

Branding so Good: from Jeppestown to Maboneng Precinct

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1 ABSTRACT

Cities globally, have long felt the necessity to distinguish themselves from each other, to proclaim their eccentricity in a quest for various economic, political or socio-psychological objectives. Johannesburg was often referred to as “the city of gold” and the “financial and economic hub of Sub-Saharan Africa.” Since the 21st century, slogans such as “world class african city” and “world class city” have been commonly used by investors, students, skilled workers and tourists to sell the City of Johannesburg. Various businesses, spaces, places and organisations in Johannesburg have in the past be branded using African names as well as slogans in order to enrich their images and to greatly catch the attention of the rising middle-class which is known for their high consumption level. There are no explicit studies that inform the use of African names for branding the Maboneng Precinct. Since there is lack of scholarly literature on the use of African names as a means of branding this paper evaluates the ways in which African names have been used as branding for the Maboneng Precinct. This paper aims to evaluate the transformation of Jeppestown to Maboneng precinct and looks at how branding through the use of African names has influenced this transformation of tradition versus branding. The case study design has been adopted and a qualitative approach will be used to collect data. Data will be collected through structured interviews with personnel involved in afro-branding in Maboneng, as well as through desktop study from various sources such as books, journals and reports; and through observations and photographic surveys of the Maboneng precinct area. The research design also uses both cross-sectional and longitudinal is used for this study, whereby in cross-sectional study the researcher records information about the subject without manipulating the study environment. The longitudinal study on the other hand is also observational and the researcher will be able to detect any changes in the characteristics of Maboneng. Research findings reveal that not only is the name Maboneng an african name branding but, various other places and businesses have been branded using African names in the Jeppestown to Maboneng transition. The results reveal that there are various places and businesses within the Maboneng precinct area that have used Afro-branding and alos highlight how this has helped in boosting the precincts economy. This paper concludes by recommending that more effort needs to exerted in encouraging the use of Afro-branding within and around the Maboneng precinct and that this type of branding should be use to attract people of all income levels and groups.

Keywords: Branding, Transformation, Jeppestown, Maboneng, Central Business District.

2 INTRODUCTION

Cities globally, have long felt the necessity to distinguish themselves from each other, to proclaim their eccentricity in a quest for various economic, political or socio-psychological objectives. Johannesburg was often referred to as “the city of gold” and the “financial and economic hub of Sub-Saharan Africa” (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Since the 21st century, slogans such as “world class african city” and “world class city” have been commonly used by investors, students, skilled workers and tourists to sell the City of Johannesburg (Rogerson, 2004). Various businesses, spaces, places and organisations in Johannesburg have in the past been branded using African names as well as slogans in order to enrich their images and to greatly catch the attention of the rising middle-class which is known for their high consumption level (Onyebadi, 2018). Streets using African names and monuments using African names have been used throughout Johannesburg for example the Nelson Mandela bridge, Mary Fitzgerald square, Mirriam Makeba street and Ntemi- Piliso street, Nelson Mandela square, Charlotte Maxeke Hospital and Hector Pietersen museum; these names have been used to change the perceptions of the urban places in the city. Furthermore, the use of african names as a branding technique has been instrumental in repositioning and re-imaging the city of Johanneburg at both local and global level. This has ideally mobilised culture and aesthetics of an area (McCarthy, 2006). There are no explicit studies that inform the use of African names for branding the Maboneng Precinct. Since there is lack of scholarly literature on the use of African names as a means of branding this paper evaluates the ways in which African names have been used as branding for the Maboneng Precinct. This paper aims to evaluate the transformation of Jeppestown to Maboneng precinct and

looks at how branding through the use of African names has influenced this transformation of tradition versus branding in the Maboneng precinct area.

3 CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Different scholar's express various views on the concept of branding. Thus under this heading, Afro-branding and City branding are discussed as follows;

3.1 Afro-Branding

In the City of Johannesburg, various places, businesses and spaces have been branded using African names and slogans to heighten their images and to clasp the attention of the ever increasing middle-class which is well known for their high consumption levels (Mlangeni, 2009). This act is referred to as Afro-branding in this paper. When powerful names such as Mandela are used in branding, this serves to legitimise the process of appropriation of spaces regardless of how biased the process may be. This is a problem because most often when an influential name such as Mandela is used to brand spaces, it is often so powerful that it silences dissent voice (Sihlongonyane, 2015). The minute the name Nelson Mandela hospital or Nelson Mandela bridge is mentioned, his credentials are euded and society overlook probing the criteria that has been used in choosing specific names to brand spaces. In this instance, probing the process and the criteria under which the name Mandela was chosen instead of other names would be seen as an offence and disrespect to the struggle hero (Mlangeni, 2009). While recognising that various elements influence Afro-branding, it should be noted that the scenery of the branded spaces most often creates exclusionary spaces that inhibit the common people from enjoying images reflecting their cultures.

Sihlongonyane (2008, p. 301), highlights an instance where people were relocated to Alexandra in order to make space for the Mandela museum and notes that none of the displaced residents contested the relocation because of the wider cultural and political significance Mandela commands. In Nelson Mandela square situated in Sandton, a behaviour which is obnoxious or any act on the space branded with Mandela's name is outlawed and carrying of serious punishment. The satire rising from Afro-branding places, buildings and spaces is that although they are depicted as welcoming and accessible to everyone, it is only certain people, slogans, names and forms of behaviours that are targeted for certain spaces (Murray, 2011). One major challenge with branding is that the sustainability of the brand when a celebrity whose name has been used to brand a certain space gets involved in misconduct, continuing to associated with that particular celebrity's blemished image may have bad implications for the place, space or the brand (Sihlongonyane, 2015).

3.2 Urban branding

Urban branding is place marketing, it is the process whereby each urban area describes and converses about its brilliant features and competitive advantages efficiently in order to differentiate and position itself for its target markets (Julier, 2005; Rehan, 2013). The concept of urban branding treats places as products and the prospectus users of places as the client whose opinions and mental images of that place have to be influenced and managed (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Urban branding in reality is the strategic marketing tool that comprises of attracting inward investments, bids to host events, attracting shoppers, attracting residents, leisure tourism; changes places images through design and street furniture; using slogans, names, memories and culture to brand places (Dinnie, 2011; Chang, 2000; Greenberg, 2003). Urban branding as a collective has three related dimensions to it. The first dimension is that branding compels instant recognition, thus the stress on synergies with sports and entertainment industries and celebrities (Riza et al., 2012). Secondly, well-being and certainty are important for leisure and the last dimension is about how branded spaces "provide a point of identification for consumers in an increasingly crowded marketplace" (Hannigan, 2003, p. 352)

Urban branding is innovative and can be defined as the process whereby exclusive physical features of the city are defined and come to encapsulate the spirit of the place. It is not only limited to promoting a positive image of the city but involves more, to alter it into an urban experience (Sepe & Pitt, 2017). It is a process of variation and modification whereby the local tourism organizations, museums, arts and cultural facilities, historic preservation groups harness and construct place images; help creating tourist sites to attract consumers and investment to a certain local area (Gotham, 2007). The branding of places and cities contains two major elements as follows:

- Place making, which is a process that makes the place beneficial or attractive
- Place or city marketing, the determination to stimulate the place/ city specific advantage (Sepe & Pitt, 2017).

Urban branding is more than a strategic and rationalized form of place making and place marketing; it is about building and modelling an urban imaginary which is assumed to be a historically based ensemble of representations drawn from architecture and street plans of the city, the art created by its residents and the images of the city; heard or read in the movies, on television and other forms of mass media (Riza et al., 2012). As illustrated in Figure 1, city branding involves the main things that people should know about a particular place (Rehan, 2013). At most, the process of brand creation involves media generated imagery, branding urban projects and branding city life, signature architecture, historical buildings and the general form of the city as illustrated in Figure 1.

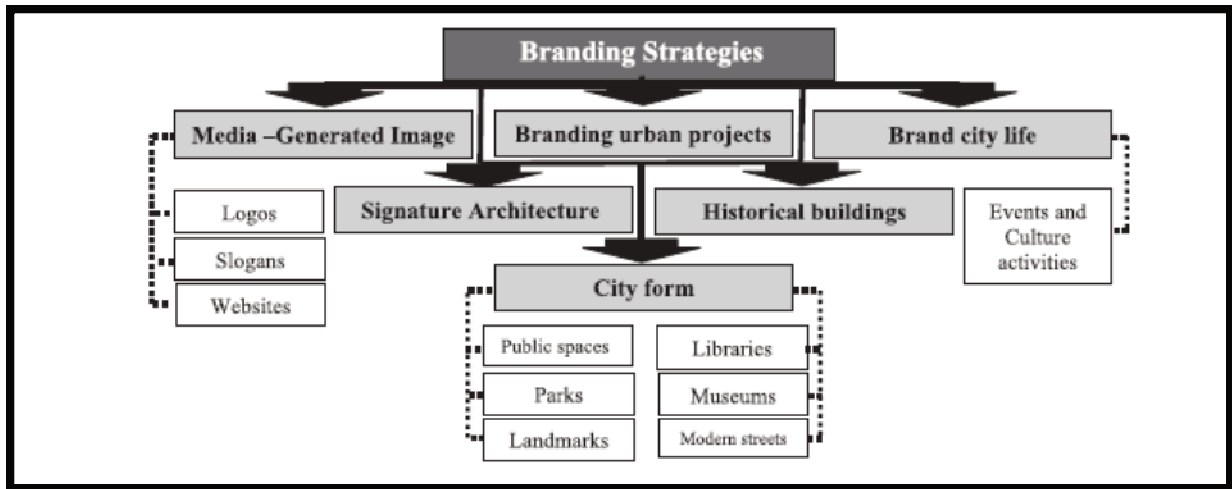


Figure 1: Different types of brandings and their strategies. (Source: Rehan, 2013)

Thus as discussed under this section there are various forms of branding, this paper has discussed Afro-branding and Urban branding. The other various forms of branding are illustrated in Figure 1. Thus, all kinds of branding are concerned about the image of the city, attracting people to the city and increasing the competition of the city.



Figure 2: Location of Maboneng Precinct. (Source: Bahman & Frenkel, 2012)

4 LOCALIZING THE CONTEXT

Maboneng precinct was formed from a section of Jeppestown found on the eastern side of the Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD) (Myambo, 2007). The Maboneng meaning “place of light” in Sesotho was formed in 2009, when a property developer named Jonathan Liebmann purchased a collection of warehouses in a rundown town block which borders Berea street, Fox street and Main Street (Propertuity , 2016). Maboneng precinct is situated on the east side of the Johannesburg CBD. The precinct is bounded by Berea, Doornfontein and Yeoville.

Maboneng precinct is a privately owned neighbourhood which was started by its founder Jonathan Liebmann who is also the CEO of Propertuity the development company that created Maboneng. The precinct stretches over two suburbs which are City and Suburban as seen in Figure 2, and Jeppestown being the oldest suburb in the city containing numerous old buildings that have given the area a distinctive heritage (Propertuity , 2016).

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study has taken up an exploratory research design (Swanson, 2015); as it seeks to investigate a problem where there are no explicit studies that inform the impact of urban resilience in the Maboneng precinct area and there are limited documented studies that inform the use of African names for branding the Maboneng precinct. A qualitative research approach was used which enabled the collecting of qualitative data (Cropley, 2015). The research was carried out through in-depth interviews with personnel involved in the establishment of the Maboneng Precinct area and those that saw or experienced the branding using African names around the area. This study involves evaluating the transformation of Jeppestown to Maboneng precinct and looks at how branding through the use of African names has influenced this transformation of traditions versus branding. Thus primary and secondary data was used in order to afford a crossing point between practice and theory (Friedman, 2019). The site was visited for observation and photographic survey purposes and photographs of the Precinct were taken using a camera. Furthermore, photographs were also obtained from the Museum Africa in Newton, Johannesburg through selecting the relevant pictures and placing an order. Qualitative data collected was analysed through the use of observation results, data reduction, theory building and testing. The purposive sampling and snowball method was used to recognize the main informers who are part of the building team of the Maboneng Precinct.

6 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This subheading presents the research finding for this study obtained from photographic surveys, indepth-interviews and observations conducted by the authors.

6.1 Afro-branding of Maboneng

The Maboneng Precinct has been the brain child of a man with a vision Jonathan Liebmann. Jonathan bought an empty, old industrial factory space on the east side of Johannesburg CBD in 2008 which was in the right location and was set at the right price and would be a good adventure in assisting the city in urban renewal (Propertuity , 2016). The first building to be renovated or better yet to experience urban renewal was Arts on Main which is 4500 square metre property that today houses art galleries, office spaces and artist studios (Murtagh, 2015).

Seen in Figure 3 is the Main street life building on the left before development and on the right hand side is Fox street. Figure 4 shows the Main Street life building after development and we able to see how this building has been Afro-branded for example on the far left of Figure 4 is a restaurant with an African name called PATA PATA which is derived from a zulu word Pata when translated into english means “ to touch”; worth also noting is the fact that the words Pata Pata are also closely associated with a song sung by Miriam Makeba called Pata Pata (Onyebadi, 2018). The word itself evocks a feeling of belonging and forms place making and place marketing (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005).



Figure 3: Left, Main Street life before renovations and right, fox street before development. (Source Burgess, 2009 found in Murtagh, 2012)



Figure 4: Main Street building after development.(Source: Author, 2018)

The naming of a restaurant after Miriam Makeba’s song who is a music icon who lived and performed during the struggle is in itself a great marketing tool because it has over the years attracted most residents in to the building and has attracted more customers (Murray, 2011).



Figure 5:Maboneng Signage. (Source: Author, 2018)

Figure 5 demonstrates how the word Maboneng meaning “place of lights” has been hung up in Kruger streets with light which light up at night and is a famously known spot where people visiting the precinct usually take pictures with the Maboneng signage in their pictures (Propertytuity , 2016). This is an illustration of Afro-

branding, here the entire precinct has been given an African name which heightens the image of the precinct and grabs the attention of the middle-class which is well known for their high consumption (Rehan, 2013).

6.2 Impacts of afro-branding and transformation of Maboneng precinct

6.2.1 Physical effects

When one looks at Maboneng today compared to 10 years ago as seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4, the precinct area has experienced transformation and as highlighted by Interview Respondent A, the precinct area used to be an industrial waste land and Figure 3 illustrates the dullness, derelict, decay condition the area was in approximately 10 years ago before experiencing physical change. Interview Respondent E mentioned that the precinct area has changed in character “most of the old buildings have been renovated, are now in good condition and have different uses. In the precinct area buildings that are derelict are becoming spaces and the area is marked by a lot of art be it painting, sculptures or wall graffiti which give the precinct a distinct feel to it.” Seen in Figure 6 is an example of the rocket factory before renovations on the right hand side and after renovations on the left hand side the building has improved and graffiti has been used as a form of branding to create a lively sense and to attract more people to the building.



Figure 6: Left, Rocket build after renovation, right, Rocket building before renovation. (Source: Greene Group Consulting Engineers (Pty) Ltd, 2018)

As seen in Figure 6 compared to Figure 3 the precinct area has changed drastically, physically with the building seen in Figure 6 renovated and painted with art work, trees are planted around the building.

6.2.2 Economic effects

Interview respondent B mentioned that, “Maboneng has changed over the past 10 years these changes are seen in the fact that there are now hotels, restaurants, art galleries, Sunday markets and residents.” As seen in Figure 4 the precinct area is marked with mixed uses such as restaurants (Pata-Pata is seen in Figure 4), hotels (12 Decades art hotel seen in Figure 4) and The Popart performing art centre; these have been able to provide employment. These various businesses as seen in Figure 4 have affected the economy of the precinct in that the precinct area is able to generate its own capital from various visitors and those staying in the area and in so doing maintain itself (Mashiri, 2017). In Figure 4 we are able to see how the precinct has been able to create informal employment through recycling, there a white bag seen in Figure 4 filled with bottles for recycling purposes.

6.2.3 Social effects

Interview Respondent D mentioned that, “the Maboneng precinct has been developed extensively and they have brought in artists like William Kentridge who owns a studio in Maboneng, he was one of the first tenants in Maboneng.” Figure 7 shows the Bioscope independent cinema in the precinct area which shows some extraordinary cinematic productions and is used as a venue for most events such as awards evenings, special screening and workshops.



Figure 7: The Bioscope independent cinema. (Source: Author, 2019)

The bioscope pictured in Figure 7 is able to bring together people from all walks of life and from different kinds of economic status'. There is also an urban sculpture park ; which has enhanced social interaction of visitors and residents in the precinct.

6.2.4 Environmental effects

The physical environment of the precinct area has improved over the last 10 years with aesthetic space becoming better. Most buildings around the precinct as seen in Figure 7 have got transparent windows which act as the “eyes on the street” and creates a feeling of safety and security (Mashiri, 2017). As seen in Figure 8, there are crafts on the sidewalks, the pavements are in good condition, the area is clean, there is street furniture and graffiti on the walls; these are all things that did not exist 10 years ago.



Figure 8: The environment of Maboneng.(Source: Author, 2018)

The physical environment has by far improved as seen in Figure 8, there are also trees along the pavements; these trees help to add aesthetics to the area and give the area a green element and act as the lungs of the precinct.

7 CONCLUSION

Various changes due to transformation have taken place in Maboneng precinct which have acted as Afro-branding and urban branding. These changes have led to physical, social, economic and environmental improvements in the city. The developments and improvements have also been used to attract many

customers and visitors to the precinct, create jobs, attract investors and put the precinct area in a good ranking competition wise. This paper concludes by recommending that more effort needs to be exerted in encouraging the use of Afro-branding within and around the Maboneng precinct; this type of branding should be used to attract people of all income levels and groups; thus we want to avoid branding that excludes certain groups of society.

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