



Johannesburg is the second-most inspiring city in the world, after Hong Kong, according to the Good City Index. In a study conducted by the Global magazine, Joburg scored the highest points in all categories used to rank the cities; such as being a Hub of Progress, City Engagement, Street Life, Defining Moments, Connectivity, Green Life, Diversity and Work Balance.

The ranking is established by editors of the magazine on information provided by a network of global correspondents.

“Indeed this is a humbling accolade,” says Joburg Executive Mayor Parks Tau. “Particularly because it comes less than a month after the 2014 MasterCard Global Destination Cities Index announced us, the City of Johannesburg, as the most popular destination city in Africa for a second consecutive year. This shows our efforts as a city at work to promote socio-economic transformation are making an impact, not only locally, but also internationally”, he says.

The city has been lauded for its efforts to positively transform communities and empower the youth, build infrastructure and urban regeneration. The magazine describes Johannesburg as

a city “that is good at finding new, sometimes unorthodox, ways to fix itself. Some of the projects mentioned are Johannesburg Development Agency’s (JDA) Newtown Cultural Precinct, Braamfontein and Hillbrow developments; the new Metro Park in the Inner City; and the bicycle lanes built in Soweto.

“Everyone at the JDA is really excited about the recognition that many of our city development projects received in the write up about Johannesburg in Good Magazine’s 2014 Good City Index,” says Sharon Lewis, Executive Manager of Planning and Strategy. “This is validation that we are ‘building a better city’ which is the tag-line on the JDA letterhead. Of course we agree whole-heartedly that Johannesburg is an inspiring city that offers hope and opportunity for all its citizens, but at the JDA we also know that it is precisely because of the feisty, creative and resilient nature of Joburg citizens that we have such a great city.”

An inspiring city

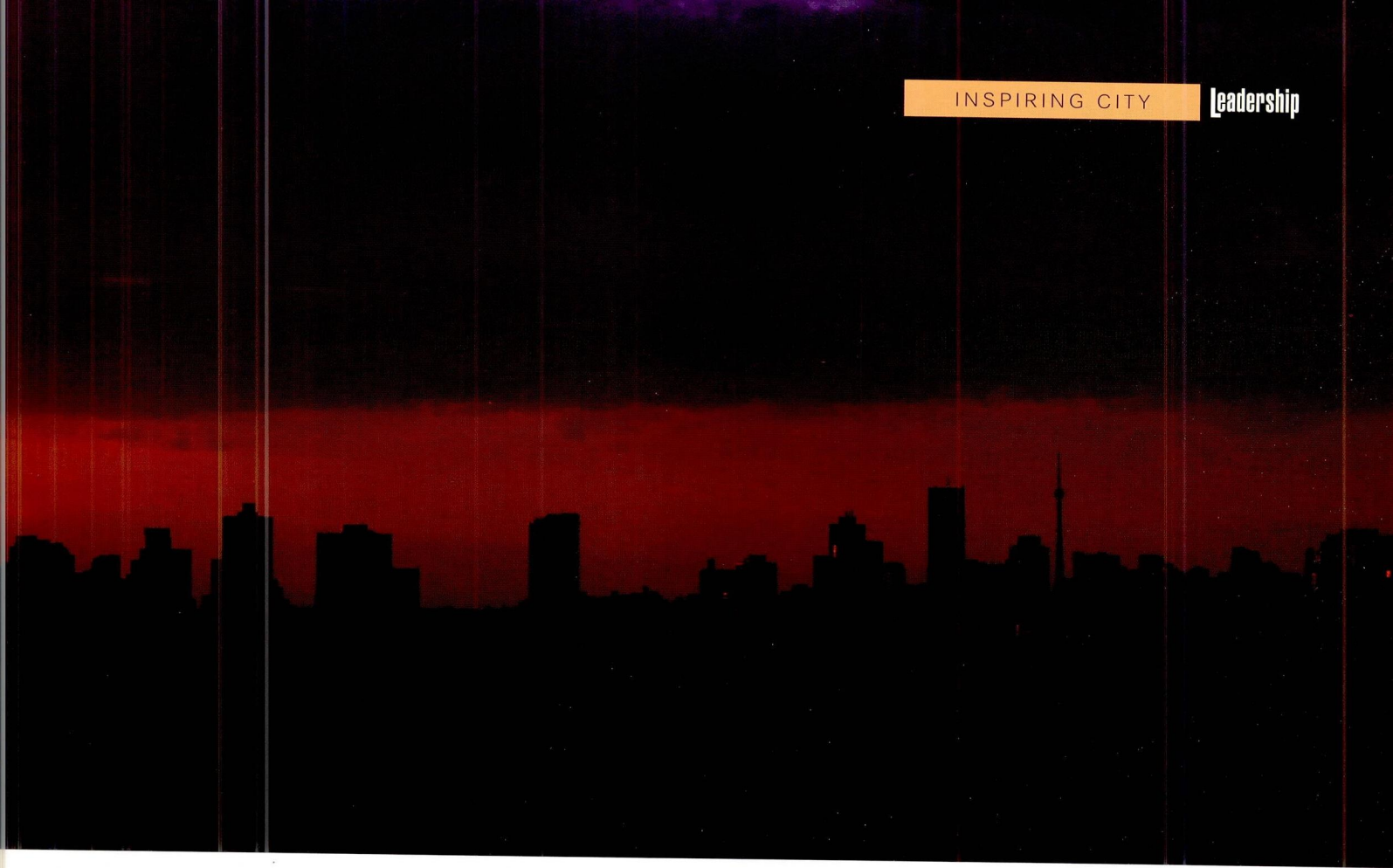
Metro Park and Newtown Junction feature high as some of the aspects that make Johannesburg an inspiring city, and have greatly impacted on the communities in which they are located. “It has been the City of Johannesburg’s vision to

create quality public spaces for the people of this city,” says Yasmeen Dinath, Planning Manager at JDA. “The rapid pace of Johannesburg’s development since its inception often occurred at the expense of quality public open spaces and in particular green spaces such as the metro park.

“Like in many cities around the world increasing demand for well-located residential and commercial space erodes green space in the City. The Metro Park is an initiative that provides inner city users with a chance to exhale, to breathe, and to have fun in a densely populated inner city. People are seen enjoying the park daily and we are committed to ensuring that the park is valued as a safe, healthy and fun respite from busy urban life,” explains Dinath.

In 2009 the JDA ran a design competition for a metropolitan-scale park in the Johannesburg Inner City. This was in response to the need for more public open space to provide recreation space for the rapidly growing residential population in the inner city.

“The winning design was based on an ‘urban tapestry’ of parks that bridge the railway line cutting through the inner city. Each of the parks is conceptualised to fulfill specific functions as recreational and productive green spaces,” explains Lewis. “The intention is to develop a



series of parks over the medium term to move towards the plan for a big park.”

Stages of implementaion

The first stage of implementation was the new park at the foot of the Nelson Mandela Bridge, which was completed in 2013 and opened on Friday, the 19th of September. The park features an outdoor gym, toilet facilities, amphitheater, rolling lawns, picnic tables for families to enjoy the environment and a state of the art playground.

Since 2001 the JDA has worked to develop the Newtown Cultural Precinct. The success of Newtown is partly dependent on the development of properties owned by the City of Johannesburg.

“As the City cannot afford to develop these properties itself, the strategy has been to release some of them for private developers through long-term development leases”, explains Lewis. “In 2009 the property between the Market Theatre and Carr Street was awarded to Atterbury Properties for a mixed use retail and office development. This has been built as Newtown Junction, which is the first significant new retail development in the Johannesburg Inner City in the last 10 years”.

Newtown Junction responds to its position in the cultural precinct by creating public open space for cultural performances including music, dance and street theatre. It also provides a large parking garage that can be used by visitors to the Mark Theatre and events on Mary Fitzgerald Square. The development was also subject to heritage conservation regulations, so the original potato sheds have been restored as part of the mall design to create space for small retailers

“The Newtown Junction is a hugely exciting development that breathes new life into the Newtown Cultural Precinct and gives impetus for even more activity and redevelopment in the area. It has received a very positive public response already and is sure to boost visitor numbers to the surrounding cultural, science and entertainment attractions in the precinct,” says Dinath. The Newtown Junction has been part of a regeneration initiative in Johannesburg, and has seen the transformation of areas in the city that, for years, were declared no-go zones as a result of urban decay and crime. Braamfontein has come a long way since the early 2000s, transforming into a modern arts and culture district through greening, development, and safety initiatives; while the Maboneng district has

brought life back into downtown Johannesburg with its mix of art galleries, retail and studio space on offer, and trendy restaurants. In addition, communities have undergone rejuvenation as well in terms of initiatives aimed at supporting underprivileged youth. Dlala Nje and the Dieploot Mountain Academy are two organisations spotlighted as having a direct impact on Johannesburg achieving their title.

Dlala Nje Community Centre

Opening its doors in October 2012, Dlala Nje was founded by lifelong friends Nicholas and Michal Luptak. “Dlala Nje is all about finding beauty in negative spaces”, explains Nickolaus.”After initially toying with the idea of opening a pie shop we eventually went with the idea of kids entertainment area because of the massive amount of children that occupy Ponte City.” The organization has since grown into a center of development and transformation aimed at providing opportunities for the kids of Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville.

“The Dlala Nje kids know that the world is a difficult place”, says Nicholas. “We help them understand that nobody is going to make it any easier for them – it’s up to them to determine how their life is going to pan out and what the

future has in store for them - we hope to give them the necessary things they need to get to where they want to be.

"The community centre has become a safe haven and place of education for many of the disadvantaged kinds that live in surrounding communities. Nicholas explains that on the face of it, Dlala Nje is just a kids play room, however it is much more than that. "We have a computer center with free internet for homework, we host music lessons, yoga classes, book readings, have a library and essentially offer a space for kids to be kids in an area where it is very often not possible to be."

After some initial hesitation from the community, Dlala Nje has received overwhelming support.

"It took a while for the community to realise we weren't there to make a quick buck like so many businesses in that area", he says. "But when they realised that we aren't in it for the cash and that every cent we make gets ploughed back into the initiative, they bought into the idea in a big way".

While the community center is the main aspect of the organisation, Dlala Nje provides inner city tours, serving as their funding model. They host immersions through the inner city for curious locals and travelers that have until now been too scared to venture into these parts of Johannesburg.

"People come and realise these places aren't as horrendous as they'd been led to believe," explains Nickoluas. "They then begin understand that if we are going to change it for the better, it will require their skills and the skills of those more fortunate."

On how it feels to have Dlala Nje noted as helping the city gain its prestigious title, he states that it is not only heartwarming and awe-inspiring in itself, but shows that the organisation's work is having an impact.

"A lot of people thought we were smoking our socks when we started Dlala Nje, so it's encouraging to see how people are starting to take notice. Nicholas believes that with affirmation anything is possible.

"We know that if people believe in what we do, things will only get easier. We always knew it would take some time for people to realise the impact of our work, but to have people eventually take notice has provided us with even more energy to continue what we are doing and grow the organisation even more."



Diepsloot Mountain Biking Academy

Run under the auspices of the Jala Peo Foundation, the Diepsloot Mountain Bike Academy (DMA) was founded by Absa Corporate and Investment Bank employee, Andre Ross, and seven other passionate individuals. "The academy was established with the aim of enhancing basic learning skills through the use of English reading circles and Math tutoring," explains Andre Ross. "The DMA provides basic MTB and life skills training for underprivileged youth sourced from schools in Diepsloot and surrounding areas."

The DMA was started in 2007 as a basic learn to cycle program and evolved into the DMA three years ago in 2012. The project currently has 70 (42 boys and 28 girls) regular attendants ranging from 9 to 23 years old. At present the academy uses mountain biking as the base of the sports for development program. "The 70 children are divided in 4 smaller teams, based on age, fitness and ability and these are managed by a senior and junior captain elected from within the ranks based on leadership potential," details Andre. "The Academic support program focuses mainly on the members from 9 to 16

years, and we are still developing the capacity to assist the older youth—currently this is done on an adhoc basis."

"Our Motto is Rea Pele—keep moving forward—and our basic narrative is that we would like all participants to recognize and believe in their own nobility," explains Andre. "The children in our Academy have access to education support, skills transfer, and knowledge and guidance on personal development and environmental care. They have a safe space to grow and develop."

Andre says that at the DMA they believe that every seed planted and every life changed makes a difference and has a multiplier effect. "It is a blessing an honor to be able to play a part in the lives of a few of the youth in South Africa and it has been rewarding to see them blossom into young leaders. So many of them have overcome great adversity and their transcendence has made us believe even more that the little we invest is worth it."

Commenting on the DMA being named as an initiative that aided the city receiving its honour, Andre says that there is very little as rewarding as knowing you made a positive contribution to



changing perceptions or a difference. "This is a phenomenal confirmation for the children that their hard work and effort is not only having an impact on their own lives, but contributing in a small way to the growth of our country.

"The City of JHB has been a great supporter of our work—we have access to land owned by Johannesburg Water and the COJ will be helping us build a BMX track in 2015—so we are proud that we could contribute to the international recognition received for the good initiatives being driven by the City Management Team. We are glad that in some way we are able to repay them for their belief in the work we are doing,"

The city has several long-term and large-scale strategic projects in the pipeline such as the eradication informal settlements; providing housing and basic services; stopping urban sprawl by facilitating a viable public transport system; and developing sustainable settlements. Currently the City of Johannesburg is reviewing its Growth and Development Strategy (GDS), and has set 2040 as the target date for achieving projected outcomes. . ▲

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