

MAKING CITIES TOGETHER

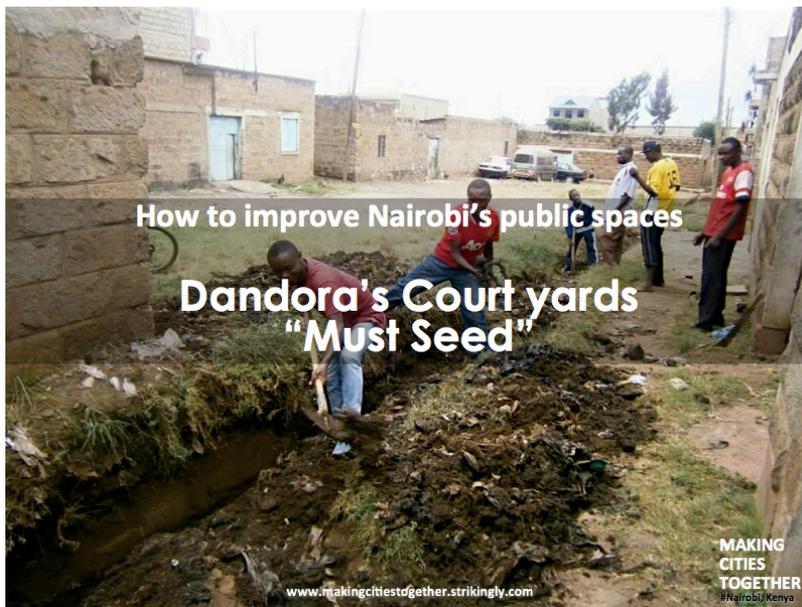


Figure 1 "Must Seed" - []Rehabilitation work of one of Dandora Courtyards

Keywords: Public Spaces, Participatory Urban Design, Sustainability, Placemaking

1. Introduction

'Making Cities Together' was conceptualised as a project that promotes exchange of knowledge, ideas, best practices and experiences among various actors in the field of Placemaking, and participatory urban development from across the world. Through strong partnerships and cross-sector collaborations with the county government, the UN, NGOs, the Private Sector, the Civil Society, the Academia, Community Based Organisations, Youth Groups, and individuals, the project sought to affirm the central role of partnerships in the creation of pleasant and timeless neighborhoods, and public spaces. It was further conceived as a pilot to showcase what is possible and showcase a best practice example of making great and sustainable community, and public spaces that can be replicated. The project aims to develop a sustainable, viable, and long term agenda for Nairobi's public spaces. As an entry point into Nairobi, the project first sought to demystify Nairobi's social-spatial (in this case placemaking) ecosystem. This fed directly into a research, which involved a diverse group of students from local universities. Thereafter the findings were used to form the basis for a Placemaking Design Lab with experts from across the world, the Academia, NGOs, and Youth Groups leading the initiatives whilst getting feedback from Private Sector and the UN.

2. Methodology

Making Cities Together adopted Placemakers methodology. This methodology seeks to revive public spaces by understanding the existing context by evaluating the local potential and capitalising on the local assets and ideas. MCT project team works in partnership with stakeholders including the local communities, local governments, the academia, and grassroots organisations to carry out socio-spatial research on-location; develop intervention strategies and design solutions in co-creation with various stakeholders and experts. Activate spaces and neighbourhoods through social and physical actions and to implement the physical intervention strategies. Foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for the space and neighbourhood through transfer of the management of the space to the local community.

During the Placemaking design Lab in May 2015, three intervention strategies were developed for the streets of Korochocho, the courtyards in Dandora and Jeevanjee gardens respectively. The selected 'Must Seed' Intervention strategy of Dandora as the best Placemaking Design Strategy.

Must Seed is developed as a step-by-step strategy to scale up from the courtyards to the streets to eventually the whole neighbourhood of Dandora with the leave-way, the dumpsite, the abandoned factory area nearby and the Dandora train station area as bigger opportunities for development further into the future. According to the jury, the strategy shows a realistic roadmap for implementing the expertise of the local organisation on the different scales of the public scale of the neighbourhood. Building on what is already there, using the momentum of the users, bringing stakeholders together, finding ways to accelerate transformation, encouraging pride and identity and self-worth as well as a sense of belonging are some of the reasons as to why we use a participatory placemaking approach. Design done top down will never result in ownership and pride as the users were never consulted and will never feel connected to the result, this is turn give a maintenance issue as we can see in the case of Dandora.

The Making Cities Together Project looks to do things in a different way, and by that it looks to inclusion and the people at the centre of design. The "model courts" initiative existed and building on that momentum, the "model street" is in process now. Using the incremental approach, the hope is that this can be taken to the city level eventually. The Making Cities Together look at the "model street" as an accelerator to positive transformation whilst keeping true to the notion that the people are the solution, with the hope that this process can create an enabling environment for change.

3. Results and Conclusion

The goal is to implement the 'Model Street' as the first phase of the creative and sustainable public space strategy called 'Must Seed' that derives from a local initiative for improving the public courtyards in Dandora, a neighbourhood in Nairobi. By creating a 'Model Street' an example will be set, providing a renewed sense of shared ownership and act as a replicable model for future projects that desire to reclaim public space as a useful, beautiful aspect of the city. Ultimately, this 'Model Street' could be a city wide or even nationwide way to tackle the use and management of public spaces. As Charles Gachanga, CEO of our partner CBO Dandora Transformation League says: "If you change Dandora, you change Nairobi. If you change Nairobi, you change Kenya." But the first step is to scale up from the improved court yards to the streets.

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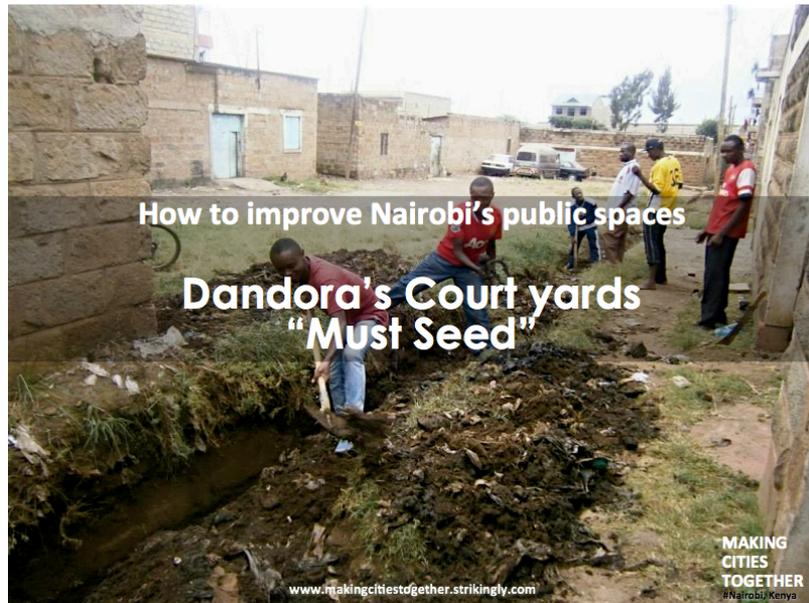


Figure 1 "Must Seed" - Rehabilitation work of one of Dandora Courtyards[]

Summary

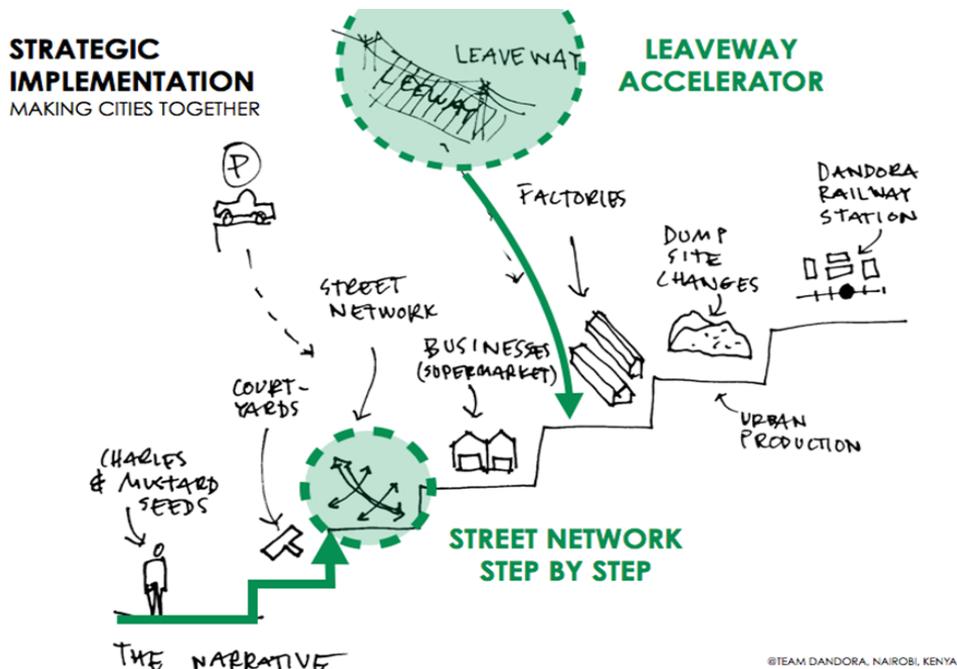
The initiative to design and create a 'Model Street' in the lower middle class neighbourhood Dandora in Nairobi, which also hosts the biggest dumpsite of Nairobi (KE), falls under the programme International culture, because it springs from a long-term relationship between Kenyan urban challenges and International/local urban design solutions. Through design workshops, Making Cities Together trains local citizens to come up with creative ideas, designs and maintenance solutions for streets and public spaces. Together with local designers and citizens MCT will rehabilitate the selected model street and build iconic entrances and organise public events for sharing knowledge. The entrances of the street including such elements as gateways, trees, seating areas and colourful facades among others are essential for a successful 'Model Street' welcoming the public, creating local identity and showing the change and pride of the people living and working on the streets.

Culture as we believe, is cultivated in pride, hence why the design of the 'Model Street' will place importance on fostering ownership by the community. It is part of the two-year public space project in Nairobi called 'Making Cities Together'. This project is also embedded in the Public Space programme of the Nairobi City County and UN-Habitat. 'Making Cities Together' contributes to the long-term agenda for the improvement of public space and will be shown at the Habitat 3 conference in 2016 in Quito, Ecuador.

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Building on what is already there, using the momentum of the users, bringing stakeholders together, finding ways to accelerate transformation, encouraging pride and identity and self-worth as well as a sense of belonging are some of the reasons as to why we use a participatory placemaking approach. Design done top down will never result in ownership and pride as users who were never consulted will never feel connected to the result. This in turn contributes to poor maintenance of the improved facilities because without a sense of ownership, there is little incentive to invest in maintenance. The Making Cities Together Project looks to do things in a different way, and by that it looks to inclusion and the people as the centre of design. The "model courts" initiative existed and building on that momentum, the "model street" is in progress now. Using the incremental approach, the hope is that this can be taken to the city level eventually, and done in a way that builds on the current momentum whilst ensuring we do not lose any of the culture in the upgrading process. Whilst the process is incremental for many reasons, the belief that attitude transformation takes time as inclusion without discrimination is necessary. The Making Cities Together look at the "model street" as an accelerator to positive transformation whilst keeping true to the notion that the people are the solution, with the hope that this process can create an enabling environment for change.

Dandora, a low-income neighbourhood in Nairobi, is famously known for its dumpsite,

the biggest in Africa, and high crime levels. The initially well-planned neighbourhood has degenerated to the level of a slum and has consequently become one of the most unsafe places in Nairobi, particularly for women and children. The neighbourhood lacks basic amenities like street lighting, street furniture and good quality community places and playgrounds. This has resulted into insecurity and inadequate safety for the local community particularly women and children.

However, this is slowly but steadily changing. Young people in the neighbourhood are leading the way to bring about change by taking the initiative to found projects that transform their courts and the neighbourhood in general. The courts are not only a physical space but they are also a model social structure—a way of organising the local community into manageable household units. The Mustard Seed, which has now teamed up with a lot other local youth groups to form an umbrella body—Dandora Transformation League (DTL). DTL is leading the transformation of Dandora through an innovative intervention known as the Changing Faces Challenge. The Changing Faces Challenge (CFC) has gamified the way the youth teams are transforming their respective court yards by offering awards to the teams that demonstrate the greatest effort and impact in rehabilitating and recreating their court yard into clean, green and safe spaces. Through CFC the youths in the courts have taken on a role of social catalysts, where different groups in the neighbourhood have different interests and different parts to play in the use and maintenance of the space: kids play, teenagers and adults create jobs by



Figure 3 Placemaking Design Lab at the United Nation HQ, Nairobi May 2015[]

carrying out maintenance, providing security -as court guards, and some have even set up small businesses inside the court - providing basic household goods and services to the locals. The Making Cities Project wants to take this to the streets and initiate a “Street Model” that brings the courtyards together and spill over their momentum onto the shared spaces.

2.2 Toward Placemaking

Placemaking is a collaborative process for the planning, design and management of public spaces in co-creation. It involves revitalising a space, street block or neighbour-

hood through initiating a variety of small-scale initiatives, which improve the use and quality of the spaces. The ultimate goal is to improve the living environment and the networks of neighbourhoods. In principle, placemaking aims to improve the quality of a public place, neighbourhood or city and the lives of its community in tandem. In practice, placemaking seeks to build or improve public spaces, spark public discourse, create beauty and delight, engender civic pride, connect neighbourhoods, improve community health and safety, grow social justice, catalyse economic development, promote environmental sustainability, and of course nurture an authentic 'sense of place'. (Department of Urban Studies and Planning 2013)

A bottom up approach through participatory planning enhances the quality of governance by creating more democratic processes that are more equitable. An inclusive process and involvement of those affected by plans as well as those making the plans result in planning innovations that are specifically applicable and relevant to the beneficiaries of that plan and the challenges they face. The process also allows for avenues not yet explored as well as looking for solutions with all actors allows for a more timely and efficient planning process. The benefits of participation include more synergies, empowerment, sustainability, and mutual learning and growth.

4. Results

5. Model Street

A 'Model Street' is designed to enhance liveability, interaction and safety in meeting places and street upgrading interventions; welcoming gate ways, benches, attractive art

Figure 4 MCT step-by-step strategic implementation plan[]

patterns, colourful paving, trees, lighting, play facilities and bins. MCT seeks to adopt up-cycling of waste with local and global companies to make paving materials creatively designed into mosaic, and benches among others. In addition MCT will work together with local producers of materials and products. This is to kick start the bigger vision of the design team; getting more business out of the dumpsite by making products for the neighbourhood upgrading project.

Like the model court developed by Mustard Seeds, the 'Model Street' is envisioned to act as a benchmark to guide future intervention activities on the streets. Dandora Transformation League will mobilize their members to start cleaning and beautifying the street block.

5.1.1 Priority 1: The Model Street rehabilitation

The whole street connecting the entrances to the meeting places is the first step. An important stakeholder group is the street vendors and business community. They are of great value for the 'Model Street'. With the involvement of the local vendors and business owners in finding new solutions for attracting customers with ambiance lighting, attractive buildings structures and see how they can be formalised. Kiosks will be designed to be Dandora specific and unique to Dandora. This will also go a long way to boost the local economy.



Figure 5 Artistic impression of the proposed Model Street

5.1.2 Priority 2: Meeting places along the Model Street

The outcomes of a community consultation showed that people meet and children play most of the time in the courtyards. By creating meeting places along the street we stimulate social greater interaction within a bigger community and eyes on the street.

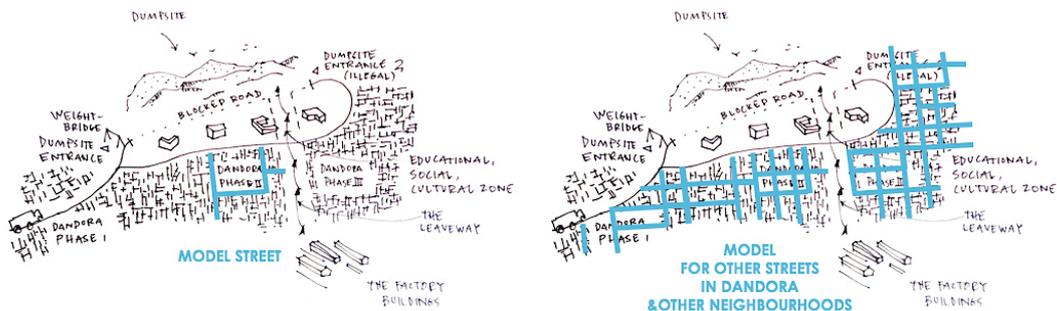


Figure 6 Illustration of the up-scaling of the model street

5.1.3 Priority 3: Entrance of the model street

The entrances of the street are the final step of strategy. These attractive entrances with gateways and art will welcome the public, creating local identity and show the change and pride of the people living within the block and working on the streets. The street entrances will also be symbolic of the new and pleasant experience embodied by the model street.

In addition to the 'Model Street', the team plans to develop the leave-way as a catalyst of the strategy. The leave-way is a large open space with restrictions on conventional development as it provides an access way for erecting masts that carry high voltage electricity lines. Currently the leave-way exists as a disused and neglected land area with sporadic vegetable gardens and illegally erected informal houses and places of

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worship. In the dark of the night, the area has become one of the most infamous crime spots in Nairobi. This space presents an opportunity for development of large scale recreational and Sports Park and urban farming activities among others. It also serves to connect different the different phases of Dandora and particularly phase 2 and 3. The team is already in conversation with Nairobi City County and the Kenya Power and Lighting Company, which are the custodians of the space, for consent and approvals to create safe public spaces on the piece of land.

In October 2015, 'Making Cities Together' teamed up with UN-Habitat to do a community consultation project on the design of gateways as an entry point to the implementation of Must Seed strategy. The project objective was to get the ideas, priorities, and aspirations of the community. This was a four days exercise distributed across the four Saturdays of October. Minecraft is a computer game that is design-based. The idea was to get the local citizens to design the street block in Minecraft environment. These would then inform the architectural design that would be further developed by the design team. For the implementation of the 'Model Street', a schematic spatial design is developed. At the very minimum, the design will include gateways, trees, street lamps, painting, street furniture such as benches, dustbins and shelters, flowers and shrubbery and street paving. For the organisation, design and building, capacity building workshops and public promotion a framework is developed.



Figure 6 Minecraft workshop proposed entrance gateway

The expected quality results for The Making Cities Together team after the implementation of the 'Model Street' project will be improved capacity for the community to transform their neighbourhood in a sustainable manner and increased income levels due to increased retail activities and employment opportunities. Not to mention reduced crime levels as a result of better lighting and community policing, improved public health as a result of a cleaner and greener environment, increased involvement of residents in their neighbourhood resulting into civic expression, pride and ownership, increased safety in public spaces especially for women and girls, increased social opportunities for children, youth and the general public and improved and coordinated management of the neighbourhood and its public spaces. The team also hopes to provide a practical example linking policies to planning practices.

The target groups include having multiple public presentation and discussion in art centres, like the GoDownArtsCentre, expecting over 200 people, citizens (youth groups, street vendors, women groups, men, elderly, disabled, children), local community organisations, local architects and urban designers/planners and artists, international architects and urban designers/planners as well as local Government (urban planning, environment department).

The goal is to implement the 'Model Street' as the first phase of the creative and sustainable public space strategy called 'Must Seed' that derives from a local initiative for improving the public courtyards in Dandora, a neighbourhood in Nairobi. The Model Street will result in a street that is accessible for everybody that lives and works in the neighbourhood, refurbished and reclaimed by art, with new entrances 'gateways', benches, trees, bins, street lights, etc. By creating a 'Model Street' an example will be set, providing a renewed sense of shared ownership and act as a replicable model for future projects that desire to reclaim public space as a useful, beautiful aspect of the city. All aspects that will make up the 'Model Street' will directly result from the neighbourhoods it will represent, for example by using art we will create and use designs that have been thought through and chosen with the neighbourhoods of Dandora in order to create pride and preserve heritage through the designs.

Ultimately, this 'Model Street' could be a city wide or even nationwide way to tackle the use and management of public spaces. As Charles Gachanga, CEO of our partner CBO Dandora Transformation League says: "If you change Dandora, you change Nairobi. If you change Nairobi, you change Kenya." But the first step is to scale up from the improved court yards to the streets. This in itself represents how deep culture is within the inhabitants of Dandora in that they believe that the first step to change is by changing what they can and are willing to, therefore in turn ensuring that they do not lose the things that are important to them in the change process.

6. Discussion

During the next two decades, the urban population of Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to double. Fast growing cities in this area face challenges of sustainability and quality of life. Challenges that put at risk resource and food security, mobility and logistics, water and waste management, health and wellbeing. Public spaces are strategically important for the cities' urban, social and economic development. High-quality public spaces are not only recognisable for visiting tourists, investors and companies, but are also fulfilling the needs of residents to meet and have leisure. Public spaces influence the character, appearance and climate of a neighbourhood and have fundamental effects on the wellbeing and quality of life of citizens. Nairobi is a prime example of this kind of fast growing cities in need of sustainable solutions for complex issues. In Nairobi, rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation has forced limited public open spaces (originally intended to serve a population of 250,000) to serve more than 3 million people. (Matindi 2008)

Public open spaces in Nairobi suffer from degradation, overcrowding, and insecurity and land grabbing, thus denying city residents access to much-needed recreation and leisure facilities. (Makworo and Mireri 2011) The placemaking inventory, which Placemakers and the Technical University in Kenya conducted in 2015, showed that Nairobi is a pioneer in participative urban development and placemaking contributes solving these public space issues. (Placemakers 2014) However, these trajectories face challenges as they are lacking expertise to guide and implement them. Solutions for high quality and inclusive public spaces are made possible by a cross-sectorial cooperative approach, utilisation of new technologies and design methods. But no party can do this alone, so we organised the Making Cities Together project as urban solutions require interaction, dialogue and cooperation between knowledge institutes, companies, cities and citizens.

The selected strategy 'Must Seed' takes place in Dandora a well-planned neighbourhood, built with support of the World Bank for the lower middle class in 1970s, fully furnished with amenities including social halls, health centres, schools and play grounds among others. However, due to poor management, the neighbourhood has gradually declined into a slum. As a result, the neighbourhood has in the recent years hit news headlines for all the wrong reasons. It has been infamous not only for its huge dumpsite- the largest in Kenya, but also because of numerous cases of violent crime, drug abuse, rape, and prostitution.

However, a movement is a foot to re-image, and rebrand this neighbourhood. Young people are leading the way to bring about change in their neighbourhood. They are taking the initiative to reclaim the lost glory of the neighbourhood. Cleaning up and landscaping open spaces, opening up drainages, and painting facades. The effects of this transformation have since been felt in the increased local retail activities, improved safety and security, a stronger social cohesion, and a better relationship with the authorities.

Partnerships and collaborations have been a key element of the Making Cities Together project. The partnerships sought have not only been with the private sector and government but also with the local community, led by Dandora Transformation League (DTL) – an umbrella body representing various youth groups spearheading revitalisation in various parts of the neighbourhood. The role of MCT has been to give technical support to DTL and upscale the successes achieved at the courts, and through a pilot project build the capacity of the locals, by practically showing a sustainable way of making a resilient neighbourhood through public spaces.

Like in many other bottom-up initiatives in other cities, Dandora experience shows that government tends to step in when things are working, when there is evidence of results. This is also true for the private sector, which has not been willing to buy the idea of potentials.

As a result of the initiatives in the community, the following results have been achieved: Improved security and safety, improved relationship with authorities- the relationship between the local youth and the chief, and the sub-county administrator has greatly improved. This relationship has resulted into rare collaborations particularly with regard to reclaiming public spaces; better cohesion and good neighbourliness – fostered community policing improved self-esteem and local pride – today, people of Dandora take pride in their neighbourhood and themselves. They are starting to feel that they are a part of the city again. Importantly, there has been change of mindsets, and better capacity among the local people to engage with diverse stakeholders.

7. Conclusion

One of our key achievement has been the ability to connect a community driven initiative with local and international practitioners to amplify what has already been initiated by the community and is owned by them. Our entry point as amplifiers and supporters has underlined the fact that the communities can be at the centre of creating solutions and are not mere beneficiaries of hand-outs and largesse. We also see awareness creation as another an achievement (public, students, businesses, government, all layers) in the revitalisation of public spaces. We are using an incremental approach in our public spaces project, learning while doing and also highlighting ongoing placemaking activities within the city.

We hope to implement the designs in the streets of Dandora as planned. Creating a place to be and a benchmark for other streets and neighbourhoods. We aim to publish a book documenting our research and the process of Making Cities Together. We also hope to take this forward to other public spaces in Kenya. We hope the process we use has a spill over effect on all of our partners and stakeholders involved, as we believe that the way they do things needs to shift.

Through this endeavour, many opportunities to present has been realised from Nairobi Design Week, to the residents association of Kenya (KARA) to the Planners Association of Kenya (TCPAK), the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) meeting at UN, Nairobi, Kenya as well as in Rome, Berlin and Amsterdam for various meetings.

8. Acknowledgements

This paper would not be realised without the partnership with International Federation of Housing and Planning (DK), International New Town Institute (NL), Placemakers. The team appreciates the collaboration with UN-HABITAT, Nairobi City County, Dutch Alliance for Sustainable Urban Development in Africa (DASUDA) to not only give technical expertise, but also share best practices and experiences. Special thanks goes to the, students of the the Technical University of Kenya and the University of Nairobi for their inputs, and field support in gathering and analysing data.

Lastly, we would like to specially thank KUWA, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Avanti Architecture Ltd, Cave Ltd, Naipolitans, Dandora Transformation League, Citilinks, Rodeo Architects and Land and Civilisation Compositions for constant engagement in the process, and shaping the discourse to date.

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