



PPC Corporate: Public-Play 4 Development initiative

A little goes a long way: finding collaborative solutions to community challenges

A collaboration between PPC and the Non-Profit Organisation 1to1 – Agency of Engagement, located just south of Soweto in Slovo Park, is demonstrating the value within co-design of public common space in informal neighbourhoods. With PPC providing funding towards the project, '1to1 – Agency of Engagement' and Steve Hoffe of 'Build a Future' have been able to work with community leaders, organised local groups and residents – assisting them to design and build a new space with and for themselves; challenging current institutional processes in place for South African urban re-development.

Named after South Africa's first Minister of Housing, Joe Slovo, Slovo Park lies in a politically and socially sensitive stretch of land just south of Soweto. Seen by others as a "limbo space", it has been repeatedly renamed over the past several years as the Slovo Park Community Development Forum (SPCDF) struggles to gain recognition of the area as a viable option for formal development through government support.

"This struggle with a forced identity is something many informal neighbourhoods across South Africa grapple with," explains Jhono Bennett, co-founder of 1to1. "Because the voice of local leaders and residents is often undervalued by the 'formal system', they struggle to get the legal governmental sanctioned support they are due."

In the case of Slovo Park, formal RDP development was started in the early 1990s with support for this process subsequently disappearing based on various accusations of corruption, mismanagement and political manipulation. The recurring name changes from "Nancefield" to "Olifantsvlei" exacerbated the challenges facing the community. With support from the Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI), the SPCDF then went on to litigate against the City of Johannesburg for failing to deliver on its 1995 promise of development.

This was the environment that inspired NPO 1to1 to be formed. "1to1 is a direct outcome of our student project with the SPCDF in 2010. At that stage, we were a group of students looking to deliver on course pre-requisites for our architecture degrees," explains Bennett. "A big part of who we are now as an organisation, was learnt from working with Slovo Park leadership about how architecture and planning should be done collaboratively – as opposed to being imposed on people. This goes against the approach typically taken during this kind of design exercise. We believed if we could challenge this status quo, and provide a meaningful alternative, developed with and for residents, we could pioneer a new approach to informal neighbourhood development and fundamentally change how we design our cities and spaces at scale."

Five years later the Public-Play 4 Development initiative was born from this thinking. The team worked off a 2013 PPC project built by University of Johannesburg students, and brought Build a Future on board to work with residents and community leaders from the area to select this public common space and co-design as a public-play space.



Slovo Park is the pilot of a larger programme which aims to start 25 new projects by 2020, with the ultimate goal of changing the way engineers, architects, planners and city officials practice and see neighbourhood development in the country.

“The biggest challenge we faced as soon as we embarked on the programme was funding. This prompted us to approach PPC,” says Bennet.

The Public-Play 4 Development initiative was pitched to PPC Architect, Daniel van der Merwe: “As PPC, we’re continually trying to push boundaries with our product. Armed with creative flair, there’s a lot one can create. This project bears testimony to what’s possible”

With the first phase of the project already completed, the team has moved onto phase two which involves a few activities. These are the further construction of play equipment, seating structures and micro-enterprise support elements where community members can meet, sit and relax and manage their local business interests. The structure was built by the community after attending various training and design sessions with Build a Future, with PPC contributing cement and towards other project materials in support.

While the project has a projected three-year rollout, depending on the funding received, it has already created far more than a physical structure and new community space. “We’ve got a framework for a very powerful process that works,” says Bennett. “For us to rebuild our South African neighbourhoods and address the systemic inequality in so many of them, we have to start at grassroots level with the people who live there. If we’re able to reimagine and co-create spaces with them, linking in larger development infrastructure from government programmes, we can provide them with the start of something far greater, and a means to then take the process of development further themselves – leading government and the private sector.”

* In recent news the current Mayor of Johannesburg publicly announced that Slovo Park will receive electricity this year. This is a milestone in Slovo Park’s re-development and is a huge win for the Slovo Park Development Forum.

Ends.

About PPC Ltd

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