

# Living The Dream Of A Rainbow Nation

*dw.de - June 2014.* Rubbish piles and sewage litter the streets of Hillbrow, a notorious crime hot spot and urban slum in downtown Johannesburg. Hawkers harass passersby, trying to sell watches, sunglasses and cell phone covers. They could just as well be muggers who pull a knife or a gun. Life is cheap in South Africa - and especially so in Hillbrow. People have been killed for their cell phones. That's why Trish Branken, now accompanied by 11-year-old daughter Rachel, comes to meet anxious visitors on the street close to their apartment block.

The Brankens, the only white family in the neighborhood, walk the streets confidently. "I used to feel nervous," 42-year-old Trish, a small white woman with flowing blond hair, admits. But now this is home.

Read more: <http://www.dw.de/living-the-dream-of-a-rainbow-nation>

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## Leslie Kavanaugh - My Choice On Sustainability



The word “sustainability” is perhaps one of the most frequently evoked, yet most ill-defined concepts in contemporary discourse. The concept can be made to apply to scales ranging from (anti-) globalization to eating healthily. Although the concept is far from new, being bound to the notion of human beings tied to and embedded in the earthly environment, in the last century cognisance of the scarcity of resources - both human and material - have brought to the fore real concerns about the future viability of the earth as a human habitat.

In the age of global markets for goods and services, underlying any attempt for a sustainable environment would be the maintenance of a fair trade organizations, protection against exploitation of labour and materials, and an equitable constructive finance system. One of the first policy documents developed in association with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was Barbara Ward and René Dubos; *Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet*, (W. Norton & Co, 1972). <http://www.iied.org/>

More recently, the European Unions’ Institute of New Economic Thinking acknowledges that any “sustainable” development in sustainability must be accompanied by fundamental changes in economics and politics. <http://ineteconomics.org>

Other excellent resources for “thinking of the world as a system over time”, is the *International Institute for Sustainable Development*: <http://www.iisd.org/sd/>

*The Earth Institute - Columbia University*: <http://www.earth.columbia.edu/sections/view/9>

The ISE - Institute for Social Ecology: <http://www.social-ecology.org/about/about-the-ise/>

And not forgetting, Buckminster Fuller: <http://bfi.org/> whose whole systems approach advocated in his book: *Spaceship Earth. Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1963) revolutionized thinking about the earth as an interconnected system not isolated from the universe itself.

Technology in the last decades has certainly provided the means to provide sustainable economics, environments, and materials. A few websites for an overview:

Research for energy-optimised construction: *New Technologies* - <http://www.enob.info/en/new-technologies/>

*Alternative Energy Information Resources and Renewable Energy Technologies*: <http://www.alternative-energy-news.info/about/>

And remembering that renewable energy is also about conservation of energy and building smart in a symbiotic marriage with the environment, sensitive to the climate and orientation of the building, passive solar is often neglected in favor of more high-tech solutions. See for example, fifteen years Passive House in Darmstadt - Kranichstein: <http://www.passivhaustagung.de/Kranichstein.html>

In addition, beyond the notion of mere recycling is the *Cradle-to-Cradle movement* that thinks about products not only in their source materials and life utility, but also as a life-cycle connected to other processes and materials. From the *Sustainability Dictionary* at <http://www.sustainabilitydictionary.com/> the definition of Cradle-to-Cradle is a “framework seeks to create production techniques that are not just efficient but are essentially waste free. In cradle to cradle production all material inputs and outputs are seen either as technical or biological nutrients. Technical nutrients can be recycled or reused with no loss of quality and biological nutrients composted or consumed.”

William McDonough and Michael Braungart; *Cradle to Cradle. Remaking the Way We Make Things* (Vintage, 2009). <http://www.cradletocradle.com/>

William McDonough in his architectural practice implements in a practical way the concepts of Cradle-to-Cradle. See <http://mcdonoughpartners.com/design-approach/>

Yet obviously, questions concerning sustainability must be answered within the context of specific human communities. An environment is not sustainable just because it uses alternative energy sources, or recycles materials. In the late 1960's, when mass urban “renewal” projects were being planned and implemented, Ada Louise Huxtable reminded us that a community is also the people and the built environment that could be “sustained”. Her seminal, *Kicked a*

*Building Lately?* argued for the preservation of neighborhoods that were sustainable in the sense of supporting communal life in an amenable way, rather than tearing down entire segments of the city and building high-rise housing. Another important thinker/architect originating from this period was Christopher Alexander. He writes in his most recent book, *The Battle for Life and Beauty of the Earth: A Struggle between Two World Systems* (Oxford: OUP, 2012): “The purpose of all architecture is to encourage and support life-giving activity, dreams, and playfulness. But in recent decades, while our buildings are technically better-more sturdy, more waterproof, more energy efficient- they have also become progressively more sterile, rarely providing the kind of environment in which people are emotionally nourished, genuinely happy, and deeply contented.” Beauty and engagement are critical factors simply because when people care, they take care. Alexander has helped communities plan and provide for a sustainable environment - not only the infrastructure required but enabling the desire to sustain, to endure, throughout many generations. <http://www.livingneighborhoods.org/ht-0/libraryofunfoldings.htm> Here to sustain is to endure.

And just when the facts of global warming, international greed, territorial conflicts and exploitation of resources become overwhelming, a reminder of the small scale initiatives brought about by courageous and principled individuals give hope. My favorite: YES Magazine, a wealth of information and support: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/making-it-home/how-to-build-green-on-a-budget>

In conclusion, I name only one initiative, proving that one man gathering about himself a clear vision can make a difference. Samuel Mockbee started with D.K. Ruth in 1993 the Rural Studio at Auburn University School of Architecture. His vision was real “roll-up your sleeves” sustainability, challenging his design studio students to use discarded and donated materials to renovate and create spaces in the rural impoverished county around the university. <http://www.ruralstudio.org/about/purpose-history>

For Mockbee, architecture was providing a “shelter for the soul.” I have found no better idea of sustainability: *shelter*.

See: [Leslie Kavanaugh](#)

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# **Gemma Solés - Five Must-Watch Videos About Urbanization In Africa**

*Urban Africa, May 2014.* It's unnecessary to say that African urban populations are growing and urbanisation is becoming one of the most important and highly topical concepts in the management of African cities. There are many books, reports and papers on African urban issues but less audiovisual material. Here's a selection of the best videos from around the web.

The platform for African thought leaders Talking Heads produced, earlier this year, *The Future of Africa Cities*. In it, Prof. Edgar Pieterse, Director of the African Centre for Cities reflects on the theoretical and practical entanglements that rapid urbanization engenders for a precarious present, and a potential future in African Cities. He raises critical questions around sustainability, innovation, creativity, and knowledge production.

See more: <http://www.urbanafrica.net/blogs/urbanization-africa-video-roundup/>

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# **Rashmee Roshan Lall - Haiti Slum**

# Blooms Into Urban Oasis

*theguardian.com. June 2014.* “Plant moringa; harvest community harmony” could be a good motto for Jaden Tap Tap, a green oasis in the tough, garbage-strewn eyesore that is Cité Soleil. The slum, in the north of the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, is often described as the one of the most dangerous in the western hemisphere.

The Jaden Tap Tap, with its rows of quick-growing, nutritious moringa, known as the Tree of Life, is a community garden. Walking in from the sunbaked wasteland that is Cité Soleil, it is noticeably cooler. Like a leafy cocoon, it provides a shield from the harsh reality of life outside its walls. Its name is Haitian Creole for Garden Taxi - tap taps are the distinctive, brightly painted vehicles that ply the roads of Port-au-Prince.

Read more: <http://www.theguardian.com/haiti-garden-project>

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## Jade Leaf - Cape Town's Anti-Apartheid Urban Plan

### **FUTURE CAPE TOWN**

*June 2014.* On December 31, 2013, the late Nelson Mandela's giant face was projected onto Cape Town's Italian neo-

Renaissance City Hall. It was the same building where he first addressed his country as a free man two decades ago. Here and there, people were crying. Mandela - Tata Madiba by his African name - had died that month, and his multi-story image brought it home that it was up to the city now.

As the champagne corks popped at midnight, some of the audience turned to go, eager to beat the New Year's Eve traffic. The cars with colored families — “colored” being South Africa's accepted term for people of mixed race — headed home to the Cape Flats. Indian families drove to Rylands Estate. Black families steered toward Gugulethu or Khayelitsha. Whites had the shortest drive, to

suburbs just a few blocks away, or to homes perched dramatically along Table Mountain's towering slopes.

Within an hour of hearing Nelson Mandela speak of unity, we would be turning in, up to 60 kilometers apart, in suburbs mostly segregated by race.

Cape Town, then, is a good place to start if the question is, "Can design create a democratic city?" because it is here that exactly the opposite was achieved during the 20th century. From 1948, when formal apartheid was introduced, to the early 1990s, when its dismantling commenced, social and spatial engineering, as historian Vivian Bickford-Smith put it, transformed the spectacular peninsula from South Africa's least to its most segregated city. Cape Town's urban plan was guided by the ideology of the 1922 Stallard Commission, which was tasked with bringing black workers and consumers into cities while still keeping them separate from whites:

Read more:  
<http://futurecapetown.com/2014/06/cape-towns-anti-apartheid-urban-plan/#.U44OopS-3x4>

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## **SCC - The Continuing Expansion Of Favelas In Rio De Janeiro, Brazil**



*June 2014.* Despite the lack of official figures, the sense of community leaders and residents of the Ladeira dos Tabajaras and Morro dos Cabritos favelas in Copacabana (a neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro), is that the local population has increased substantially, especially after the creation of the Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) in 2010. Longstanding problems such as poor access to health and sanitation, worsened with the arrival of new residents, who in many cases, lived on asphalt prior to their arrival.

For example, the João Barros Barreto family Clinic in the favela has already reached a patient limit. The last registration was made in 2011 and, today, many people are left without access to healthcare. Danilo Ferreira, president of the Association of Residents of Ladeira dos Tabajaras and Morro dos Cabritos, is reminded that other services also do not account for growth, like water sanitation and sewage. The community leader says that these networks are old and in need of repair and expansion. He estimates that since 1990 the population has increased by approximately 35% (with higher growth after the establishment of UPP).

Read more: <http://sustainablecitiescollective.com/continuing-expansion-favelas>