

SESSION TWO:
11:15-12:45

Empowering children as the civic: Participatory Democracy for children

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CHILDREN AS URBAN CITIZENS

12 October 2020

Topic

Curated by Gretchen Prangley Play Africa, Heather Barclay Mimosa/ Africa Reggio Emilia Alliance, Pauline Borton and Stephen Hobbs The Trinity Session

This session is a part of the Urban Festival 2020



the trinity session





The City is our
Children's
Museum

PIONEERING SHARED, INCLUSIVE AND
EQUITABLE SPACES FOR CHILDREN'S PLAY AND
LEARNING IN AN URBAN AFRICAN CONTEXT



PLAY AFRICA

Children's museum
leveraging public space
to catalyse innovations
in creative learning,
children's rights,
parent engagement and
social cohesion.

Disrupting the idea of a museum

Play Africa developed a flexible, city-wide museum model to bring transformative learning experiences promoting creativity, innovation and connection to a divided society. Through replicable programmes and exhibits, Play Africa empowers children, parents and teachers with learning approaches that bring global thinking back to homes, classrooms and communities.



Everyone deserves access to safe environments where they can play, create, discover and connect with one another. Our decentralised model uses existing public spaces in Johannesburg to offer 21st-century, high-quality playful learning to everyone – from all walks of life and abilities.











WHAT MATTERS TO CHILDREN?

CHILDREN AND CAREGIVERS ARE INVITED TO SPECIAL KIDS' TOWN HALL HOSTED BY PLAY AFRICA ON ZOOM:

"HOW WOULD CHILDREN RE-IMAGINE CITIES AFTER LOCKDOWN?"

SPACE LIMITED. APPLY BY 22 MAY: bit.ly/KidsTownHall

PLAY AFRICA CONNECTS IS AN ORIGINAL PLAY AFRICA PROGRAMME CREATED IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE GOETHE INSTITUT SOUTH AFRICA. MORE INFO: PLAYAFRICA.ORG.ZA



During the COVID-19 crisis, we've leveraged technology and design thinking to expand our reach substantially across southern Africa.

We invite children to imagine new futures for our cities.





CHILDREN AS URBAN CITIZENS

AFRICA REGGIO EMILIA ALLIANCE /MIMOSA SCHOOL
October 2020



Children are born citizens

And they are involved in citizenship from birth

How does Mimosa see CHILDREN AS URBAN CITIZENS ?

For us, a citizen is something that you simply are and that is your right, because you belong in a place and are a member of the community of people who live there with you. So children are born citizens. Its not something they will become...

Children are intensely interested in understanding their world.

Through play and making they investigate their ideas.



In practice this means that children can and should exercise their citizenship from a young age. Children are fascinated by what they see and hear as they navigate their worlds. We all know how they are always asking questions. Why must we stop at robots? Why are most petrol attendants black? Who plants the flowers on the pavements? Why do some people sleep on the street? They want to know, and they want to understand. This concern for society is at the core of citizenship

—

A practice of
daily
democracy.



When we say children are citizens, it doesn't mean that they simply know what it means to be a citizen. What their rights and responsibilities as citizens are and how they can engage as agents in shaping where they live and learn and play. At Mimosa we believe that children learn to be good citizens through the daily practice of negotiation and compromise, discussion and debate, problem-solving and decision making. We seek to create opportunities for the children to practice these skills.



Shaping children's experience as citizens.



What are some of the ways you do this?

In the morning meeting with our group, children share their plans for the day. Perhaps they need to finish building a house for the fairies. Maybe a small group is still busy painting the jungle gym with Uncle George. Children take responsibility for their own projects on an ongoing basis. They also in this meeting have an opportunity to express their needs and to justify their choices. Maybe Finn really doesn't want to paint outside in the sun today, but he says he'll ask Uncle George if he can finish up the next day and proposes a different plan for his day.

When problems arise, we discuss them collectively as a group, such as what to do when things are not looked after, or there is too much noise, or the plants are being trampled on. Whatever the group decides, we implement, even if it seems unlikely to us adults to work. Last year my group made chore chart. They decided that each group should clean for a whole week. Well that soon grew very tiresome for the very first group who understandably staged a protest... New negotiations led to a daily chart being drawn up!



Another thing that is very important is to give children time and space to work together and negotiate and fight and compromise **without interfering as an adult**. How else are they going to learn to be a team, to take perspective, to deal with disappointment? This is democracy in action amongst the children .

Here the children are building a castle for the princess. It has ramps and moats with crocodiles to keep out intruders. There are knights and dragons. Well of course there are as many different ways to construct the set as there are children in the game. And lots of jockeying for favoured characters. But they can't all be the princess and the knight some children are going to be disappointed, and how do they learn to cope with this? (Fortunately Sam makes being a crocodile a very inviting proposition – what a great mediation skill)

These are issues we adults grapple with every day...working in a team, managing our disappointments when our idea is not favoured. The children are learning the attitudes and values and skills that are important for being an effective citizen.



The Lorax is a cautionary tale with a powerful **message** that the environment must be protected against those who would profit from it...

In the story all the trees are cut down to make space for factories.

How do you understand children's agency?

So to begin with, we have to **believe in** children's agency. That they are competent and able to engage with complex ideas.

I'm going to tell you a story now about a group of children and their response to a complex question.

I was reading the story of *The Lorax* with my group of 4-year olds and one of the children began weeping, struck by the enormity of the problem. He echoed the words of the Lorax – "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it's not."



“The whole earth needs a tree, but a tree is not helping. Maybe it needs a better tree like this.” – Manu (4)



The children were sooooo concerned that there were no trees in In the walled city of Thneed-Ville,. Where would the oxygen come from? And what about homes for animals and birds and insects. There would be no shade and no beauty. They agreed that trees are very important and THAT THE WHOLE EARTH NEEDS TREES.



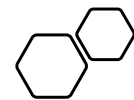
We must believe in children's ideas.

Children map the trees and plants we have in the garden.

The children began discussing what THEY would do about the problem facing the Lorax and his community. Plant more trees! But what to plant? And where to plant and how to plant? Do we have space in our garden? We decided that a first step would be to map out what grows in our very own garden.



- “I made them to be so beautiful! If we did all of them to be the same they would look so funny!” – Livy
“Pick a book of flowers...”



Through careful observation, drawing, searching, making notes and creating hypotheses around their explorations, the children got to know the different plants and trees, their smells, their properties and how we might interact with them in order to broaden our understanding of the world around us. They also began to think of ways that the plants might help us better to understand ourselves, and how our relationships with the plants and trees could help us to understand our relationships with each other.

Questions for the tree...

- How old are you?
- Tree, can I climb up on you?
- Can I see the sun and the sky from your branches?
- Do you get tired of the noise, tree?
- Do your leaves protect you from the sun?
- Tree, do you respond back? Or are you sleeping right now?



It was clear though that we STILL needed to find out more about trees. How should we do this ? The children came up with a very, in adults' eyes, unusual idea... They suggested that we ask **the trees** for some answers. We can see how the children are beginning **to do research** by interviewing the tree.

Following the children's lead we brainstormed what they would like to know from the tree. The children grapple with taking the perspective of another. Trying to imagine what life is like from the point of view of a tree growing on the pavement. They are **showing empathy** – another critical citizenship value.



If you want
to know someone you
have to spend time
with them.

We spoke to the trees , but wondered how the trees would hear us. And how the tree could answer.

Luka said maybe we need to get to know the tree better and how can we do that? If you want to know someone, the children agreed, you have to spend time with them. You have to sit with them, look at them and listen to them.



We must
plant more
plants.

And on and on the research project went, with so many questions to answer, as the children think about how to solve the Lorax's problem, that by now they have realised is **OUR PROBLEM, TOO**. What they came up with was an understanding that trees are not alone in providing food and shelter and oxygen. All plants are important. And all the life that sustains plants and that is sustained by plants.

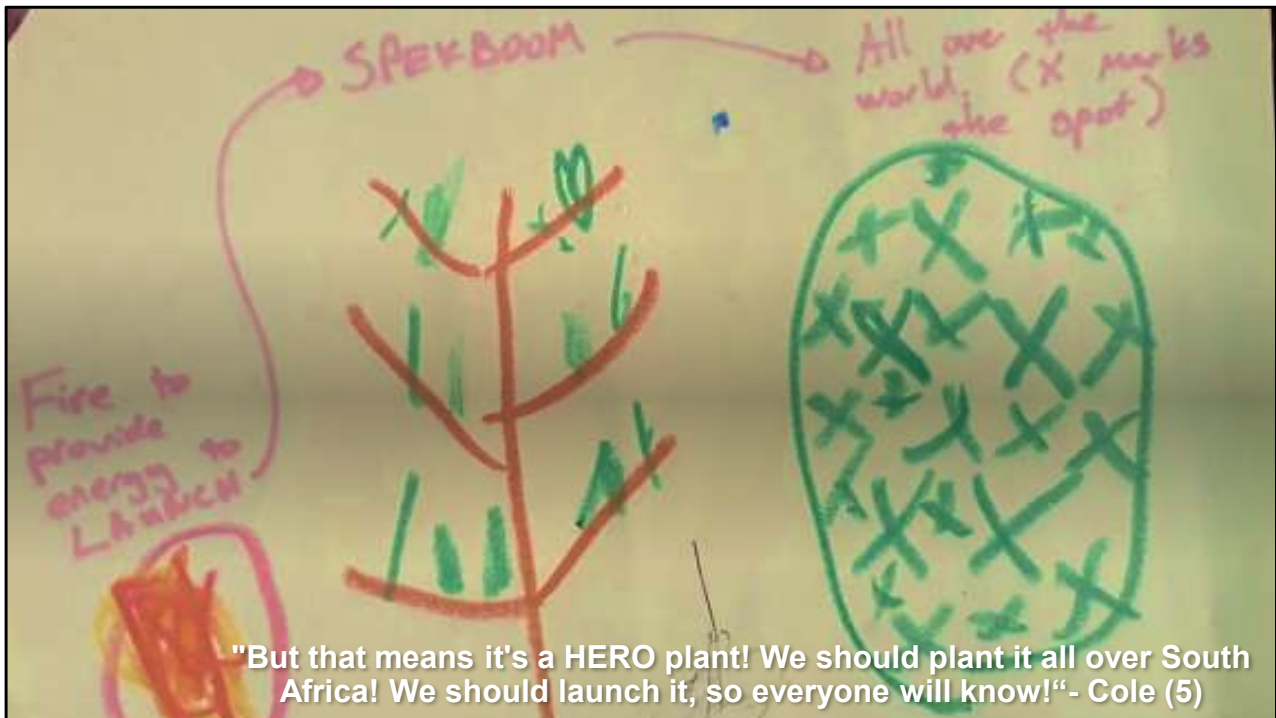


So we planted seeds and grew new plants from vegetable cuttings.

Children quickly decided that they should do some planting. Because the earth needs more plants and because then we can watch to see how plants grow. Ideas of waste and recycling and climate change are coming up for discussion.

And children are beginning to see a **relationship between their actions and behaviours and the impact this has on their world**. They are also becoming aware that **they have agency** in this situation. .

We saw how we as teachers and adults could facilitate the expression of children's agency. How we could make possible opportunities and platforms where they can explore, discuss and shape their experiences as citizens.



"But that means it's a HERO plant! We should plant it all over South Africa! We should launch it, so everyone will know!" - Cole (5)

In what ways does the work you do make visible the citizenship of children?

In this same project...

Children are now busy experimenting with planting and growing and one of the parents, a biologist, introduces us to the marvellous SPEKBOOM.

We begin to do a short version of its properties of carbon sequestration. Mid-way through the explanation, Cole (5) practically explodes with excitement:

"But that means it's a HERO plant! We should plant it all over South Africa! We should launch it, so everyone will know!"

This launching, for him, looked like putting seeds and cuttings inside a rocket, with many messages, and exploding it above us in the atmosphere. He went on to say, "You see, its branches are like swords! It will guard the front door, so global warming doesn't get into Mimosa."



Cole's words were the seed that inspired teachers and children at Mimosa. Children decided that we needed to share the power of spekboom with EVERYONE and launch the message. They planted cuttings in tins and then wrote messages to let people know about the HERO plant. First these tins went home so their parents would know, but this wasn't enough. The children wanted to spread the message more widely. Because the whole world needed more plants. We discussed how we could do this and agreed that we would give cuttings to the people who passed by our school so they could also plant spekboom.



By now the whole school was involved – children and teachers and even parents. Everyone was busy composting, marking the movement of the sun, planting seeds, exploring our streets and seeking to understand how the worlds around us interact and intersect.

We were starting to see in our day-to-day experiences how interwoven the world is, and how much we depend on those around us – human, non-human and more-than-human – to thrive, not just survive.

From all these connections, we collectively decided to have a joyful plant protest, timed to coincide with the Global Climate Strike in September 2019.



On the last day of school, Mimosa children, teachers and parents marched with succulents in our hands. We headed for Henley, in front of the SABC, where we handed out cuttings of spekboom, while singing a song for the climate. The children handed out their tins, explaining to passers-by why it was important to plant the spekboom in the garden or on their balconies .



As well as prompting the protest, the children's concern for trees and the planet has launched a new era at Mimosa. We are all thinking about how to live better and how to 'do school' more sustainably. What can we use less of? Where can we recycle? What food we can grow?

Our school project for this year, 2020, has been to research and understand ecosystems and ecological diversity better. And of course exploring diversity in ecosystems is just the beginning of understanding the power of diversity in all systems.



What lessons could another organisation draw from your experience of working with children on urban projects?

To go back to what I said earlier...

Children are able to think deeply and they have amazing theories about how their cities work and creative ideas about how the city could work BETTER. We need to listen to them.

This project (among others) showed us at school that if we work together with children and provide them with research tools that make sense to them, they will always come up with ideas to solve problems, local and global.

I'm thinking of the interview with THE TRINITY SESSION and seeing how much overlap there is in the WAY we work with children – using participatory methodologies, using different tools like photography and mapping and design for exploration and research, and making children's thinking visible to others... Wouldn't it be wonderful

if more people worked in these ways with children.

I'd conclude by saying: believe in children and in the power of their voices and their capacity to lead us (adults) to new knowledge and new ways of knowing, and not the other way around.

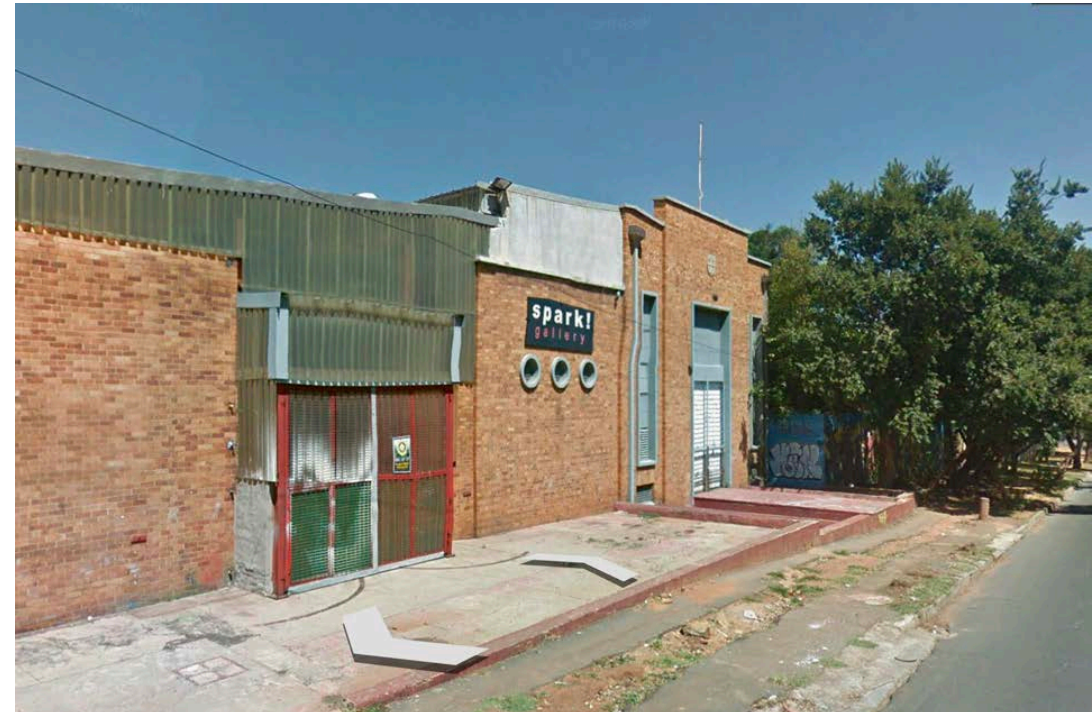
RE-CREATION SPACE

YOUTH-GENERATED PLACE MAKING

Commissioned by The Orchards Project / Spark Gallery NPC

April – June 2019

Funded by LOTTO.



The Trinity Session production and operations base at The Orchards Project / Spark Gallery, Orchards, Johannesburg 2017 – pres.

RE-CREATION SPACES – multi-disciplinary team and facilitators

The Orchards Project

<http://www.orchardsproject.org.za>

The main thrust of the Orchards Project /Spark Gallery/ Art Complex is to create a self-sustaining composite of income producing entrepreneur based projects(EBP) that are self-reliant.

These EBP's will form public/private partnerships (PPP) to drive skills-trained employment in the small business community. Training in basic business practice is necessary to empower people to be able to quote competitively and market their newly acquired skills. Inlight of the planned expansion of the premises to accommodate a more comprehensive and user friendly facility our present funding fromLOTTOallows us to invest in a capital development applicable to the present needs.



Sarah Treherne
The Trinity Session



Zimvo Makaula
Z²



Mantala Nkoatse
The Trinity Session



Mpho Tsele
Play Africa



Futhi Mbongwe
Play Africa



Tebogso Dube
Play Africa

Play Africa and Trinity Session Representatives



Image: Play Africa Facebook Page



Philiso Sebole
Play Africa



Khanyisa Tofile
InTouch Youth Justice

Dream Careers, 9 April

To get the participants into the head-space of dreams and aspirations, as well as to introduce them to one another and to the facilitators, the children were asked to choose their dream careers and they got to dress up.



Site Walkabout, 9 April

As shown above, 6 sites were identified for the participants to analyse. The children were split into 5 groups of four and given the task of analysing each site using a simplified adaptation of the SWOT analysis technique – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats; renamed as:



Site 1: The Picnic Spot



Site 2: Gambler's Corner



Site 3: The Skinny Island



Site 4: The Forest



Site 5: The Dance Off

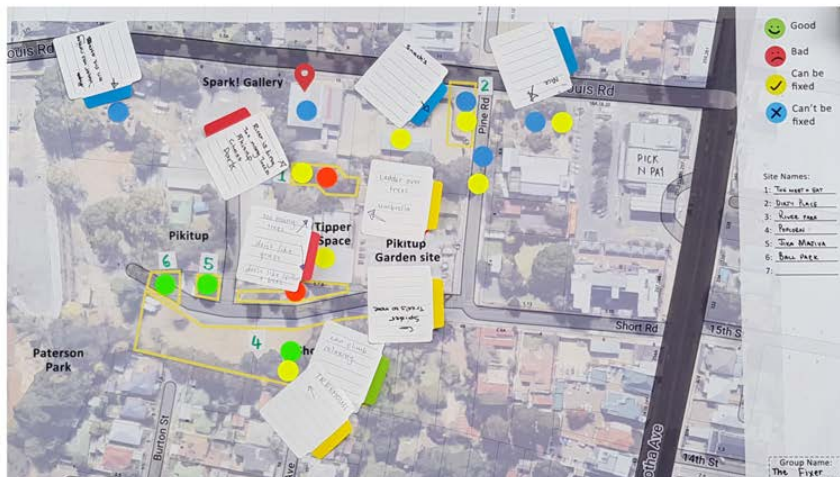
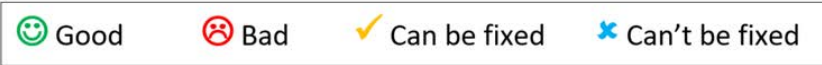


Site 6: The Basketball Court

Site Analysis, 10 April



As shown above, 6 sites were identified for the participants to analyse. The children were split into 5 groups of four and given the task of analysing each site using a simplified adaptation of the SWOT analysis technique – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats; renamed as:



Site 4 - The Forest

Team	Site Name	😊	😞	✓	✗
The Fixer Kids	Popcorn	1		1	
The Super 4	Eighty Spot	1	1	1	
Brilliant Kidz	Dinosaur Toes		2	1	3
Team Rocket Go	Jungle Mago Place	1		1	
Fire Fighters	Castle	1			
Total votes:		14	4	3	3

GOOD	BAD	CAN BE FIXED	CAN'T BE FIXED
Can climb trees	River is dirty	treehouse	
relaxing	Smelly rubbish	More slides and swings	
Able to jump and climb	Polluted, broken bottles	Put a gate and security guard	
Play soccer	Small space	Police should always be there	
Run around the trees playing hide and seek	Can't play soccer	Can put or design smiling pools	
Enough space	Too much space	Make a treehouse	
Play around the trees	Less trees	Police guards in trees	
	Broken swings then children don't have a place to play	Jungle with animals	
		Swings should be fixed	

Notes from site 4:

- Precious "I can't work at that place. I like this place because it is beautiful."
- Yongama "No trees, soccer poles. Zori Stadium. No digging, no fence."
- Itumeleng "Yes I can dance."
- Sanelisiwe "A little bit scary."
- Katlego "I like the space. I do like to put airport and a park."
- Siyanda "I can is car."
- Siya "I wonder if I can make playground for 8000 that will take me a week."
- Mpendulo "I don't like the hole in the grass on the ground because criminals will hide in it. I don't like the big tree in the park. I would like to build a police house in a tree house."



Site Sketches



Storyline Development, 14 May

After Workshop 1 was concluded, elements of the children's drawings, models and other creations were cataloged and turned into potential plot narratives, characters, and settings for a new story that would be decided on by the children.

The second workshop took place in the week following the National Elections on the 8th of May; taking advantage of this, a storyline "ballot" was compiled allowing to democratically vote for their preferred settings, themes, good guys and bad guys, etc.

The concept of voting, especially only being allowed one vote, was difficult to understand for a lot of the children, especially the younger ones.



Act 2 – Scene 1

IN THE JUNGLE. DRUMS ARE BEATING.

[BUILD AN ARK-PEACE WITH EVERY STEP: NU BAYA ROOTS]

Narrator The prince had never been into the Mighty Mago Jungle before. It was dark and scary but, in the distance, he heard singing.

FLION AND RHINOCORN ARE SITTING IN THEIR TREEHOUSE, SINGING TOGETHER AND THE BUTTERFLIES ARE SINGING AND DANCING ALONG. THE PRINCE FOLLOWS THE SOUND TO THE TREEHOUSE, PASSING THE BUTTERFLIES. PRINCE IS CRYING SOFTLY.

[MUSIC STOPS]

Rhinocorn Leodash, do you hear that? I think someone is crying.

Flion Let's go help them

FLION AND RHINO CORN LOOK DOWN AND SEE THE PRINCE SITTING UNDER THE TREEHOUSE.

Rhinocorn Hello! Do want to be our friend? I am Anna.

Flion And I am Leodash. Come into our treehouse.

Prince I'm Philip, just Philip. And I would like to be your friend. I don't have any friends anymore.

Narrator Prince Phillip lived happily with his new friends, and they sang many songs together. He found a new home in the forest, but he never forgot his sister.

Act 2 – Scene 2

IN THE CASTLE

Narrator Over time, the kingdom became full of darkness as the Wise Woman's prophecy had predicted. One day, while the princess was plotting over her next evil scheme, the two sheep escaped the castle and went to find the prince.

PRINCESS IS ON HER THRONE, DRAWING ON A PAPER AND LAUGHING EVILLY. THE TWO SHEEP RUN FROM BEHIND THE CASTLE HEADING TOWARDS THE JUNGLE. THEY CROSS THE BRIDGE AND LOOK LOST.

Sheep 1 Beautiful butterflies, where can we find the prince?

BUTTERFLIES ALL SMILE AND POINT TO THE TREE HOUSE.

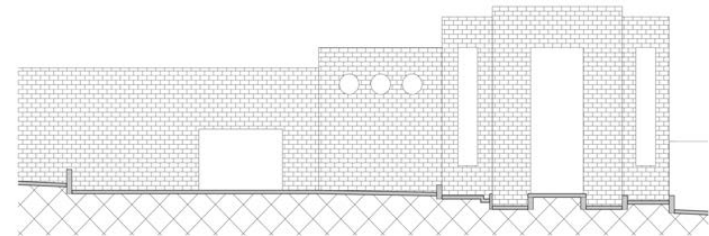
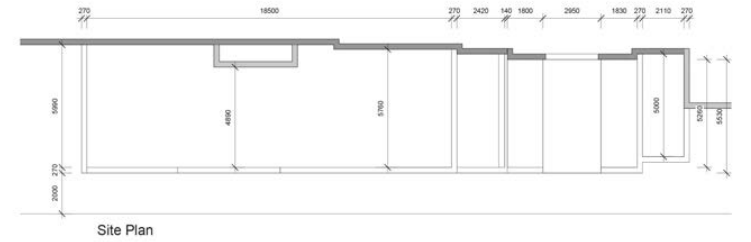
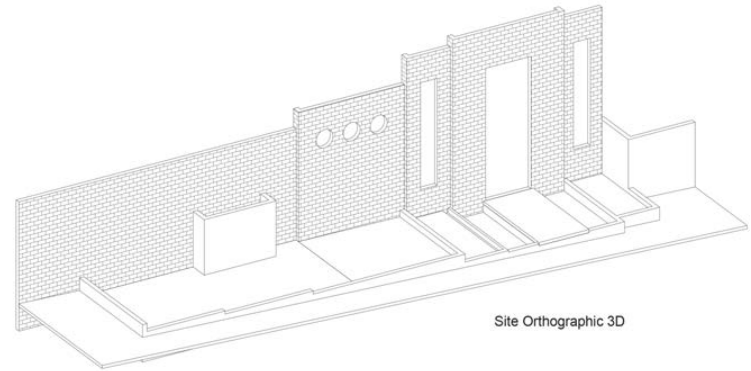
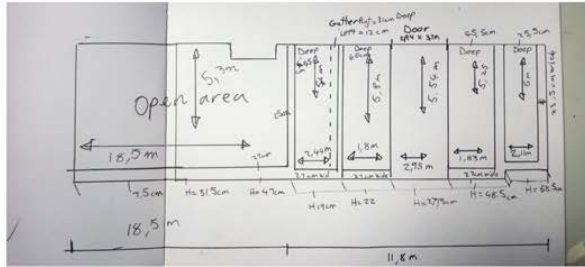
Sheep 2 Thank you Angel, Bumble and Sofia, the prettiest of all butterflies.

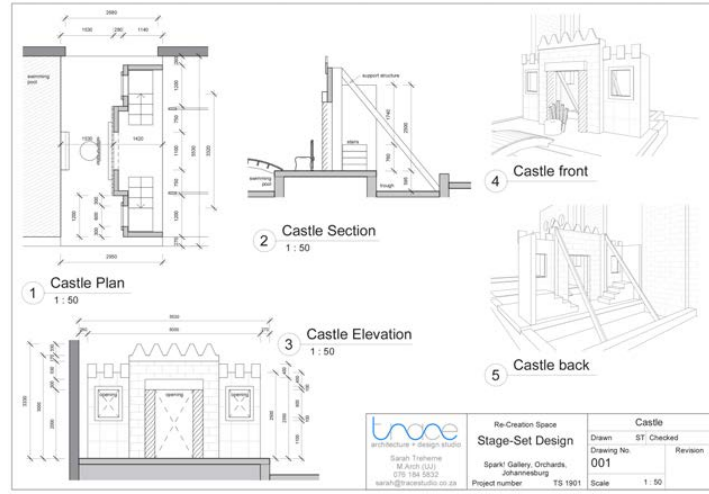
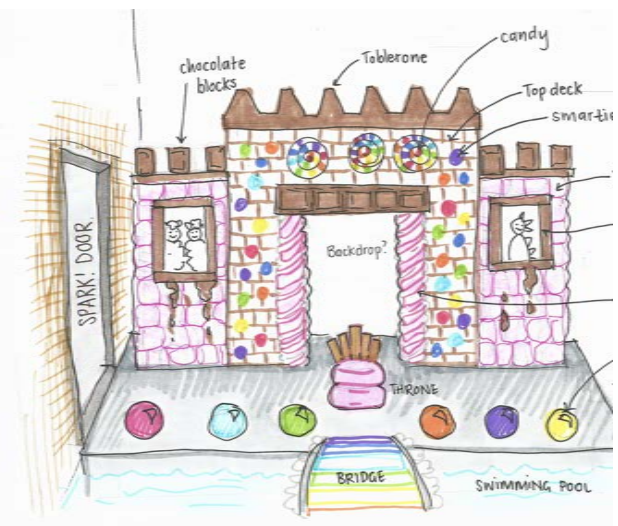
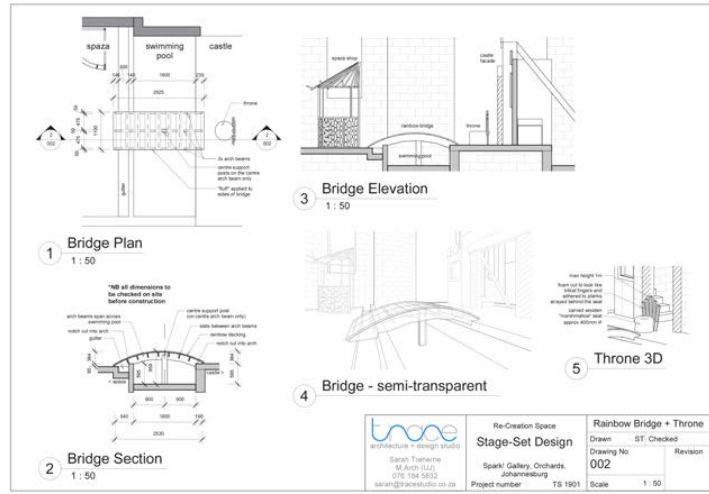
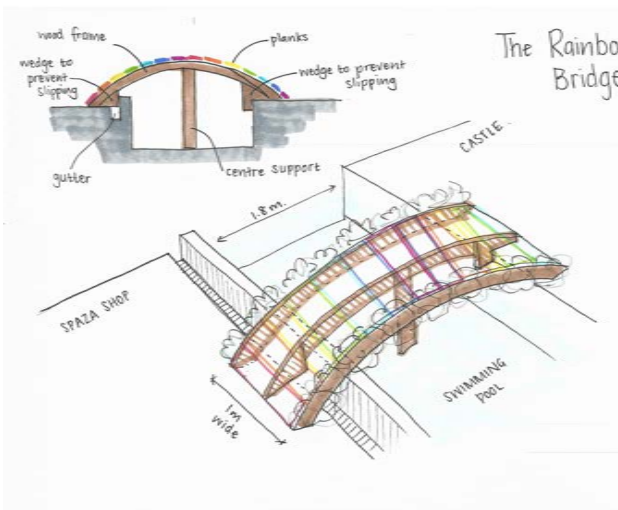
SHEEP GET TO THE TREEHOUSE AND LOOK UP.

Both sheeps: Prince Philip, we need your help. You are our only hope.

Flion and Rhinocorn together :You're a PRINCE??

Narrator The sheep explained how bad it was at the castle and how Princess Starfire had become so mean to her people. At first the prince didn't want to help, but eventually the sheep and his friends the Flion and Rhinocorn convinced him to be brave and save the kingdom.







YONGAMA Makaula
FRANKIE THE NARRATOR



MOKETE MOKUNYANE
PEN THE PINK SHEEP



KATLEGO SEKELE
THE DRAGON DANGEROUS



HAYDEN THOABANA
LEODASH THE FLION



Khanya Mkhize
ANGEL THE BUTTERFLY



PRECIOUS Nwajwu
SOFIA THE BUTTERFLY



GIFT BONGINKOSI SKWEYIYA
DINOSAUR RAAAARRR



ITUMELENG MOROPHI
Milo The Kudu



BOITUMELO MOROPHI
ANNA The RHINOCORN



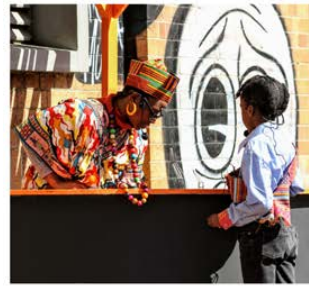
Bafokeng RAPITSE
Jack The Dinosaur

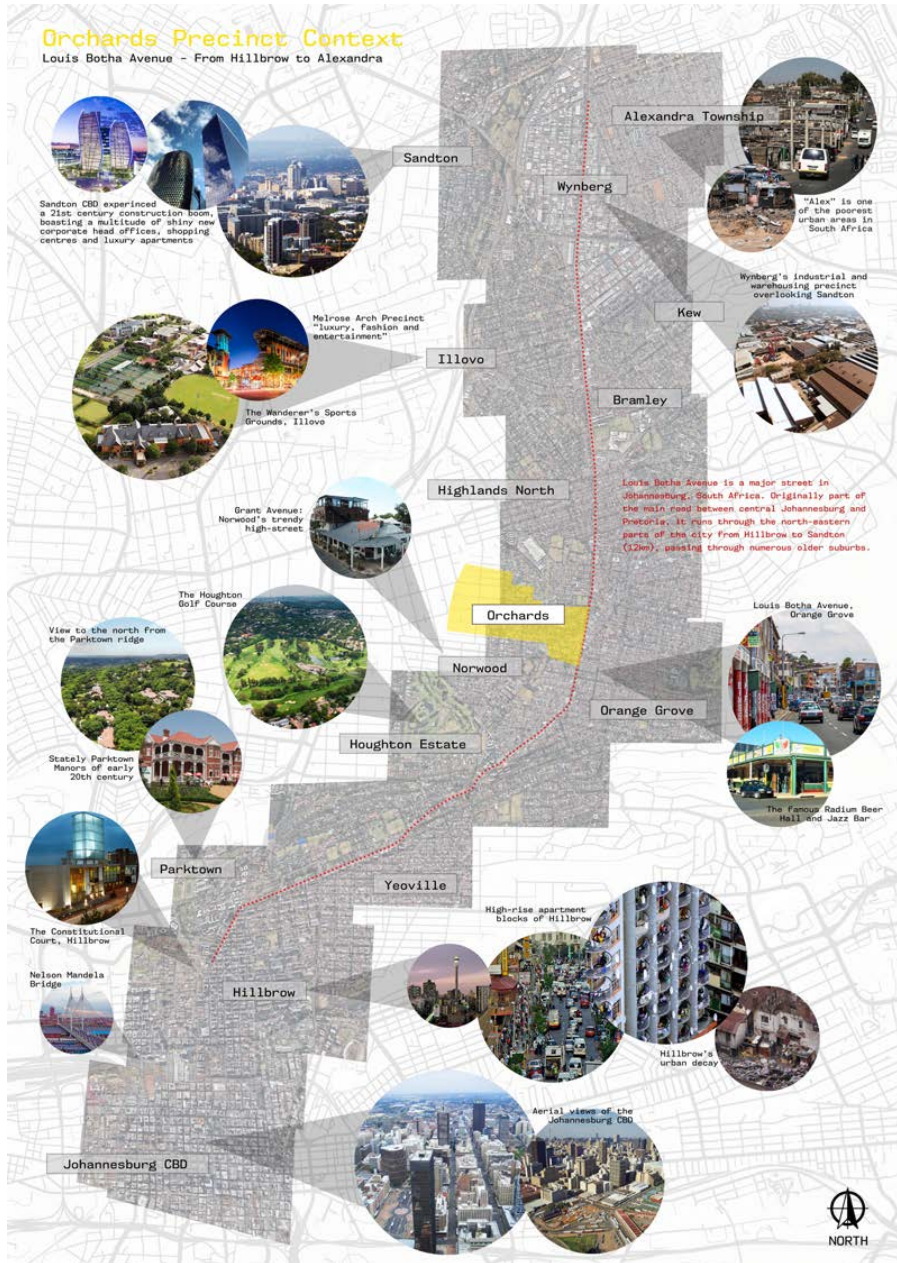


NTANDO PRECIOUS MSIMANG
PRINCE PHILLIP



SANELESIWE ZUMA
PRINCESS STARFIRE





Points of reflection:

Testing scalability: collaboration, audiences, users

Relevance: partnerships and participatory logics

Creative activation: imagining / making new urban form

Future funding: case study for upcycling

Expansive linear transit corridor: multiple histories, cultural politics and identities, future densities and economic growth

Events of the every day: potential for an urban festival.



Louis Botha Avenue - Transit Oriented Development Corridor

THANK YOU

[[]] the trinity session

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the trinity session



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