that people identify and discuss special places, share precious photos and memories and tell stories about historical and current day people and events.

The aim of phase 1 is, therefore, to reconnect the people to each other and the specific space through co-conceptualisation and collaboration to develop a common story and a vision to go forward. Working with specific communities in particular places allows for a common sense of purpose to develop. This in turn creates opportunities to bring different stakeholders together to foster the seeds for inclusion and peace, not only related to the exterior landscape, but also towards inner healing.

Social-ecological systems are far more than coupled human-nature systems in which humans rely on ecosystem services. Instead, social-ecological systems represent the combination of the 'exterior', as created by biogeochemical processes and activities (in which humans and their technologies have come to play a disproportionate part), and

the 'interior', as created by, and experienced through, processes of thought and shared cultural phenomena (Hes & du Plessis 2015:27).

Therefore, considering cities as socio-ecological systems and public spaces as a critical value-adding component of this systems, requires a focus on both the exterior landscape and the interior spaces of people to enable peaceful and inclusive transformation.

2. *Revitalisation through co-creation and participation*

The second phase of the process is concerned with the concrete manifestation of the vision in practice. It relates to interventions in a public space to revise or revitalise the existing landscape through the addition or modification of existing buildings and infrastructure to enable the public space to reflect the land patterns and the ecological and cultural systems towards the improvement of the broader socio-ecological system, the city. Initial questions could include the following: Who is the core team? Who can assist to manifest the vision? What do we need to start? Who can provide this?

This phase requires the relevant stakeholders to make decisions around the physical transformation of the public space and key actions that is needed to realise this. While architects, urban designers and planners can play an important role, they should be careful of dominating the process. Critical questions to facilitate the process, may include:

1. What can be or has been done to enable the space to realise its higher potential for the broader environment?
2. How have / can different interventions work with and connect different socio-ecological systems in and around the public space?

During this part of the process, stakeholders can co-design interventions utilising maps, models and on-site demonstrations during small community workshops. The aim of phase two is therefore to revise or revitalise the state of the public space through co-creation and participation to plan and design an accommodating and liveable space. Working with the specific community to develop and design the specific space, enables the seeds of inclusion and peaceful co-habitation to grow and flourish in an open and vibrant manner. This part of the process holds within it the potential to allow for the restoration of the balance between humans and between humans and nature. Healing is concerned with the reconciliation of different agendas and aspirations, working together to rebuild a specific space and allow it thrive in the broader socio-ecological system through the restoration of the flows of life.

Every development, no matter how small, enters and unspoken contract with the world that it inhabits from the moment that it is commissioned until it is torn down. It can be a burden on resources and disrupt life-sustaining processes, or it can contribute positively to the commons, the network of spaces and flows (Kishnani, 2017:22).

In this way, public spaces can act as key leverage points to initiate transformational exchanges where small conscious and conscientious interventions in the right place can create beneficial, system-wide effects.

c) *Reinvigorate through co-mutualism and cooperation*

The third phase of the process is concerned with the ongoing care of the public space and its continuous evolution to ensure that it keeps on flourishing. Useful questions could include the

following. What do we need to do to ensure continuous care? How do we engage the larger community of care in the neighbourhood and city? How can the space allow possibilities for others to grow and thrive? How do we allow for evolution?

This phase involves the core team and wider stakeholder network to ensure the ongoing management, maintenance and care of the public space to allow it to spread its ripples of positive benefit outward into the larger environment. Key to consider is:

1. Who has or will ensure that there is ongoing care in the future? (partnerships, community groups, etc.)
2. What resources are necessary to manage and maintain the space?

This part of the process can utilise online platforms such as community websites, WhatsApp groups, and other Applications to build communities of care and spread the value of the public space to a wider audience. The development of a digital platform assists to facilitate an ongoing process of co-evolution through 1) access to data and information to highlight potential within the four communities and allow others to learn from it, 2) taking research activities outside the university to accommodate co-production of knowledge and facilitate participation, and 3) building ongoing cooperation between communities, academia and professionals from private practice towards greater knowledge sharing and integration (Landman & Guest, forthcoming). The purpose of these actions would be to maintain the momentum created by the interventions and ensuring ongoing care of the space in the future. In addition, it can enable the creation of wider networks of communities to allow for the evolution of multiple public spaces over time. This would allow for the reinvigoration of the public spaces and others in the larger environment through co-mutualism and cooperation.

The potential of a neighbourhood park lies in the health and well-being of the human and natural communities that it may benefit and the social bonds that it fosters. As the neighbourhood evolves, a well-designed park evolves with it. This implies that a park is more than its physical elements (playgrounds, benches, trees, fountains). From a living systems perspective, it also includes the process by which it is used, maintained, improved and celebrated over the years (Mang et. al. 2016:118).

Regenerative Development and Design should therefore focus on co-evolution, requiring whole-systems re-orientation that connects human activities with the evolution of natural systems (Mang et al 2016). This is an ongoing process that involves continuous evolution, similar to the creation and maintenance of peace. There have been many misconceptions of peace and how it can be attained. It often implies that once the guns fall silent, peace has been achieved (Kallelea, 2024). This closes opportunities for everyday renewal and reinvigoration of peace through inclusivity in specific urban spaces (Figure 1).

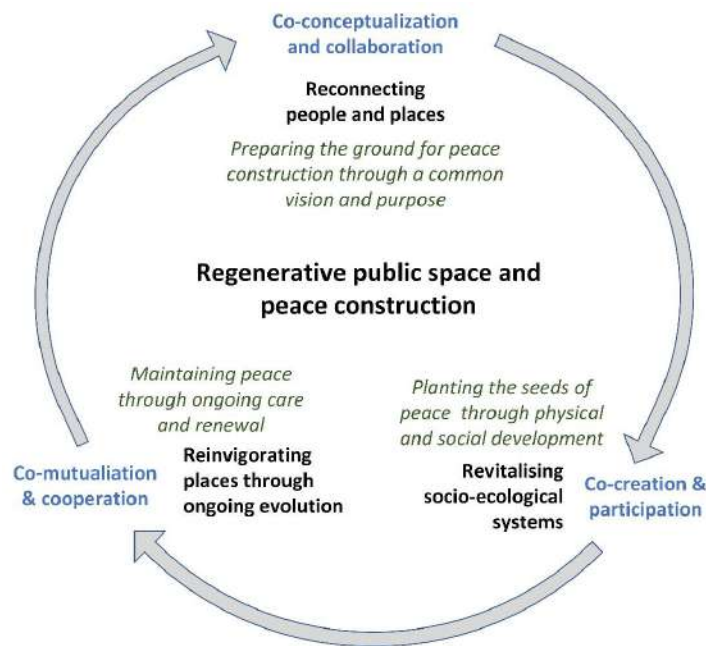


Figure 1: Regenerative public space and peace construction

Peace construction in public spaces should therefore also be concerned with finding new approaches to peacebuilding and development that extend beyond security to restructure societies and their relationship to nature so that they have the capacity to adapt and modify constantly changing environments. This could offer a pathway for continuous reinvigoration to create more resilient peace and other social characteristics, including stronger economic outcomes, better measures of well-being and more sustainable environmental performance (Kallelea, 2024). However, constant reinvigoration through co-mutualism and cooperation also implies that it may be necessary from time to time to revisit the vision of the space and restore the balance; hence the need for a continuous process of transformation and regeneration as indicated in Figure 1.

Transitioning spaces and requirement for ongoing care

As mentioned, applying the concept and principles of regenerative development and design in practice is very context-specific. Consequently, the process could vary in different contexts and conditions. Similarly, the outcome or product may be quite different. This is illustrated through the four case study areas located in the City of Tshwane, a large municipal area located in the Gauteng Province in north of South Africa. The municipal area (Figure 2) includes Pretoria, and covers an extensive area of 6,345 km². In 2017, the population was 3.31 million, as the municipal area housed 6% of the national and 25% of the provincial population. The principal economic activities included government and community services (30%), finance (25%) and manufacturing (13%). In 2017 Tshwane contributed to 28.4% of Gauteng's GDP and 10% of national GDP. However, despite the concentration of economic and research activities, unemployment was estimated to be around 24% in 2017. In addition, there are a growing

number of informal settlements with an estimated 19% of the population in 2017, residing in informal dwellings (City of Tshwane 2020/2021 IDP). The economic conditions have since deteriorated due to the Covid-19 pandemic, contributing to rising levels of inequality, poverty and unemployment and challenges related to service delivery and urban management and maintenance.

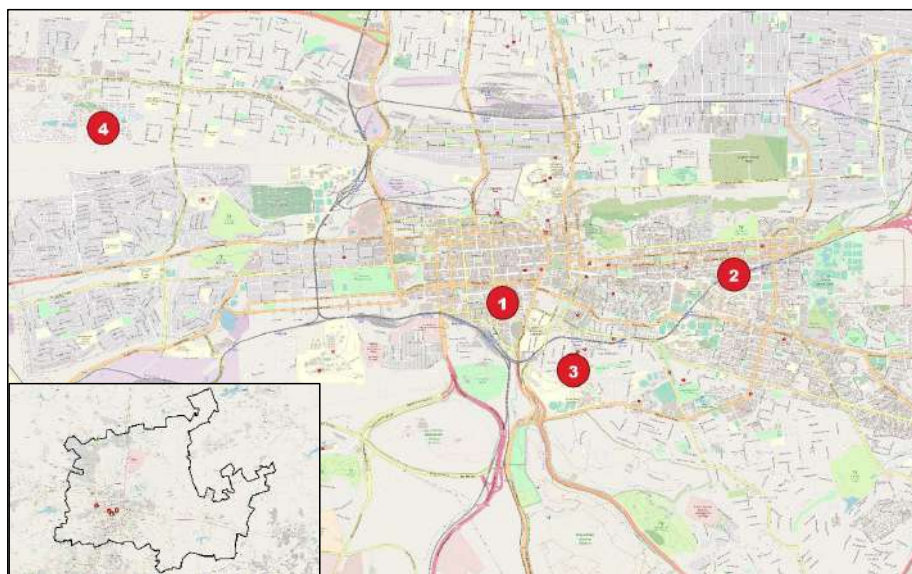


Figure 2: Location of four public spaces in the City of Tshwane (insert). They include 1: Burgers Park; 2: Moja Gabedi; 3: Muckleneuk Commons; 4: MYDO & Melusi Clinic (Source: Landman & Guest, forthcoming).

The NRF project focussed on four public spaces located in different parts of the municipal area (Figure 2). The four spaces were selected based on their ability to show various phases or notions of regenerative development and design in different socio-economic and physical conditions. The team worked closely with the core stakeholders to find out what happened in spaces, why and what they are planning for the future. The main intention was to find out what the regenerative development and design of public space could entail in South Africa. Each public space embodied a specific reality and transition story.

a) *Burgers Park*

The park is one of the oldest parks in the inner city of Pretoria, serving a very diverse population in a high density and mixed-use area (Figures 3 & 4). The Victorian Garden of 47,678 m² was completed in 1874. One of the key stakeholder groups involved in the regeneration of the park is *Friends of the Park*. They focus on mobilising resources, engaging stakeholders and ensuring security in and around the park through collaboration with local and private law enforcement entities. The Community-Based Organisation (CBO) also work with entities and institutions surrounding the park, including schools, churches and businesses, as well as those affected by it. Additionally, they try to foster a sense of ownership within the community and advocate the community's goals, needs and ideas to the city of Tshwane. The primary organisation overseeing several social programmes is the *Tshwane Leadership Foundation* (TLF), which manages and

repurposes buildings in the area to address social needs, including housing for women, young girls, homeless individuals, and those with chronic illnesses. They are assisted by Urban Studio, a partnership between the representatives, the Centre for Faith and Community, and the University of Pretoria. The Urban Studio focuses on providing social housing for homeless community members and women escaping from Gender-Based Violence situations.



Figure 3: Location and form of Burgers Park.



Figure 4: Nature of Burgers Park with high density buildings in the background.

The nature and use of the park changed several times over the years. Being located in the inner-city it caters for a diverse group of people from the surrounding higher-density housing in need to relax, recreate, connect to nature and meet other people. Despite challenges related to management, maintenance and security, the park is extensively used by people from all ages. However, over the years, the park struggled with ownership. Although formally under the care of the local authority, they have often failed to maintain the park, leaving it to the local NGOs and CBOs to care for the park. In spite of these challenges, ongoing initiatives, such as the annual Feast of the Clowns ensure that the importance of the park is re-emphasized. The Feast of the Clowns is an inner-city festival in Pretoria centered in and around Burgers Park. It was created and is still hosted by the TLF as a festival celebrating the city, building community and creating awareness of social justice issues. It is an annual proclamation of the city as a good place, lamenting actions that seek to rob the city of its soul and its people of access, dignity and justice (De Beer, 2020:234). The TLF, and the Centre for Faith and Community is working with many other stakeholders, including business owners, academics and other community organizations to find new ways to reconnect, revise and re-invigorate the park. These efforts are not only focusing on ways to address the lack of maintenance, but also finding ways for peaceful interaction of people from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic conditions sharing the park.

b) Moja Gabedi

This public space is located on an open space situated in a dense and rapidly growing area of Tshwane, namely Hatfield. The neighbourhood is one of the most dominant nodes in the City of Tshwane and is not only home to the University of Pretoria, but also includes prominent schools, large corporations and office blocks, and higher-density, mixed use housing developments. The representatives from Moja Gabedi and Reliable House, an institution focusing on homeless people, recognised the urgent need for addressing the negative space in the community. The strong influence of churches and religions in the area played a significant role in mobilising the community. Churches organised prayer sessions, providing food to participating community members. Reliable House offers homeless individuals access to food,

prayer and accommodation, while Moja Gabedi, a garden in the city, provides working opportunities for recovering drug addicts from Reliable House. In addition, it is an open space that any member of the public can use. Over a period of five years the space was transformed from a neglected and vacant open space to a vibrant, luscious garden with flowers, vegetables and fruits.



Figure 5: Location and form of Moja Gabedi



Figure 6: Nature of Moja Gabedi indicating a space to sit and relax with housing in the background.

The park is a result of people who cared about others and the waste in the city and who dreamed to heal a wound in the urban fabric. Building on the vision of a healing space and working with people who are trying to find their place in society alongside students doing community service, the space created new purposes for derelict land. Together, the Faith Based Organization, the University of Pretoria and the local City Improvement District continue to care for the thriving food garden, recreation space and small coffee shop. Students can also hire small allotments to plant food for themselves and the broader community. Working together, does not only foster inclusion, but also peacebuilding between different age and socio-economic groups in Hatfield and the larger city.

c) Muckleneuk Commons

Muckleneuk is an older, upmarket suburban neighbourhood close to the inner city of Pretoria. The community members shared a passion for nature and desire to revitalise a former neglected and unsafe space. To improve and connect the community, they formed a neighbourhood association and developed an urban design framework to identify areas to promote safe and community-friendly public spaces. However, they faced a backlash from some community members who were concerned about attracting drug-users, loud music and alcohol abuse in the public space. The representatives and residents were responsible for drafting the design, and physical elements were added in different phases as needed. The Cool Capital Festival in the Pretoria offered the impetus for the transformation of the space. Resources were obtained through donations, connections and community contributions. Telkom (a large telecommunications organisation), located next to the commons, donated a significant amount and provides electricity and water. Maintenance and combating challenges like vandalism and misuse requires constant involvement and active maintenance efforts.



Figure 7: Location and form of Muckleneuk Commons



Figure 8: Nature of the small park with rapidly growing vegetation.

The park is used by community members and people who pass by on a daily basis. The community also organizes regular events to raise funds for the ongoing maintenance and community-building. These events include movie-nights under the stars, informative talks on nature and self-development and Sunday food markets. These events that have also been able to extend the impact beyond the local neighbourhood and attract people from further away. While the land is owned by the municipality, the park is maintained by a few community members. The action of the core group shows how an idea to heal a scar in the urban environment can bring about a thriving space for both locals and visitors. Places of peace and inclusivity therefore does not have to be big spaces with large budgets, but could be the result of a small tactical intervention to unite people and place.

d) Melusi community spaces

Melusi is a predominantly informal settlement with a very high density including approximately 30,000 residents and 900 households located in the west of the City of Tshwane. The area includes inadequate service provision and many of the housing units are informal. The Melusi Youth Development Organisation (MYDO) was created to assist the youth with their schoolwork, providing food and extracurricular activities focused on sports and art programmes. MYDO coordinated with community health workers and stakeholders to provide resources and health services to the youth in a community that faced many challenges related to service delivery and maintenance of services. The MYDO centre developed into a prominent public space and community centre, with infrastructure sponsored by large donors such as Coca-Cola, other businesses and NGOs. The MYDO Project has become the heart of the community, and the organisation is registering as an NGO to facilitate involvement from sponsors and stakeholders. They assist around 200-300 students and aftercare learners per day. They have also partnered with the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Pretoria, located opposite the Community Centre to offer health services. Next to the clinic (Figure 9) is an abandoned municipal nursery. MYDO is investigating the possibility to work with the municipality to revitalise the space a green open space and sportsgrounds for the Melusi community.



Figure 9: Location and six of the MYDO center (top) and clinic (bottom). The municipal open space is located just south of the clinic.



Figure 10: MYDO community center and open space.

The MYDO center is a space of healing that allows the youth to develop and thrive through access to study rooms, computers, tutors and spaces for relaxation. It is a place of inclusivity that creates a peaceful environment where young people can study in a safe environment under the protection of capable guardians. It is an example where this public space has become a point of exchange to facilitate the flows of information and goods to assist the development of marginalized youth. The public space is a pulsing point that ripples through the community and vibrates its energy to build the larger system. MYDO is constantly evolving and searching for new ways to assist the youth and the broader community, for example through their efforts to repurpose the green open space next to the clinic for sportsgrounds and a park.

These four public spaces indicate that there are many challenges facing communities and institutions towards regenerative public space, especially in the Global South. The challenges in the City of Tshwane are related to a lack of funds for development, management and maintenance, as well as issues related to safety and security. This is especially true in public spaces that have to accommodate a diverse population from different ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds. However, despite the challenges, these cases have indicated that there are examples of regenerative public spaces, albeit at different phases, that offers hope for the establishment of peaceful and inclusive public space. Given this, regenerative development and design offers a pathway for peace construction in public space.

Conclusion: public space as game-changer for peace construction and inclusion

Drawing from four case studies in the City of Tshwane in South Africa, the paper explored an alternative paradigm for public space, proposed a different process for (re)development and design and offered examples of four regenerative public spaces to highlight the value of regenerative development and design as a game-changer for peace construction and inclusion.

Regenerative sustainability, as alternative paradigm, extends the work of traditional and contemporary sustainability (including resilience thinking) to focus on the improvement and regeneration of living systems to enable the co-evolution of humans and nature interacting in cities. This evolving paradigm emphasises the need to work with change and transformation of socio-ecological systems to enable both external (biophysical space) and internal (mental and social space) space. This process of transformation could be guided by five over-arching principles, namely a) the essence of place, b) evolutionary protentional, c) value-adding role, d) leverage points and e) control the hard lines.

The process to enable regenerative practices involves three phases. The first phase is concerned with reconnection of people and places through co-conceptualisation and collaboration of multiple stakeholders in a specific public space to develop a common story and vision. This creates the opportunity to identify the potential and the value-adding role of the space and foster the seeds of inclusion and peace through acknowledgement and inner healing. The second phase involves revitalisation through co-creation and participation to work with the socio-ecological systems to enable the vision to manifest. This part of the process facilitates the co-design of various initiatives to restore the balance between humans and between humans and nature to encourage healing and the development of thriving communities and places through inclusion and peaceful participation and co-habitation. The third phase relates to reinvigoration through co-mutualism and cooperation. It requires ongoing communication, support and involvement to ensure the continuous care of the public spaces and the people using them. Thus, allowing for evolution opens opportunities for everyday renewal to foster peace and inclusivity over a longer period of time.

Although the implementation of the process varies in different public spaces and contexts, the four case studies (products of various elements of regenerative development and design) illustrated the potential to assist with peace-making and peace-building in an inclusive and evolutionary manner. The discussion therefore highlights the value of regenerative development and design as a game-changer for peace construction and inclusion in diverse societies in the Global North and South contributing to healthy and thriving communities.

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