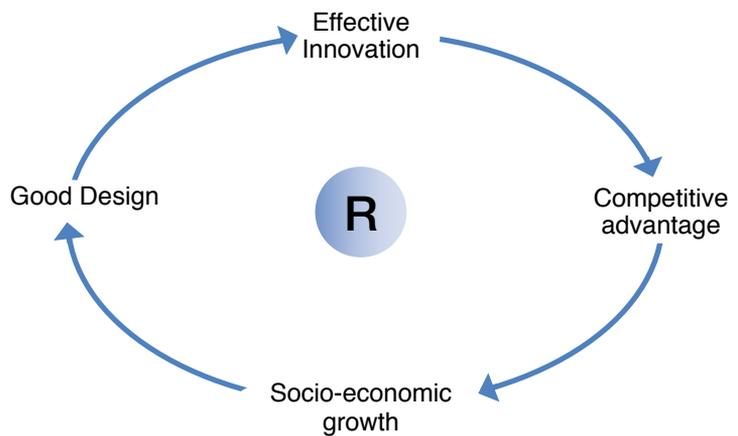




### Tessa Graaff

founded and is director of Montebello Craft and Design Centre, a public benefit organization dedicated to creating creative spaces for creative people to work from. The project is the result of a gift to the University of Cape Town almost 20 years ago by a donor, for the purpose of promoting design, and while recognizing that the donor was ahead of his time, she passionately embraces the idea of design thinking as the new currency for nations that will succeed in the century ahead. She also works extensively throughout the Southern African region with indigenous communities using design and entrepreneurial approaches to creating sustainable livelihoods with craft. She has served on numerous boards in the design education and cultural industries domain, is currently a board member of !Khawattu a cultural heritage and educational centre for the San.

# Design in the economic system



*“This strategy thus proposes that the development of an interconnected design ecosystem will stimulate the usage of design across sectors, generate more competitive products and services (both commercial and public) and drive socio-economic growth.” (Design: Driving competitive advantage in the Western Cape. A strategy for design to unlock innovation. 2nd Draft 15 January 2013.)*

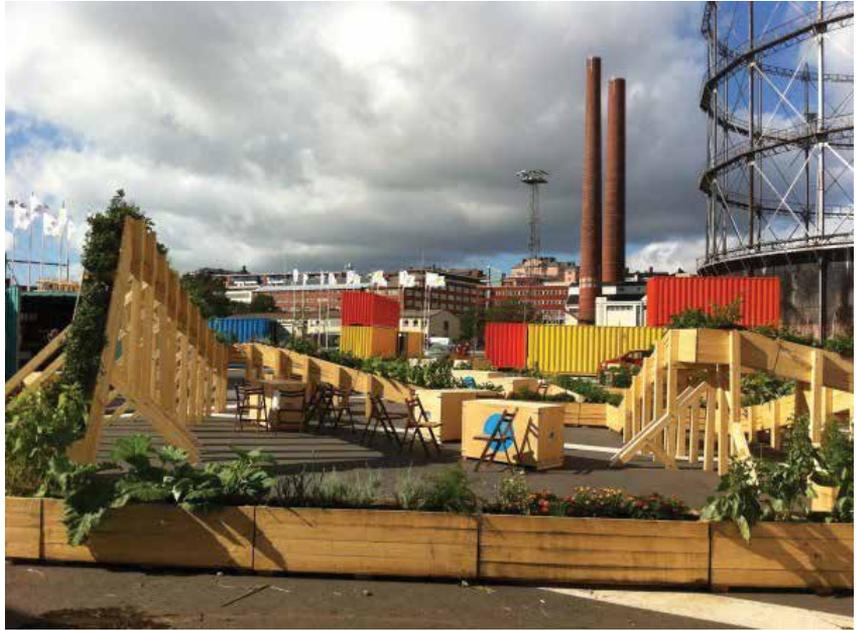
## World Design Capital 2014

*“You should never hesitate to trade your cow for a handful of magic beans”* Tom Robbins

During 2014 the City of Cape Town will be World Design Capital. Cities focusing on innovation creativity and design have an advantage, and the City of Cape Town is looking to use the event to catalyse innovative and creative projects.

The definition of design that the city has adopted is the following:

*“(Good) design is an activity that uses creative and iterative processes to take account of a range of factors and needs in the innovative development of products, services, systems, environments and communication, in response to the human condition and society’s needs.”*



Helsinki.

## Why Cape Town?

The previous city to get the award was Helsinki, the sort of city one might expect to receive such an award steeped as it is in the design conscious culture of Northern Europe.

Why would Cape Town get such an award is the first question Capetonians ask when the subject of World Design Capital 2014 comes up. Was it the equivalent of a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) deal? Did it have more to do with giving the city, as a gateway to Africa, the chance to start thinking about design and the benefits thereof, than any design excellence we might already have? We have great landscape, but can we claim a great city?

*So while the award may not be honouring us for our great architecture or solutions to low-cost housing, we can certainly claim history, heritage and a long relationship with design as our early ancestors shaped, possibly, some of the very first human tools.*

It is an early winter day in the coastal suburb of Llandudno, the slate grey green sea moves in towards the shore with its endlessly permeating pattern of swells and sprays of surf. Great banks of clouds gather and dissolve with the same endless permutations. The sky casting patches of light and shade. Large granite boulders glinting with quartz jut into the sea. These are some of the oldest boulders in the world. They form the edge of the back of one of the oldest mountains in world, known to the first people, as Hoerikwagga “the mountain in the sea”, Table Mountain with its

surrounding coastline is one of the most iconic landscapes of any city in the world. It forms the heart of the city like an enormous cathedral would in a European city. Only it is a monument to the design of nature with its constant shaping by weather rather than the design of man.

From this landscape a number of aspects related to design and the city arise:

***The design of nature***

The design of nature in relation to the city might be a good place to start. Not only is the mountain the dominant natural design feature of the city, it is also home to the fynbos kingdom – the most variety filled of all the plant kingdoms on the planet. Design is a Darwinian process and diversity always creates the strongest ideas. Capetonians might do well to adopt this principle as a 2014 idea. Homage to nature and inspiration from nature.

***The origin of human design***

The mountain and its coastline are also probably one of the oldest sites of human habitation and one could argue the origin of early design with the stone hand tools, ceramic vessels and jewellery representing the beginning of design thinking. Products shaped by humans to be beautiful and useful. So while the award may not be honouring us for our great architecture or solutions to low-cost housing, we can certainly claim history, heritage and a long relationship with design as our early ancestors shaped, possibly, some of the very first human tools.

*What is the x factor in generic terms that if understood could take the city and its inhabitants forward into a better future?*

***Bad contemporary urban design***

What is so striking about the suburb of Llandudno settling into this glorious natural world is how ill considered the architecture is and how ill-fitting to its natural setting. Llandudno is one of the wealthiest suburbs of Cape Town and what is patently obvious from what my friend who lives there describes as “the appalling architecture” is that having money and resources is not enough. Not enough to create a good house, a good suburb or a good city. You cannot just buy good solutions, you need other considerations too. Money cannot buy taste as the old adage goes. “The houses in Woodstock are better” my friend from Llandudno goes on to say.

***Money but no love***

“There is lots of money but no love here” he also says. I find this a very interesting remark. I had never quite thought about it like that. Is it possible that we could think of good design as that human process of making that is imbued with love – with consideration for the natural environment and its human interface.

***Wisdom versus resources***

So a consideration in design is the consideration of the wise use of resources. If even the rich of Llandudno cannot get it right, what of the huge concerns facing a city that is mostly made up of poor people? A city often dubbed “The tale of two cities” to describe the very different lifestyles of its inhabitants – one of the most unequal societies on earth. Yet from a design perspective the challenges are the same – to design with care and to use resources wisely towards meeting human needs while respecting the environment.

**Design as a generic idea**

“Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works”<sup>1</sup>

What then are the components of the design process? What is the x factor in generic terms that if understood could take the city and its inhabitants forward into a better future? The thing about thinking of design in generic terms is that it is not just about designing a city, it is personal too. Designing a better life has the same principles as designing a better city.

In a commencement speech given at Berkley's Graduate School of Information Tim Brown CEO at IDEO, gives some advice on how to design your life. As a designer he was taught how to use his skills to create products that were more attractive, easier to use and more desirable, and spent the first few years of his career "doing exactly that"<sup>2</sup> only to find most of them obsolete within a few months or years and now occupying landfill. He considered himself fortunate to discover that he could apply the same sort of skills to many other problems. "Problems that if solved might have greater impact on the world".<sup>3</sup> As there is not much we can do about the rate of change in the world, he believes a better investment is to prepare for it.

*But I think the principles' of design thinking might help you create a life that is more rewarding, interesting, creative, and perhaps more meaningful".*

"I am not going to paint some beautiful detailed picture of a perfect life that you might wish for. Designers sometimes do that. We create a perfect picture of a possible future. We hide it under a metaphorical black cloth and "ta-da"! We pull off the cloth and expect the audience to swoon in wonder. We then expect our clients to go and perfectly execute our vision. And

while it may be possible to approach the design of a car or a house that way, it isn't appropriate when designing one's life. But I think the principles' of design thinking might help you create a life that is more rewarding, interesting, creative, and perhaps more meaningful".<sup>4</sup>

"Here are a few things you might think about" he goes on to say, and suggests the following:

*Don't ask what – ask why?*

Designers have a habit of being awkward on this subject he says. They ask, why is this even the right question. Solutions flow from questions so getting the questions right before creativity is invested in.

*Open your eyes*

Re-look at things with fresh eyes. Ask questions about everything. "Good design thinkers observe" and he goes on to say "Why are man hole covers round? Why do I dress this way to go to work? How do I know how far back to stand from the person in front of me in the line? What would it be like to be colour blind? You will be shocked how inspirational it is to look at mundane things."<sup>5</sup>

*Make it visual*

"Being visual allows us to look at a problem differently than if we rely only on words or numbers" he says.<sup>6</sup>

*Build on the ideas of others*

"Great ideas evolve. They do not spring fully formed in the mind of geniuses" is another of his tenants.<sup>7</sup>

*Demand options*

Think of multiple solutions that can compete with each other, the same principle of biodiversity seen in nature and its extraordinary display in the Cape fynbos plant kingdom.

*Balance your portfolio*

Finally he suggests that you keep a record. Document the process in whatever form it takes, sketches, writing, videos, photos etc as it unfolds. It is your own reflection of your own life. What you do and what you stand for will become more conscious.

What this all adds up to is a more mindful way of being.

“Dan Pink talks about being mindful as a strategy for reaching the right balance between actively affecting your future without trying to achieve a futile level of control. I think that mindfulness is at the heart of design and that’s why I think it is possible to design a life”.<sup>8</sup>

*“... and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do”.*

So it starts with the way individuals allow themselves to be and the way workplaces and institutions create the space and respect that allows these qualities to develop and be rooted in their ways of doing things.

Steve Jobs of course has the last word to say on this:

“Here’s to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently – they’re not fond of rules – You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can’t do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do”.<sup>9</sup>

## Back to Cape Town

The purpose of the design strategy that has been developed “is to unlock in the Western Cape the globally recognised potential of design to play a role in economic development by embedding design processes in business and organisational practices across sectors.”<sup>10</sup>

The award offered by ICSID ( International Council for the Society of Industrial Designers) is really nothing more than a bag of magic beans. It does not offer anything more than a cluster of ideas around the notion of design and what design can do to help manage the issues cities deal with, and, being in the world spotlight for the year. helps to provide focus.

While this may not seem like much, it is in fact a very powerful idea that any city would do well to embrace. Design can be a powerful tool for change and betterment within a city.

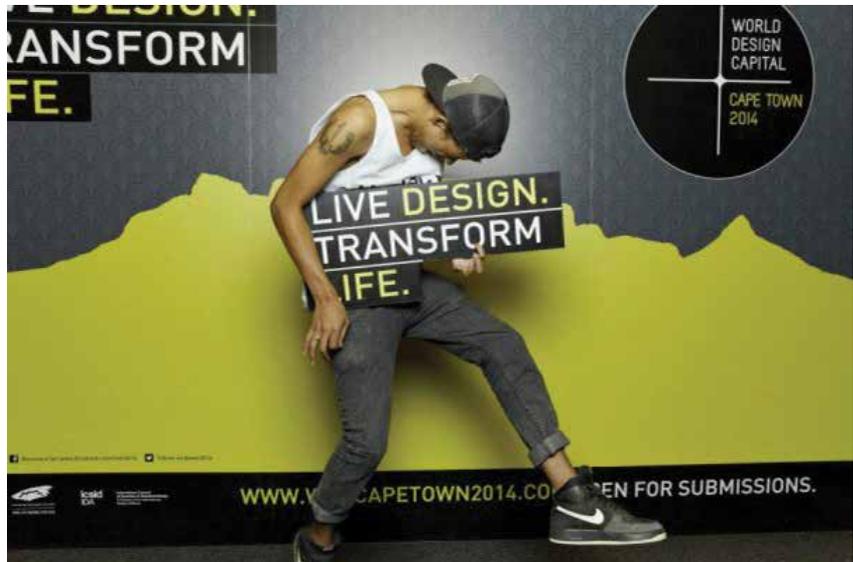
Most of the issues that cities work with can in fact be seen as design problems for which design thinking and methodologies can help to find new or better solutions.

Housing, public open space, transport, service delivery, street lighting and park benches, drain covers and the distribution of libraries are all design problems.

The magic beans in the bag could then be described as the where with all of working with what is at hand to conjure, to invent, to innovate, to create, to conceive, to plan and to realize in such a way as to shape and form ourselves and our city for the better.

The award to Cape Town focuses the City then on innovation, creativity and design. With the main objectives being:

- Support by establishing mechanisms and pilot projects to build the design infrastructure and create an enabling environment



- Promotion by building a strategy to market and promote design competencies and its value as a tool for innovation and competitive advantage
- Education by developing a design education strategy for the WC that meets current and future needs of sectors

World Design Capital 2014 has adopted four themes for the event. The themes, whatever they are interpreted to mean, are:

- African Innovation. Global Conservation
- Today for tomorrow
- Beautiful Spaces. Beautiful Things.
- Bridging the Divide

*But I think the principles' of design thinking might help you create a life that is more rewarding, interesting, creative, and perhaps more meaningful".*

Over 570 submissions have already been submitted for consideration to the team of appointed curators and The Bank, a collaborative design space between Harrington and Canterbury Streets, has become the hub for the evaluation of these projects. The space known as the Bank Canvas, previously used as a workshop, exhibition and storage area, has now been

re-purposed as the Curator's Hub where the blank canvas of possibility will start to unroll.

The City has appointed Alayne Reesberg as the Chief Executive Officer of Cape Town Design the World Design Capital's (WDC) implementing agency to work closely with Richard Perez, the City of Cape Town's WDC director. She wants the accolade to spotlight Cape Town's design community, showcasing local innovation on the international stage.

While this is worthwhile, I see the award as something different. I see it as honouring our potential to be a great city. I do not think we are one yet.

## What of the future

On the foreshore is a freeway built in the 1970's. There is a bridge that was never completed which has become something of a landmark. It starts and then just stops in midair. The official explanation was that there was just no traffic demand for the additional flyovers and that the cost of finishing them could not be justified. As a symbol of ridiculously poor past planning and future potential it will be interesting to see what ideas are put forward for it during 2014. UCT engineering and built environment students have adopted it as a World Design Capital 2014 project that will consider the needs and priorities of city residents. So watch this space.

*... the Conference is seen as an opportunity to explore the latest facts and findings on the creative industries in Africa, and the huge potential of the industry to create jobs and help the sustainable development of the continent.*

In the build-up to 2014 the City is also planning an African Creative Economy Conference in October this year (2013). In response to research which indicates that only 1% of the global creative economy is represented by Africa, the Conference is seen as an opportunity to explore the latest facts and findings on the creative industries in Africa, and the huge potential of the industry to create jobs and help the sustainable development of the continent.

The strategy sees potential projects that will leverage the event in the following areas:

- **Export Visual Communication Services**  
Marketing and selling visual and communication design capabilities internationally – setting up Cape Metro as a one-stop-competitive-shop for all branding and marketing needs
- **Entrench design in agri-food industry**  
Building collaborative projects with agri-industry in food products, food packaging and food processing materials.
- **Design and film collaboration**  
Researching and assisting in building the film industry “by investing in and up-skilling the various design disciplines that interlink into film production. Initially research in the types of films planned in South Africa and determining which areas could benefit the most by design disciplines.”<sup>11</sup>
- **Alternative and green energies**  
Determining design's potential in alternative and green energies and involving design in current projects.
- **Fast-track Cape Town Spatial Development as 24-hour city**  
Collaborating with and building spatial design projects that enhance the Cape Metro's capabilities and user-experiences.
- **Service Design**  
Developing capability in services design. The My City is an example of a potential pilot project.
- **Quality of Life & Sustainable development**  
Systems design or systems thinking projects could assist government in resolving real social issues that would help give 2014 a higher profile in terms of what design can do for quality of life.

- **Public Sector procurement**

Rigid procurement processes have been identified as a major inhibitor and a pilot project aimed at providing a methodology to unlock this could have major value.

So World Design Capital 2014 in Cape Town, BEE deal or not, if the BEE is a way to create a great buzz for design, the honey jar of better possibility for an African city can start to fill up. There has also been a ripple effect to other cities with Pretoria supported by the SABS Design Institute now declaring itself 2014 Cool Capital.

If the city also builds design thinking and methods into its long term approaches, the World Design Capital year could become a powerful legacy for the way the City approaches issues in the future.

The strategy recommends that planning and implementation should take place over five year increments with an initial preparation period from 2013-2014. The periods 2012/13 and 2013/14 are positioned as a preparation in which the foundation for the platform for design will be laid. Specific goals for the remaining periods have been outlined to support the vision

What will be interesting to see is how being an African city gives us permission to think differently about solutions and not just adopt Western approaches. *Rogue Urbanism: Emergent African Cities*<sup>12</sup> (ed by Edgar Pieterse and Abdoumalik Simone) is a new book on the shelves arguing that dominant knowledge and discourse on city are largely inappropriate for Africa and that there are multiple alternatives in approaching and understanding the African city, where those working with the urban condition and spatiality can find new entry points for their creativity – another discussion that 2014 World Design Capital will no doubt be able to take forward in the hope of better understanding the African city.

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NOTES

1 (Steve Jobs, Business Week, May 25 1998)

2 (Class of 2013: Start Designing Your Life – Linked In. Tim Brown CEO at IDEO)

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Dan Pink. The adventures of Johnny Bunko

9 (Steve Jobs Business Week, May 25 1998)

10 (Draft Report Design: Driving Competitive Advantage in The Western Cape, 2nd Draft – 15 January 2013)

11 Ibid.

12 *Rogue Urbanism: Emergent African Cities*- edited by Edgar Pieterse and Abdoumalik Simone