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Angus Donald Campbell explores the complexity and contradiction of Johannesburg as a recipe for urban renewal.

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Originally from South Africa and having worked for 18 years as a design academic in Johannesburg, Donald Campbell is now the design programme lead at the University of Auckland. His design, teaching and research focuses on local and sustainable innovation at the complex nexus of social, technological and ecological systems.

Johannesburg, Joburg, Jozi or *eGoli* (the city of gold) began in 1886 as a dusty highveld mining town. Depending on how you choose to draw your borders, the current metropolitan area is estimated to have a population of between 5 and 10 million people, making it one of the largest cities in the world not located next to a water source. The city's inception lives on in the imagination of many who move here with aspirations of a better life. As a melting pot of hopes and desires, the city offers experiences that can only be described as contradictory, since its most observable characteristic is that of extreme inequality. Poverty and opulence, urban sprawl and high density, informality and gentrification: these are just a few of its paradoxical spatial realities. They are not only experienced but also measured, with South Africa holding the notorious title of being one of the most unequal countries in the world by both the World Bank and Oxfam.

Much of South Africa's inequality comes from its apartheid past, when absurd racial segregation and urban planning

legally and forcibly relocated 'non-white' citizens into 'native' (Black African) or 'coloured' (neither white nor 'native') townships on the peripheries of most cities. Although the country is now 27 years into democracy, these forced social divisions are still strongly evident in the urban fabric. The Covid-19 pandemic further aggravated the long-term effects of apartheid urban design. At the one end of the extreme, privileged, mostly white South Africans living behind high walls topped with electric fences in secure complexes and lifestyle estates were able to work remotely from their fibre-connected home offices and escape from the indoors into their private gardens. On the other extreme, mostly 'non-white' South Africans living in former apartheid townships in shared one-room shacks with limited access to safe public space had to decide between buying food or exorbitant mobile data.

There are examples of spaces in Johannesburg where gentrified urban developments have only amplified these inequalities. Others, however,

have been more carefully and holistically considered. An example of the latter is Lor-entzville, a predominantly poor and marginalized suburban community on the eastern fringe of Johannesburg's inner city. In 2014, Nando's, a much-acclaimed South African food enterprise with a love for local design, chose to build its head office here, helping to spark the revival of the suburb. It's also where Victoria Yards, an 'ecosystemically' considered development, was initiated in 2017 by 44 Stanley developer Brian Green and Boom Architects. What was originally an industrial laundry in the 1900s was reimagined as a space that creatively connects and cultivates: an entrepreneurial incubation centre that supports local social and creative businesses by renting space at cost. The interconnection between the environment and people is made all the more tangible through agroecologically designed food gardens that link the creative hubs. By considering social, economic and environmental aspects, the development has attracted a diverse range of artisans, artists and designers to

a space that authentically brings people together, despite their differences. Makers Valley, for example, a non-profit organization based in Victoria Yards, has focused on co-creating a local wellbeing economy through a range of stakeholder partnerships. With a particular emphasis on local food security, it created a food parcel scheme during the Covid-19 hard lockdown in 2020 for the approximately 45,500 local community members who lost their jobs during this time.

The ecosystemic conception of Victoria Yards has recently led to it being internationally recognized in the Urban Land Institute's inaugural ULI Europe Awards for Excellence. In the South African context, Victoria Yards is an example of reimagining difference through a tight-knit relationship between people and place. Such creative consideration for social, economic and environmental systems is well placed as an example to lead Johannesburg into a more sustainable and equitable future. ●