

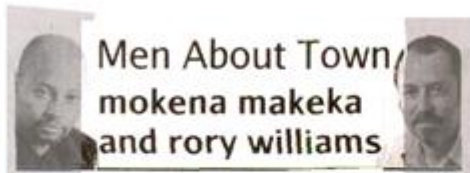
# Cape Town's win is an opportunity to design our own lives

AND now the work begins. The World Design Capital title is the start of a process of getting ordinary Capetonians to embrace their role as the designers of their lives. This is not an event, it is a movement – a shift in thinking about how we create all the pieces that make up the city.

That means, perhaps more than anything else, that we are all partners in the Cape Town project to create a better city.

Designer Mugendi M'Rithaa of CPUT in Cape Town is a member of Cape Town's World Design Capital bid committee.

In an interview on the Designtalk blog, he says that when consumers are treated as co-creators in a participatory design process, they appreciate the product and feel associated with it – they also begin to trust the designers of the things they use, and designers learn to trust the end user to make meaningful contributions. Just because systems are complex doesn't mean it's difficult to understand



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what design needs to achieve.

In designing the city, this requires not only changing mindsets, but creating space for people to actively define how they want to live their lives.

That space is defined by all the things that govern our actions; not just the physical, but also the rules and regulations.

Stellenbosch Mayor Conrad Sidego, who attended the IDA Conference in Taipei when Cape Town was announced as winner, said: "The physical environment is important, but design must now become part of our leaders' vocabulary. Those in the design industry must use this opportunity to plough back into the community and people that they design for – in that way you also unleash in

them their design potential. People should be encouraged to be co-designers of their existence now and in their future – not merely observers. It comes back to empowerment. Government can facilitate but it cannot create – it must give space to entrepreneurs and create an environment in which business designers, job designers, can operate.

"We must revisit the bylaws that cramp the style of these entrepreneurs. Our laws have to be redesigned so as not to inhibit designers. And if they aren't, there will be robust debate about the relevance of those legal barriers. We cannot allow them to stand in the way of jobs."

As a slogan, "This city works for you" is clever, but perhaps Council should consider changing it to "Unleashing your potential". One way or another government needs to get the message across that we are all in this together, and that the real resources come from people on the ground. To make that message a

reality, government will have to make it easier for people to act by showing us what we can do, rather than telling us what we can't.

And the more we get involved, the less we'll need to rely on cumbersome and inhibiting processes to ensure transparency.

In the private sector, community involvement has brought about voluntary disclosure in areas such as sustainable forestry and fishing, fair labour practice and green buildings.

Consumer-driven regulation is more responsive to a changing economy, whereas outdated rules are simply flouted. What we need is a framework that allows for continual learning and improvement, which requires a free flow of information between government and business and individual citizens.

Informed citizens are less easily hoodwinked by rogue operators, whether in government or the private sector, and they will more readily

understand their role in a democratic society and spot things that are not right. And help make them right.

Innovation comes from engagement rather than "command and control", but truly empowered engagement requires people who are free to make judgements, decisions and mistakes.

This autonomy will always pose a challenge for governance, but the old ways have not produced what is needed, so something's got to change.

Government will never be a leading innovator, but it can set the scene and watch what happens. With a learning frame of mind, government strategy can be adjusted to ensure that the combined actions of citizens bring us closer to goals that are consistent with business and social values. It's that alignment that will allow positive development to come naturally.

[www.men-about-town.co.za](http://www.men-about-town.co.za)

● (The M'Rithaa interview is at [www.formula-d.co.za/blog/](http://www.formula-d.co.za/blog/))