

## trends

## Urban unity

A SERIES of Open Streets Days is spreading across Cape Town and currently happen in Bree Street, Langa, and, most recently, Mitchells Plain.



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## STREETS IN THE

Countrywide there has been a trend for public spatial interaction which has seen locals reclaiming the streets and various nodes becoming increasingly synonymous with leisure

By Samantha Hartshorne

EVERY few weeks, the Newtown Junction comes alive with locals seeking exciting entertainment and young adults who pour in for a taste of cost-free social interaction. Twenty-something Kay Ramoshi has been instrumental in using public areas to create trendy events for a mass gathering of the arts and hosts a number of appealing events, such as "Hypnotic Fridays".

Locals in all our big cities are driving a trend for public spatial interaction. With increased urbanisation in our bigger cities and a tendency to buy smaller, more compact properties, residents in these urban enclaves are more and more using their communal areas for leisure, sport and even trade.

Property developers are catching on to the desire for shared leisure. "Property development brands are looking outside their apartment buildings and home design projects, and getting into city and spatial design to benefit all residents and the greater community. A few local developers are taking on park projects, and even urban design projects, on the understanding the more they contribute towards the city, the more it impacts positively on its residents and developers via people choosing to move into, and buy property in, these cities," says Jacques van Embden, managing director of Blok property development agency in Cape Town.

When the Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation announced its roll-out of culturally-centred precincts, developers had more incentive to collaborate with government bodies.

The founding statement said cul-

tural precincts were aimed at providing a conducive and enabling environment to enhance social cohesion through the collective consumption of arts, culture and heritage in public spaces. They were devised to contribute to job creation, economic development and crime reduction.

"To attract the widest range of patrons and audience it is important that a precinct offers both free activities, like open-air events, which attract people to the area, and charged activities," said the statement. And these cultural nodes are doing just that.

Other examples of community-driven interaction are park runs and pop-up gyms.

Developers are taking on park projects and even urban design projects

As more people choose to move to cities to minimise commute time and maximise security and convenience, so urban residents are looking to get more out of their cities than before. A beautiful apartment to live in is one need but people also require creative spaces and open places that they can use for their after-hours entertainment and relaxation, often in lieu of a large garden or entertainment area in their home. Many urban apartment owners who do have their own large gardens and outdoor spaces still choose to use shared spaces for the social benefit they offer.

Property developers are acutely aware of the trend and formal development agencies associated with the

various city authorities are also fuelling the trend by upgrading shared areas to attract investment.

"Property developers are becoming increasingly aware of the value of the wider urban environment, and, in particular, of the public realm," says Guy Briggs, director at dhk Architects & Urban Designers. "This means that they are not only focused on the design of individual buildings but they are also aiming to create public spaces on private land, as well as upgrading existing public spaces outside of their site boundaries. This serves the dual purpose of improving the attractiveness of the property concerned, as well as the surrounding neighbourhood, which increases the value of the development."

Other examples of developers catching on are South Point in Braamfontein, Joburg, with Propertytu, the development brand behind the Maboneng Precinct. Braamfontein has evolved from a rundown area with concerns about crime and vagrancy in the early 2000s, to being the fourth-largest node for office space in the city of Joburg, as well as being home to thousands of university students.

In the eastern part of the city, the Maboneng Precinct has been given the renewal treatment with shop space and apartments. Today, there are art galleries, collaborative work spaces, cinemas and a creative and eclectic mix of people on the street. Along with Newtown, these nodes are becoming increasingly synonymous with leisure.

The hip young team behind Blok in the Western Cape are applying similar techniques, since they have an understanding of how an urban landscape is used when it's your workplace, front yard and shared living space. Common amenities are

## trends



FORWARD PLANNING: An upgrade of Durban Point Waterfront is in the pipeline.



EXERCISE FUN: Pop-up gym at Montecasino, Joburg.



FUN TIME: Musicians entertain the public in Newtown Junction.

## LIFE OF THE CITY

## Parking space



PARKLETS, such as this one in Cape Town, offer pedestrians and residents free wi-fi and a place to rest while out and about in the city centre.

PICTURES: BLOK



critical and these must tap into the needs of the community, says Van Embden. They have needs that touch on workspaces; outdoor yoga and exercise facilities; street festivals and events that get people out of their homes.

Open Streets Cape Town was founded by a group of volunteers in 2012 and registered as a non-profit organisation in 2013.

"It enjoys the full support of the City of Cape Town, as well as civil society organisations and many individual volunteers from across the city. Open Streets Cape Town is rooted in 'street action', as well as research, and has grown as a dynamic and organic movement of 'street-minded' citizens," says Van Embden.

Open Streets Cape Town works to challenge the paradigm of urban mobility by carrying out campaigns; temporary interventions; dialogues

and walks that raise awareness, spark public debate and, ultimately, drive behaviour change around the role of streets in the life of the city. The flagship programme, which launched the organisation, is a series of Open Streets Days that are

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spreading across Cape Town and currently happen in Bree Street, in Langa and in Mitchells Plain.

The City Walk is a collaborative community project that starts in The Company's Garden, continues down

St George's Mall to Waterkant Street and progresses up the Fan Walk to St Andrew's Square. The City Walk connects significant places and offerings in the urban heart of Cape Town through storytelling, wayfinding, public art, walking tours and retail offerings.

In Durban, the municipality has invested over R5 billion in the inner city to improve public infrastructure and to implement projects. Completed public sector projects include construction of the Warwick flyovers, Kingspark Sporting Precinct, beachfront upgrade and the inner-city bus system.

The Durban Point Development Company said the benefits were particularly relevant to prospective Durban Point Waterfront investors, where there has been renewed demand for office and retail space. Overall, the Durban inner city is in a growth trajectory and the extension

of boundaries will serve to ensure that this momentum is not lost.

The department said they anticipated the youth to be beneficiaries of the programmes in the hubs by promoting conglomerations of institutions and cultural activities. "Cultural precincts have the potential for training in a range of skills, including artistic creativity and construction work. Newtown, for example, is a hub of artistic creativity."

The collaborative, youth-engineered approach follows an international appetite for outdoor playgrounds. Open Streets Days are inspired by Bogota's "Ciclovía" – a recreational programme that creates 120km of car-free streets in the Colombian capital every Sunday and public holiday. More than 400 cities around the world have followed suit.

It is an extremely exciting time to be in city and urban property development. The opportunities for

creative exploration are wide open and we are working more collaboratively with the city and spatial specialists on projects such as the Regent Road Parklet, offering pedestrians and residents free wi-fi and a place to rest, and upgrading city parks to benefit not only Blok buyers, but the general area and its community," says Van Embden.

"There is a group of developers nationally who are already taking advantage of these opportunities and we would love to challenge the rest to do the same. The more we work together to benefit our cities, the more it'll benefit the greater community."

Ramoshi says the Newtown events are catching on. "We are now mixing up-coming musicians and visual artists to cater to a variety of people. Hypnotic Friday and First Thursdays are popular and the residents and visitors are responsive."