

Reflections & Opportunities:

DESIGN, CITIES AND THE WORLD CUP

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“Conceptualising the World Cup as an opportunity to create a conversation around cities and development is not an obvious choice,” writes Danny Jordaan, former CEO of FIFA World Cup™ South Africa, in the foreword, “but it is vital in understanding the impact of these events on public space, transportation and the changing shape of cities.” In fact, many South Africans saw the opportunity to reimagine their cities, whether physically or socially. Three years later it is interesting to look back and see what has endured.

Zahira Asmal is one of those energetic and creative people who saw an opportunity in the FIFA World Cup™, and DESIGNING_SOUTHAFRICA is her project – a platform to discuss design’s role in this mega-event and in national branding. She is now seeking to be a bridge between South Africa and its fellow BRICS nation Brazil, which will be hosting the FIFA World Cup™ in 2014. The book is divided into *Reflections & Opportunities* where the stories are told in English and Portuguese.

The *Reflections* section is a collection of stories written mainly by international media. Most are

slightly breathless in tone as the journalists explore the frisson of ever-potential violence that overseas publications continually speculated on in the lead-up to the event. An intelligently critical piece by Justin McGuirk in the UK publication *Icon* is worth a read (if only to feel smug that his prediction that Cape Town’s BRT system would never happen has been – just about – proven false). Japanese magazine *Axis* also produced a helpful (if rather dry) short introduction to Johannesburg’s 2010 transport infrastructure

aspirations, while an article in South Africa’s *Financial Mail* does a similar job for the stadiums in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban.

Opportunities, the book’s second half, comprises four essays written after the event. Edgar Pieterse of the African Centre for Cities criticises how slowly the State got itself into gear to deliver the World Cup infrastructure, meaning that thoughtful, integrated design was squeezed out. The Gautrain is a case in point: a huge investment was made in a public transport “solution” that simply speeds through areas such as Alexandra, where people desperately need it.

Architect Henning Rasmuss wrote the one piece that tries to take some lessons from the mega-event and move forward with them.

Reflections & Opportunities is beautifully produced. However, it doesn’t use its platform to give a visual overview of designs created for the World Cup. Rasmuss talks about how signage in major cities moved from words to pictograms: “This is an important step for a country with eleven official languages.” In an article for *Design Week*, the journalist mentions redesigned maps of Johannesburg; “a vital legacy for a city impenetrable to outsiders”. Several articles mention Cape Town’s Fan Walk, which involved a redesign of the Cape Town Railway Station, pedestrianisation of several city streets, a large new footbridge and the deployment of hundreds of artists. Yet there are no images of these. There are some evocative photos by David Goldblatt, Dave Southwood and the like, but few document what changed for people experiencing cities post World Cup.

“Let us build an archive of South African design excellence,” says Rasmuss in his essay. Let’s celebrate “when we have achieved something; not when we have written a policy, but when we have built something; not when we have drafted a framework guideline, but when life has measurably become better”. This book provides a launching pad for an archive of what we have built and improved upon when we hosted the World Cup. ●

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