

S1 Ep 4 Spaces and Legacy

GUESTS: Kirsten Wilkins and Garth Hankey

Host:

Welcome to the **Just for a change** podcast, powered by the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. First off, what you need to know about us, is that solving big social issues by thinking outside the box is what makes us tick. We love offering new perspectives on social innovation and social justice, so we hope you'll be inspired to make a difference wherever you are! **We're changing the way we're changing the world.**

Welcome to the **Just for a change podcast** with me, your host, Kentse Radebe.

[00:00:38] Have you ever walked into a place, be it a club on Kloof Street, a shebeen in Soweto, or a larney clothing shop in Sandton City, and just felt awkward? That instant feeling of "I don't belong here". Sometimes there are subtle cues that just let you know...you don't belong here. I'm pretty sure you know what I'm talking about. Isn't it strange that something seemingly invisible - like space - can have such a tangible feeling to it? And what do you do when you get that feeling? Maybe you leave or find new ways of navigating those spaces. Well that's what we're talking about today - space, place, belonging & legacy.

[00:01:00] I'm pretty sure you know what I'm talking about. Now isn't it strange that something seemingly invisible, like space can have such a tangible feeling to it. And what do you do when you get that feeling? Maybe you leave or you find new ways of navigating those spaces? Well, that's what we're talking about today.

[00:01:19] The concept of space is an interesting one. It's an undeniable, albeit saddening truth, that many spaces in South Africa carry a legacy of injustice. Though they aren't physical barriers, spatial barriers continue to cause division. Fancy suburban areas with their lush lawns and long driveways are contrasted by poverty-stricken communities with dirt roads and often lacking running water or sanitary facilities...just a block or two away.

[00:01:51] It's been 26 years since the end of apartheid, yet we still see this legacy of spatial divide. According to Edward Soja*, an academic who has done significant work on the concept of spatial justice in cities, space is socially produced and therefore can be socially changed & reimagined. Now isn't that just the dream?

[00:02:13] The idea of social spatial relations is fundamental. That is that space shapes, social relations, as much as social relations, shape space. Urban social justice scholar, David Harvey said the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is one of the most precious, yet most neglected of our human rights.

[00:02:34] We asked some people what signals they look for to know that they belong in a space and also what that experience has left them with. Here's what they had to say.

[00:02:45] For me when I enter new spaces differently the workspaces and quite often the social space. It's about people you don't see colour. I feel quite uncomfortable if I'm the only white person in the room and you can kind of [00:03:00] feel that people are reacting and responding to you differently and similarly If it's a room with any white people [00:03:06] and for some reason, I just don't feel comfortable entering a space with white people, which seems strange as a white person. And maybe it has to do with the rural context I grew up in.

What's very important to me is the inclusivity of that space. Um, so I look for how inclusive is the space. I also look at the tone and the energy of the space.[00:03:29] Um, cause you know, those things are always indicated whether you are welcome or not. Is it a warm environment? Is it an open environment? You know, is it an accepting environment? Or is it just a really judgmental space.

[00:03:47] Today we are honoured to chat to Kirsten Wilkins - the Director from Open Streets on this fascinating topic of space and legacy. Kirsten is an urban designer & experience architect. Kirsten is also a cycle activist & a self-proclaimed curious anarchist.

Open Streets is a citizen-driven initiative working to change how we use, perceive and experience streets. One of the objectives of their events is to create an awareness of the space around us that isn't naturally accessible to all. Open Streets work towards challenging the paradigm of urban mobility by carrying out campaigns, initiating dialogues and organising walks that raise citizen awareness, spark public debate, and ultimately drive behaviour change around the role of streets in the life of the city.

How do we bridge the gaps in spaces? How do we create awareness in different spaces? And how do we encourage people to re-engage with public spaces.

Welcome Kirsten, I'm looking forward to our conversation today.

Interview section

So Kirsten, one of the first time that I heard you speak was at an Open Street event that was celebrating women who cycle. The talk was about [00:04:56] how are woman safe, whether or not they're commuting, whether or not [00:05:00] they're cycling competitively, cycling across country, or even across the continent. I think it was about two years ago. Um, and I just learned to cycle and we ventured out into the streets we cycled from Pinelands to Langa and I remember distinctly being terrible at it, but it was a great event.

[00:05:16] And I think for me, why that's relevant as an experience is that as a woman living in South Africa, I've always been very conscious about how I occupied and move in spaces, my top priority. And for many women is the question of safety and sexual harassment when you're out in the street or whether or not you're using public transport, for example.

[00:05:35] I often find myself wanting to shrink or make myself invisible because there's this tacit that acceptance, that woman in public spaces in South Africa are not safe. So subsequently as we were prepping for this episode, I thought about these questions and I'd always assumed that Cape town was ahead of the curve in terms of developing a cycle friendly city.

[00:05:54] But I'm curious as, as a cyclist, um, how have these social cues shaped, how you [00:06:00] navigate a city like Cape town.

[00:06:03] **Kirsten:** [00:06:03] Um, hi, Kentse, thanks. Thanks for having me here. It's really exciting. And I'm so glad that we jumped straight into a discussion around cycling, because for me, I think it's a way for people to experience the city in a new way where previously they may have been saying sort of, I think what you're eluding to, which is sort of self editing, the way that we engage with space because of how we look or, you know, our ability, you know, sort of ableism. [00:06:29] Uh, or our age. So, so yeah, I mean, I think, I think cycling has really given kind of really gives us opportunities to explore those, those themes. So for me, for me personally, you know, I, I felt, um, that that cycling gave me the opportunity to move your spaces, faster. Uh, we, I felt, uh, Uh, more scared or unsure.

[00:06:52] Um, and it also allowed me to leave places faster when I started feeling uncomfortable. Um, so I think, I think, I think [00:07:00] the way that we move in the way that we interact as a city, I think the more opportunities we have to explore, what an other way of being would be like, I think is very empowering for people. [00:07:09] But I think for women in particular, who, who really are sort of second class citizens, when it comes to a public space,

[00:07:16] **Kentse:** [00:07:16] Sure. I like latching onto this idea of, you know, second class citizens thinking about marginalisation, thinking about who's excluded from space because a big focus of this podcast today is about legacy and you know how that influences space today in South Africa that we live in and something that for me has been a big focus.

[00:07:35] And I know for you as well, cause you tweet about it quite often has been, you know, the conversation around access to affordable housing in Cape town. We know that Cape town has one of the highest rental costs, you know, across the country. Um, but recently at the end of August, uh, the Western Cape high court rule that the city of Cape Town [00:07:52] shouldn't sell land. That's just outside the city in Tafelberg, um, various activist group challenged the city to [00:08:00] actually develop that land for fordable housing. And this was like a contentious battle. Um, the court ruling cited that the city needed to address about Apartheid, spatial planning legacies, and some of the arguments against this was that, you know, change is slow and that will eventually.

[00:08:13] Get there. Um, we know that, you know, affordable housing, isn't an issue that's unique to, to Cape town, many cities all over the world are dealing with it as an urban planner. What are some of the unique and context specific strategies that cities and governments, particularly in the global South can begin exploring order to address segregation in cities.

[00:08:34] **Kirsten:** [00:08:34] Right. Thanks, Kentse. I'm really happy that you brought up the issue of the Tafelberg site to in such a win for, I think housing, activists and social. Justice activists across the city. So, um, thanks for

highlighting that. I think the one thing that the Tafelberg site does is it addresses the issue of scale.

[00:08:51] And affordable housing at the same time. So if you look at neighborhoods like a Delft or anything, really outside of the, on the periphery of the [00:09:00] Metro, um, affordable housing has always been produced in a way that is so radically out of scale to like lived human experience, that it leaves the typology.[00:09:11] with, you know, it leaves a bad taste in people's minds, but what it means to not be able to afford a light and what access to facilities and to be well located means. So the Tafelberg site for me is exciting because what it does is it highlights how important it is to look at the affordable housing model and clusters that are smaller.

[00:09:32] So Tafelberg only a couple of hundred units in a very small space, you know, once it's developed and developed successfully. People will realize it's going to be okay. And I really feel like the issue of scale and how much of something we developed really needs to keep holding on to ideas of how do we build community?

[00:09:51] How much is too much, you know, how do we, how do we develop places? You know, what do people need? You can't ask those questions when you're developing 6,000 units [00:10:00] as quickly as possible to the lowest. You know, at the lowest affordable price. Um, I really feel like Tafelberg is, is really going to unlock that, um, uh, really negative thinking around what affordability means.

[00:10:14] **Kentse:** [00:10:14] I think it's really, really interesting that you say that. And you're speaking about this concept of like nuance and not thinking about scale on a grand, you know, thinking about addressing the housing needs that we have. Now, I'm thinking people who are listening might think what we have a serious, you know, housing shortage issue in South Africa.

[00:10:31] So many people have been, you know, waiting for houses from government, from in some of my, in my community back home since like the early nineties. So what would you say to people who were saying, but we need scale, we need to address the housing shortages. How does that sort of parallel with what you're saying around nuance and thinking on a granular scale?

[00:10:50] **Kirsten:** [00:10:50] Yeah, so yeah, that's, that's brilliant. That's exactly where I think the, the, the solution is going to lie. I think the solution to producing [00:11:00] more housing opportunities lies at scaling up housing provision organizations, rather than, uh, having smaller numbers of people having to bear the brunt of just the numbers of homes that are required.

[00:11:17] And so, you know, really, I think that's that smaller developers and unlocking opportunities for people to build jobs and build organizations that can produce housing at that granular scale. Would it be based on, there are some examples of that. Um, but I don't think it's sort of legislated well enough in order to sort of unlock that.

[00:11:35] But I mean, you can imagine if you, I mean, just, you know, simple math terms, if you want build million houses at PLR, a more beautiful and more diverse for, you know, a hundred thousand groups to be building those houses rather than two groups with only two ideas of how things should be. So

I really think diversity and design and organizational strategy is the way forward to reach the numbers that we have to, and in a way that's beautiful [00:12:00] and particular to place. [00:12:01] And, you know, allows people to be engaged in processes, you know, so, yeah.

[00:12:07] Thank you.

[00:12:08] **Kentse:** [00:12:08] I think what you said really resonated with me because just earlier this week, when we were working with an organization based in Nigeria that's capacitating systems entrepreneurs, one of the things that we speak about is differentiating between scaling up, scaling out and scaling deep.

[00:12:22] So I think what you're speaking about is quite innovative and a different way of approaching it and I really appreciate it and resonate with that. So thank you. I think the next sort of where I want to go next is to speak a little bit about Open Streets and the work that you do. Having attended a few open streets events [00:12:37] one of the things that I've always enjoyed is how the events themselves, so like reimagine and reconnect us with how we think about streets in our neighborhoods. Can you share a little bit about why this kind of work is important and why it's critical when thinking about creating inclusive spaces?

[00:12:53] **Kirsten:** [00:12:53] Sure. Yeah. You know, Open Streets as has run. I think, I think it's 22, uh, events now where we [00:13:00] have closed streets in different neighborhoods across the city to close them, to cause to open them up to people for a day. And, and in many respects, it is a reimagining exercise, because, you know, logistically we can't keep those streets closed for, for much longer than the hours that we managed to get the permits for.

[00:13:17] Um, but you know, it's very important is that if we look at what the city is composed of, I think a lack of affordable housing is one of them, but we actually have an abundance of public space, right. And that public space at the moment is dedicated to roads. So it's dedicated to the car. And so what we do for a moment in time as we steal back that space, from the most powerful of elements that occupy the streets, which is the car [00:13:43] and we say, well, why don't people who have less a voice or less of an opportunity to express themselves have that day. So it's really about a power shift uh, if you like, um, and it allows people to reimagine what it would be like if it were safer, if you wouldn't have to be fearful, um, If you wouldn't, [00:14:00] if you could cross without having to find a hand to hold first.

[00:14:03] No. So I really, I really feel like, you know, while, while we reimagine streets and we reimagine places, we also give people the chance to take a breath from that fear and that second class citizen, which we mentioned right at the beginning of our time. So what's really important for me as an urban planners, you know, look at, uh, at the, at the city spatially, um, You know, we're still very segregated in terms of how we live, where people get to live, how people get to move. [00:14:32] And the unfortunate part of that is that a lot of that separation of people and intent, it's still enforced by infrastructure and that infrastructure, those are roads. So for me, public space, isn't just important for us to have spaces of self expression, but there are some streets in Cape Town that literally are still dividing neighborhoods that could otherwise be together.

[00:14:55] We haven't had a chance to recognize the other. Um, but you can't do that when you you know, [00:15:00] with, with, with vehicles occupying that space first. So I think Open Streets really works on a number of layers, but I mean, but the consistent thing that we do is, is working towards a less, uh, spatially separated city by bringing people together in ways that are different.

[00:15:15] And when you're in a new experience, you're more open to be aware and to be reflective. Um, and so we try and make, we try and open that door and keep the door open as long as possible so that people can take those experiences and then move that into the spheres of influence that they have, uh, day to day when the cars of back.

[00: 15:34] **Kentse:** [00:15:34] Speaking a little bit about traveling and some of the innovations that you've seen across the globe. I'm interested if you've seen anything on the African continent that you think would be relevant for South African cities. I know as South Africans, we tend to sometimes be very insular, but there's so much happening on the continent and there's so many different experiences and I'm curious, and obviously it wouldn't be a copy and paste because context is so specific, but are there any innovations or ways of designing cities that you've [00:16:00] seen happening that you think would translate and would have and you know, appeal for South African cities?

[00:16:06] **Kirsten:** [00:16:06] Yeah, that's a, that's a great question. And I love, I loved it. I never went to examples to be Eurocentric. If I can be super honest about it. Like I love we've put so much, we've got so much so close to us that is as beautiful and workable. Um, so I think it was, I think it was two years ago. [00:16:23] I had a chance to work in Malawi with World Bicycle Relief. And that was amazing. I think that was probably one of the best bicycle experiences I've ever had in my life. Um, and the innovation there for me, wasn't infrastructural um, the long way is actually a very poor city and has very little infrastructure.

[00:16:43] So the innovation is not infrastructure. Um, it's people don't earn a lot of money and generally people live hand to mouth. So the innovation is not being wealthy. In Malawi, cycling works [00:17:00] and streets are beautiful because everybody is participating in a way that is accepting and just gets the job done.

[00:17:12] They don't elevate cycling or mobility to anything other than getting around. And I, I sometimes I sometimes think that that one of the things, one of our downfalls in Cape Town is that we actually elevate cycling or innovation and mobility to, to be the sort of the shiny thing, the sort of holy grail, um, in Malawi to just normal to cycle.

[00:17:33] And everyone does at this official things and they just cycle through it. They need to go and you get a bike taxis, I guess that would probably be the thing that I love. Um, but do you know what I mean? I think that the innovation there was just that they'd moved beyond, um, making it a big deal, you know, just this normalized it in and everything else just kind of flowed along Malawi.

[00:17:57] Malawi's one of those beautiful places I've ever been to in my life because [00:18:00] people have such a deep and considered perspective of

what matters. So yeah, I'd be very happy in Cape Town. If, if we, if cycling wasn't actually a big deal and it was a super normal, and I kind of think that would be really innovative for us to just. [00:18:15] Be accepting instead of challenging the things that might be a little bit different.

[00:18:20] **Kentse:** [00:18:20] No, no, absolutely. I think as you're speaking, what I'm thinking about is, so I'm a big fan of public transport. Before I moved to Cape Town I didn't have a cost or I relied on like taxis to get me from, from A to B and growing up, but also, you know, used taxi.

[00:18:34] So as I'm hearing you speak, I'm thinking about how, you know, many bus, Texas and South Africa have always been present and have largely served, you know, Black communities, particularly during Apartheid, when public transport systems were not designed to accommodate those who were marginalized or discriminated against by the apartheid state. [00:18:51] And when I think about innovation, I often sometimes I feel that, do we create something completely new, or how do we incorporate, [00:19:00] or marry new ideas with what exists? And I think about cities like, you know, Lagos. And I think about. Um, other parts of Africa where they're incorporating mini bus taxis with, you know, motorbikes with boats, with whatever it is.

[00:19:12] And I wonder what are the basics from an urban design perspective? That we should be taking in when we're thinking about innovating, when, whether or not it's public transport access to public housing or access to, you know, health facilities, what are some of the basics that we need to think about as cities evolve? [00:19:30] And we try to think about sustainability and we try to think about what you were saying - children's perspectives, which some sometimes are left out. How do we bring all of these different pieces together?

[00:19:40] **Kirsten:** [00:19:40] Yes. You know, the, the thing really interesting to think about minibus taxis for me is that they, they, I don't really fit into if there was a Maslow's hierarchy of needs for transport, they sort of didn't really fit into that.

[00:19:53] Um, because what they do, actually, they do very, very long distances that buses could [00:20:00] make, and they make very, very short distances that people could cycle. And so they really are stretched quite thin in terms of doing the work of other modes, thirds of public transport, including walking, because some places just too unsafe.

[00:20:14] So, so for me, I think looking at distance as one of the key, um, differentiators between transport modes and trying to create as many different segments in that as possible, rather than, okay, I'm going to walk or I'm going to take something that burns petrol as being, you know, the only two sort of like binary's in this, in the situation that we're in at the moment, but.

[00:20:38] The more, we look at distance and what's possible with certain distances. I think we can really expand the amount of opportunities of, of transport modes that are possible. So, you know, a two kilometer cycle is actually lovely if you have a bike and it's safe, you know, five kilometers is great for an electric pedicab.

[00:20:58] But more than five [00:21:00] kilometers is a bit much cause they're gonna run a battery. Right. So I think, I think understanding the nuance around distance is very important, but then we're going to circle back. We can't really ask that question until we circle back to hey, but wait, we live in these insulated neighborhoods that are cut off from other neighborhoods with Apartheid, uh, implemented infrastructure.

[00:21:21] And that's where the problem is. I can, I can travel in my neighborhood. And then to get out of my neighborhood, actually need to be in something that's a little bit more of us like a vehicle. You know, so I can't really cycle. So I think, I think, I think, you know, the spatiality and the mode of transport are absolutely critical for us to address at the same time.

[00:21:40] **Kentse:** [00:21:40] So, so listening to you speak, Kirsten the I think the thing that comes to mind for me is just how important nuance is in your work and how you approach the kinds of solutions or innovations and how we should be thinking about them and really critical lens. And what that makes me think about is, you know, what we were speaking about earlier around power, and I think about [00:22:00] specifically power, positionality and identity, which when we think about the history of South Africa is absolutely critical. [00:22:06] We can't have a conversation about, you know, urban development and space without talking about where we come from. And I wonder that as you know, in the profession and in the space that you're in, because you also a cycle activist. What are some of the, I don't know, narratives or identities that you draw on when you come into a project, when you're trying to reimagine a space, how do you immerse yourself in trying to think about how are different individuals affected by, you know, something that we're designing or project we're working on?

[00:22:35] **Kirsten:** [00:22:35] That is a good question and a great way for me to make enemies. I do it all the time. And so what I often do is when, when we initially, when a project starting, I always try guide the words that we use before things even become real before concepts get drawn on paper to start identifying and giving names to those power relations and as identity dynamics.

[00:22:59] So for [00:23:00] example, with the cycling advocacy project, you know, I don't, I wouldn't say I'd stop saying cyclists. I say people on bicycles or children and bicycles, and then it's very difficult for somebody in a position of authority to say to me, I'm sorry. I, I think that's safe enough for children on bicycles. [00:23:16] If they kind of giving me a sort of a second class solution to safety, you know, it might be, it might be safe enough for cyclists. That's easy to sort of compartmentalize, but as soon as you put people into your words, it's so much more powerful. So try and say, try and say that as much as I can. So already from the conception of an idea, Um, we're putting people first.

[00:23:38] And then the other thing that I think is very important is, and I think you mentioned this right at the beginning is, is, is bringing people into space of micro experience to develop empathy. Um, in, in kind of design thinking, I think this is sort of relatively sort of old school now, but I think it's very important to have decision makers, being able to really identify with people that [00:24:00] they're making decisions on behalf of.

[00:24:02] I mean, as advocates for, for change, you know, it's, it's our job to speak on behalf of others. Um, because we have access to spaces of power

or decision making that not everybody does, but there's people in spaces of power and decision making also need to experience the people's experience, the lives of the people that they're representing. [00:24:22] Cause it doesn't always kind of go back the other way. So, so we try and we try and do that. So to Open Streets, we have, we have a lot of events where we'll do like, you know, the, the mobile women. A bike rides. You're talking about, uh, where we go create a ride. Well, we will have people cycling in places they may have not experienced before.

[00:24:40] Um, so we've taken a lot of, uh, sort of nervous people from affluent suburbs cycling across, uh, Philippi and Mitchell's Plain before. And that was great. People were like, Oh, that's. It's not what I thought it was. Um, so I think experience is, is, is everything because it changes effective in a minute, your perspective has changed. [00:24:59] you could [00:25:00] change other things about the way that you say you do your work. Also, you know, you could do things faster, you could do things more collaboratively and sort of just breaks down a lot of, a lot of barriers. So, so between, um, using the correct the terminology to, to sort of hyper Uh, people orientate what we do and, and then actually putting people in experiences where they can empathize. [00:25:23] I think, I think we're really on a, on a really good trajectory for change. Um, I think examples are also very important. Yeah. I think we've mentioned as well I think taking examples and precedent or best practice from places that people aren't necessarily necessarily familiar with is also a good way to go.

[00:25:40] Um, but I think at the heart of it, I think is really just being collaborative and all of those things. You know, I can't be in a room anymore or sit in a meeting where everybody looks like me. Like it's just not going to work and, and I try and I try and be really specific and maybe not make friends by [00:26:00] asking those questions, but that's okay [00:26:01] it's not my job to make friends. It's my job to make partners in changing the way the city looks. So it's okay to be honest and kind at the same time.

[00:26:10] **Kentse:** [00:26:10] I like the fact that you are speaking about empathy cause this is something that came up in a webinar that we hosted as a Bertha Centre. I think about a week ago around systems innovation and how we think about, you know, creating change. [00:26:21] And I really want to drill a little bit deeper into that because one of the questions that came out from, from one of the audience members was. You know, are we just using empathy as a crutch when we actually should be dealing with concepts around accountability and ethics and morality. And I'm curious about your perspective working [00:26:38] I'm assuming, you know, with, you know, people who are in top leadership positions, people who have access to resources, people who can really create, you know, big, significant shifts in order to transform systems, are they often receptive to the ideas of empathy? And what does that look like?

[00:26:54]

[00: 26:54] **Kirsten:** [00:26:54] Hmm. Yeah. It's you need to make, okay. So here's the thing, here's the [00:27:00] thing. Right? So Open Streets as an output creates safe spaces for people to have experiences en mass. But what I work really is, is creating micro spaces for people to have safe experiences of having their minds changed. So what's very important and I've learned, and

in some respects a little bit, the hard way is not to have that empathy or that mind changing moment, or, or, or even a conversion moment to say, sometimes it happens to have not make that happen in a place that isn't safe, that doesn't have the same dignity and kindness and, and, and safety than an Open Streets stay would have.

[00:27:48] You know, if you're going to realize something and you're going to realize you were wrong, like you really want to have your friends around you. So I think, you know, when I'm in spaces where, where people are making decisions that are going in the wrong direction, I try [00:28:00] and be a little less like shouty and, and, and have that conversion experience or that kind of moment where I ask people to be empathic, but actually have that in a slightly more, uh, kind of side conversation way.

[00:28:12] Um, so I think bringing people to a place of accountability and calling people out is different. Um, but creating empathy and bringing people along and having people experience something really demands and a little bit more safety and a little bit more of a gentle creative space. Before we say goodbye to you.

[00:28:29] **Kentse:** [00:28:29] Thank you for taking the time to join us this afternoon. I just wanted to find out if you have any parting words before we say goodbye.

[00: 28:36] **Kirsten:** [00:28:36] Yeah, I, you know, it's just an encouragement, um, just to, to take up space. I think it's really, really important that if you feel like you're a second class citizen to, to know, to understand why you feel, you're not being afforded that right first-class status and [00:29:00] understand that and just give yourself space to think about that, because that doesn't have to be normal.

[00:29:04] And then go and take the space. I really think, um, for me, I mean, maybe I hope that doesn't sound too radical, but you know, the permission that we waiting for is coming, it's it's for you and I and people to work together and, and live our first class citizen lives. Um, in a way that's beautiful and expressive and fun and all these good things.

[00:29:26] But the thing that we waiting for it's it's us. Kristen. Thank you so much for joining us on the podcast. We've really appreciated the insights that you've shared with us. So, so thank you so much. Thanks Kentse saying thanks to everyone from the team. It's really been a pleasure being here with you. And I hope to see you on an Open Street really soon.

[00:29:48] **Katusha:** [00:29:48] Hi, my name is Katusha de Villiers and I work on health systems innovation for the Bertha Centre. Today I'm so excited to be chatting to Garth Hanky, the [00:30:00] I was privileged to be a part of the setup and launch of the Groote Schuur Innovation Hub back in 2014 as a means for staff to turn their ideas into a reality, and in so doing, solve some of the hospital's biggest challenges.

The hub is the first space in an African public sector hospital devoted to fostering and supporting innovation in health service delivery . Now, six years since its inception, the space is still being used for this purpose and a variety of other purposes and it's amazing to see the innovations that have come out

of this simple idea of creating a space with intention and purpose that can lead to great impact.

Thanks for taking time out of your schedule to join us today, Garth. What was the first thing you heard about the innovation hub and the innovation program?

[00:30:55] **Garth:** [00:30:55] Well, it was widely advertised at Grooteschoor all the [00:31:00] poster boards and liking the healthcare. We're very competitive in nature. So some of our peers became involved in some of the innovations and we saw some of the posters came up, we show this colorful room and we wanted to know what is that we thought, what is Google doing in healthcare?

[00:31:19] **Katusha:** [00:31:19] So when I was working, um, on the hub, in the innovation program in 2015, I was, um, I was sitting at the hospital about four days a week, uh, for about a year. And, um, then that project wrapped up and I went back to Bertha and I started doing other health systems innovation projects. Um, but the, but the hub continued. [00:31:41] Um, and that's when you became more involved with the running of the hub, is that right?

[00:31:47] **Garth:** [00:31:47] Yes, it was in parallel with another initiative. So one of our Peter's hospital wide innovations is called the hood escape performance system. It's actually developing, thinking, thinking people [00:32:00] to institutionalize a culture of continuous improvement in almost giving the people a platform to explore new ideas all the time.

[00:32:10] So I was involved in another initiative where we decrease the discharge exit times in one of the acute surgery wards and that proved to us that we can make a difference without actually, uh, obtaining a lot of resources or throwing money at everything. So the innovations is still very much part of Grooteschoor, but the improvement component is complimenting it at the moment. [00:32:34] So we're looking at the behavior of the managers to support the environment, to explore new ideas.

[00:32:41] **Katusha:** [00:32:41] That's right. I remember it was also sort of in parallel with the 50th anniversary of the heart transplant. So all of this, um, sort of came at a good time to keep celebrating Grooteschoor as a, as a space for innovation.

[00:32:56] Um, can you tell us a little bit about the, [00:33:00] the 13 new innovations that you helped to, uh, support.

[00:33:05] **Garth:** [00:33:05] We were setting up antenatal clinic for pregnant ladies, because we discovered that the ladies and the partners don't understand the journey of pregnancy. So that was something additional to the services that we offer. [00:33:19] We also add a, an awareness campaign for diabetic mothers to latch the babies, as soon as the babies are delivered, because they contact with your mother at delivery is actually quite vital for the baby's development. Then, something that's still running, but because of Covid stopped for the moment we started a multidisciplinary team, adolescent clinic.

[00:33:44] where they actually give them, empower the adolescents by giving them certain life skill, to like CV writing, I think finance management, and it's all clinical as well out to take your meds and how important it is when you feel better to still continue on your [00:34:00] goals, et cetera. And it was a multidisciplinary [00:34:02] hospital wide approach. And then also, uh, the CPR, uh, they call it project team care, the CPR campaign we previously, we will put 30 of our hospital, people through CPR training by this initiative within three months, we trained 240 people and then use simulation training to train people, to just know how to do CPR, who to phone, what to do, what works do you use?

[00:34:31] And then. A patient actually came up with one of the innovations that when they disclose that she has pancreatic cancer, she actually felt so bad because it was done in front of other people. So she donate that. In addition to the money that was given to them furniture and spicing her room up as a consultation room and all the support structures we'll break the [00:35:00] news because sometimes you want the news, but you don't necessarily want to family to know yet.

[00:35:04] And then all the support structures, like the palliative care team, the wellness team, everybody is in the room with you.

[00: 35:11] **Katusha:** [00:35:11] As you're, as you're talking, I'm just so struck by the variety of different projects that you're describing to me. I think sometimes when, people say health innovation, it's a new drug or it's a new, um, no surgical procedure or something like that [00:35:32] and what you're describing really is creative solutions to problems, um, that, um, run the gamut from, um, you know, how patients want to receive bad news to, um, how do we uh, support adolescents, not in a difficult time in their lives and sort of look at that whole patient all the way to, how do we use gamification to up skill our staff? [00:35:59] and I just [00:36:00] think it's so incredible that, um, Grooteshuur is supporting these kinds of, of, um, innovations. Um, and it must be so incredibly rewarding for you as well.

[00:36:13] **Garth:** [00:36:13] No, it is extremely rewarding because I feel valued at the hospital with people come to me with ideas. People come to me, even outside of the innovation programs with brilliant ideas. [00:36:24] They wanted to start the veggie garden on top of the roof, uh, in collaboration with one of the nurseries but unfortunately the engineers did, they taste in the wind was blowing too, too fast on typical Cape Town. It gains the speed from us. But, uh, I realized that a lot of people walking in our passengers have brilliant ideas, but they don't necessarily have the platform to explore them.

[00:36:55] So by having this green room, people coming here all the time and ask what you do. Yeah, it looks [00:37:00] so exciting. Can I ever meeting? And I allowed him to use the space because their thinking changes when they enter the space. What other programs do you run in this space? So currently the space has multiple users.

[00:37:15] Uh, I have somebody that assist me with the booking because pretty Covid, there was actually a lot of people booking the venue and the it'll list. You still using it from the previous innovation drive and launching from the space. But I also do my process improvement training. Yeah. So I think both coaches and frontline teams, how to address the challenges at work.

[00:37:40] So as you can see at the back here, I have a library, lots of books to expand the knowledge. And I have shelves with the multiple templates and guidelines for them for me not to run all over the hospital because we have approximately 4,000 staff members and only one improvement officer. [00:38:00] So I needed to find additional capacity and by the use of templates and guidelines, you can do self-learning when you want to know how to start the graph or improve with purposes.

[00:38:11] And then the front section, uh, we use for the nursing training where people need quiet time, because as you know, the glass box in front and closed both sides when they use it for interviews and when there's one on ones with students and people also use it because of the multiple plug points too to do some research and the wifi is next to my room. [00:38:34] So it's quite strong here. So it's a very interactive room. They need permission to come into the inside, but the front room is open for the public to use.

[00:38:43] **Katusha:** [00:38:43] Wow. That's such a cool use of this space and such a, um, such a welcoming way in which to encourage staff and patients to also tap into, um, an innovative space. [00:38:58] Um, one of the things that I [00:39:00] realized when I was there and, and working in other. A project at Bertha. That is how important space is to innovation. And I'm not just talking about physical space. I'm also talking about virtual space, like that platform that you have mentioned. And when I say virtual, I don't necessarily mean online [00:39:17] I just mean in the way people think about innovation, you know, there's this, there's this need for, um, a neutral space, which I think that the the physical space of the hub is very important where people can come away from their day to day or being on the wards or whatnot, have the, have this space where they can just totally focus on their idea, but also that virtual connection with one another, that there is this environment of innovation that Grooteschoor is encouraging that I think. [00:39:51] It's really, it's really cool. When you, when you think that a hospital is actually a very rigid, bureaucratic place, you know, and it has to [00:40:00] be in many ways, but that it has created these spaces that encourage staff to, um, to also be a part of, of solution making. Um, so what have you been your biggest learnings from, from running the hub and running the innovation program and the other various, uh, process improvement programs you run.

[00:40:24] **Garth:** [00:40:24] So it's exactly what you just said. We used those systems in a hierarchical structure. Expecting people to tell us what to do. So what we done as executive management team, we inverted the triangle and we start learning from the frontline people, the people that does the operations it's fixing the patients because they, the people with the most knowledge.

[00:40:47] And I just want to allude to the fact that we learn from this experience in terms of the space and the CEO personally created a wellness center next to me. It's a big open space for all staff [00:41:00] to just go sit and have a cup of coffee. There's wall paper of trees and waterfalls. And big posters of table mountain, and that's our wellness center.

[00:41:11] We discovered it, the people at the Franklin don't always have the resources to sit and relax. You're studying the working environment. So we needed alphabet. So we took that learning and gave them an additional space with open access so that they can see things as you come visit me. We

can sit next though. [00:41:30] You'll be very impressed with the place, this even part, but for the people to play.

[00:41:35] **Katusha:** [00:41:35] What do you think is significant about the fact that Grooteschoor is not only the first is it's the first public sector hospital in South Africa to have a hub like this, or to have recognized that there needs to be a space for this kind of program?

[00:41:51] **Garth:** [00:41:51] Well, I don't think it's about being the first. I think it's in response to the patient needs as well as the staff moves. It doesn't help you [00:42:00] having brilliant processes with staff that don't understand them or the flip side, it doesn't help you having brilliant staff with broken processes. So we've trying to merge the two in response and which is the first principle of leaders is giving the customer the best value in which or our customer basically is on patient.

[00:42:22] So we need to focus all our energy out. Can we can make the journey for the patients better in any way.

[00:42:29] **Katusha:** [00:42:29] Absolutely. Fantastic. Thank you so much, Garth, I really appreciate you taking the time to chat with us today and I'm looking forward to hearing more about the other brilliant innovations that are going to be coming out of the hub and the program.

[00:42:42] Thank you.

[00:42:43] **Kentse:** [00:42:43] Now, I don't know about you, but I'm definitely going to allow these insightful conversations to brew my mind and my heart, we need to be mindful that faces should make all people feel like they belong. Yes, we do have a long way to go. The legacy of spatial injustice [00:43:00] lives on unless we actively and collectively start, I'm writing a new narrative for our country spaces.

[00:43:06] What can you do in your sphere of influence to start conversations about space and legacy that will help move the needle?

Bertha Centre has been asking:

How are digital technologies influencing the organisation of and conflict around urban space, and how does the digital divide affect power dynamics in urban space?

[00:43:26] With these questions in mind, we're excited to invite you to Build Peace 2020, an annual conference that brings together practice activists, academics, policymakers, artists, and technologists from around the world to share experiences and advanced knowledge on emerging challenges to peace in a digital era, showcasing peace-building innovations to address these challenges.

[00:43:50] Join us this year for Build Peace 2020: Social Justice & Pandemic in the Digital Age. The conference will be held in Cape Town & Online, from November 6-8th.

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