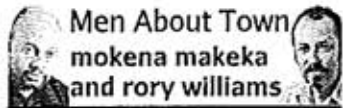


Big investment needed to create a genuinely creative city

THE recent announcement by President Jacob Zuma and Fifa president Sepp Blatter of a large capital injection into the development of local soccer talent is welcome and necessary. It is a recognition that talent is an asset that needs to be nurtured to reach its full potential.

For years soccer aficionados have lamented the lack of infrastructure and training required at all tiers of competition to create a world-class Bafana Bafana squad. The rugby World Cup success of 1995 and the Africa Cup of Nations of 1996 delayed the reflection necessary to pursue excellence. Although newcomers to the international scene, our political transition gave us an inflated sense of our capabilities.

This illusion of invincibility led to bold claims that our township soccer could compete with Brazilian flair and that in no time we would be world champions. But decades of navel-gazing made our country lose touch with the



Men About Town
mokena makeka
and rory williams

pursuit of excellence, and we failed to see how success in rugby and cricket could be repeated with soccer.

The ensuing years brought a slow dawning of the realisation that we are not exceptional at soccer, even in Africa. As we adjusted to reality, we were confronted with our foibles through stark and often gut-wrenching engagements with real talent. This has been healthy. We now understand that excellence takes years of care and patience.

Fast forward to 2010. Cape Town is vying for the title of World Design Capital 2014, an exciting and fresh initiative for a number of reasons. Without question we have world-class design expertise across a range of disciplines. Our

film and media, architecture and music have made an impact on the world scene, not to mention our cuisine, literature and our resurgent fashion industry.

The notion of a creative city is an established one that Cape Town has embraced – in name – for at least five years. However, the gap between a design capital and creative city is much wider than is appreciated.

In much the same way that South Africa has an abundance of soccer talent waiting to emerge, so it is with the design and creative sector. Without proper support and meaningful infrastructure, our claim to being a “design city” will be a challenge to uphold on the global stage.

The success of the creative industries in the city and Western Cape has been a result of intrepid and energetic entrepreneurs fighting to carve a space in what remains in many respects a “conservative city with great designers”.

The City of Cape Town has not, since the advent of democracy, held a single design competition for a significant public square or building; nor has it actively encouraged a culture of urban public open space as a platform for public and contemporary art and cultural production. We should be encouraging anonymous professional competitions for public works so that the best ideas become projects in this city.

Our museums are fixated with looking back, while cities like Barcelona, Helsinki, Valencia, Toronto, Vancouver and Turin have their view fixed on the horizon before them and have embraced designers to shape their future.

Design-oriented cities create the institutional conditions around which designers can flourish, with a city-based public arts policy and dedicated funding. Byzantine hurdles and government lethargy has led to many of our best designers leaving our shores. We need a

city that attracts the world's best and brightest, and those with an appetite for risk.

We need to incentivise private investment in social infrastructure by providing nuance and precision in development controls, and innovative placemaking needs to be a desired and targeted outcome of all infrastructure projects. The private sector cannot transform the city unless the city makes real space for design to happen.

Compared with Johannesburg and Durban, are we even a national design capital?

Let's hope it doesn't take 10 years of underinvestment (as with our soccer odyssey after 1996) for us to realise that making Cape Town a design capital requires a real investment in design and designers, and making the city a canvass on which we can paint our economic and social dreams.

● www.men-about-town.co.za