

with formally planned, organised and regulated city forms inhabited by a diverse population. The informal sector may be regarded as an 'underground network' (Madrack, 2001: 39). It is viewed as a dynamic process (Hays-Mitchell, 1993: 1085), although it may be seriously questioned in its simplicity. Informal economic processes and activities are generally small scale, typified by simple technology, family labour, flexible work sites with changing cultural, social, economic and spatial boundaries concerning land, shelter and employment creation. Lisa Peattie (1997) describes these informal spaces as 'third spaces' – neither home nor work, but inhabited spaces that are informal, spontaneous, unprepossessing, where people experience everyday living.

The African city must allow for the unpredictable. Under current conditions of 'extreme' and 'rapid' transformation, change manifests itself most evidently through space. The urban poor make and remake space; they transform and capture space. Through informal activities, they intrude into the patterned grid of history, permeating into every aspect of the functioning of society (adapted from Edensor, 1998). In urban Africa, people and their activities form a fundamental, dynamic part of the building of a city. They disrupt the coherence of the planned urban landscape, retaliating against authority – visually, emotionally, resourcefully and powerfully. It is important to acknowledge, accept and accommodate this spatial change to meet the needs of the people.

South Africa was instrumental in bringing the issue of informal settlements into the Habitat III discussion. Informal settlements have been on the agenda for many years, so why is this different to Habitat II? There is an opportunity to incorporate best practice with regard to economic opportunities (including financial models), urban tenure and spatial planning as a more sustainable approach to address the housing issue. There is a quest to prioritise in-situ upgrading to respond to the scale of urban poverty. This progressive shift doesn't speak of evictions or the elimination of informal settlements. Rather, there is recognition and inclusion.

#### LESSON 7: SMALL CHANGE, BIG IMPACT

There is generally a correlation between location and scale of public space. Larger spaces are associated with the most accessible urban conditions. But smaller, productive public spaces and places have a fundamental impact on the neighbourhood and its inhabitants, allowing for small, but vital, change. Friedmann (2006) says, 'Most of us live our lives locally, not universally, and we treasure the small spaces of the city.' It is often these small 'leftover' spaces that form the most exciting of places. Hamdi (2004) sets out a way of thinking on cities that gives precedence to small-scale, incremental change over large-scale projects. He shows how the trickle-down effect advocated by conservatives doesn't produce the large-scale changes predicted. Instead, the trickle-up effect of self-organised systems produce the biggest changes.

At VPUU, we work with the community on the idea of 'Emthonjeni'. This is perceived as a multifunctional place for children to play in a safe environment, which provides selected utilities. These spaces are focused internally to the neighbourhood cluster and encourage social cohesion. They are associated with water/washing points and will have smaller-scale public spaces as gathering spaces. They are located along pedestrian desire routes and are seen as the 'breathing space' along pathways that connect neighbourhoods. Clustering around small open spaces helps provide space for economic opportunities and easy access. Consequently, previously 'wasted land' is put to optimal use without the loss of spaciousness in providing a hierarchical order. Such places play an important role in neighbourhood watch and patrolling exercises, promoting respectful community action and moral behaviour along with community policing against illegal activities. Spaces for small change allow for implementation at site level to test methodologies, processes and outcomes, which can be monitored through indicators.

#### CONCLUSION

Why do I believe in building for change?

- I am fascinated by the unpredictable, people and social networks.
- I am intrigued by informality within the city.
- I am inspired by the gaps in between; the public realm.
- I believe in catalytic social architecture driven by urban design.
- I am passionate about education. ■

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1 Lotus Park Neighbourhood Centre, VPUU NPC. 2 Monwabisi Park Emthonjeni M-15, VPUU NPC. 3 Monwabisi Park washing line, VPUU NPC. 4 Monwabisi Park Enumeration, VPUU NPC. 5 Hatcliff New Stands, Harare, Zimbabwe, Andrew Curling.