

Social Responsiveness Award for 2024, Dr Kathryn Ewing

For a better Gugulethu

Kathryn Ewing, a Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics (APG) in the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, is recognised for her valuable contribution made to research, advocacy and practice of urban design and architecture in Southern Africa, as well as her commitment to improving the quality of life and safety of marginalised communities in Cape Town. Ewing's approach to social responsiveness scholarship and pedagogy is built from over twenty years of participatory spatial research and experience as a co-founding director of Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading Non-profit Company from 2013 to 2023.

Transformative urban spaces can potentially act as places for exploring innovative ways of learning, dynamic ways of researching and emergent ways of practising urban design in the global South. Yet, safe and accessible public spaces are neglected spatial elements in South African cities. Ewing's transformative Southern practice integrates a taught interdisciplinary design studio, *Studio Hope Gugulethu*, and a small design-build public space project *iThemba Walkway*, situated within a larger research initiative *The Walkway Project*.

Studio Hope is deeply grounded in the lived experience. The overarching studio aims to introduce students to the complimentary and conflicting dimensions of everyday reality and urban transformation and design in a time of uncertainty in a vulnerable context. The studio focuses on the neighbourhood of Gugulethu, informing the relationship between spatial systems and the social, cultural and political context in Cape Town. Community representatives from Gugulethu are part of the engaged action learning process that allows for the work to be solution-based and action-orientated. Knowledge is co-produced through iterative and deliberate learning activities, feedback loops and co-design workshops.

Between 2019 to 2024, Studio Hope co-developed a concept of collaborative learning between youth and local agents in Gugulethu and urban design and landscape architecture students in APG. Combined engaged scholarship research and a Teaching Innovative Grant Award in 2021 opened the possibilities to train youth and fieldworkers in Gugulethu within the virtual world of communication during a landscape of COVID-19 lock-down. Through a series of digital urban walks and urban talks, the collective developed a series of spatial strategies connected to Sustainable Development Goals and key themes of education, safety, everyday culture, and environmental justice.

A small, neglected walkway or access passage connects Dora Tamana Road and Lolo Mkonto Road in Gugulethu – is commonly referred to as NY57/89 paveway. In March 2021 when visited by Xolile Ndzoyi (a local agent for Studio Hope) on a virtual urban walk, the public space was covered by solid waste, rubble and attracted crime and violence. Since November 2021, multiple co-design events and co-production workshops have taken place involving public space upgrading in the passage with multiple partners. The passage was collectively renamed *iThemba Walkway* and has emerged as a catalytic stakeholder-driven project that demonstrates active, responsible design and participatory development opportunities in Gugulethu. The project guides the activation and upgrade of small public spaces through a co-designed process and 'design and build' approach. The iThemba Walkway partnership includes multiple stakeholders, street committees, active citizens, local agents and youth representatives and the Gugulethu Sport Council. The project has received support from the City of Cape Town Mayor, the local Ward 39 Councillor and various directorates including Catchment Stormwater and River Management, Bulk Services, Water and Sanitation, Urban Waste Management, and Communications and Tourism; along with support at provincial level from the Minister of Cultural Affairs and Sport.

Due to the positive impact and collaborative approach, 23 additional walkways have been discovered in Gugulethu over the past 4 years, hereby opening possibilities for a broader understanding of safe and inclusive public spaces in Cape Town, emerging as *The Walkway Project*. The research is participatory, action-based, that explores public space through engaged dialogue around resilience, safety and spatial justice funded via the URC Project Fund and ACU Climate Resilience Challenge Grant.

The iThemba Walkway has had numerous activations, implementation workshops and presentations at international conferences with publications in international journals. UCT Urban Design researchers, students and iThemba Walkway partners co-presented at the Urban Forum to the Mayor of the City of Cape Town (CoCT) and Young Urbanists in August 2022. In March 2023, the Walkway Project was selected for an invitation to the CoCT Collaborate Platform at the Water and Sanitation Innovation Indaba. This opened iThemba Walkway to be included as a key stakeholder with the City of Cape Town's Liveable Urban Waterway (LUW) and Green Infrastructure Project in 2023 and 2024. The iThemba Walkway was co-exhibited by Xolile Ndzoyi and Kathryn Ewing at the Bertha Spaces 2023 Festival, celebrating the power of physical spaces in promoting human connection and social change. iThemba Walkway was exhibited under the theme of spatial justice at Philippi Village from 15 to 17 June 2023. In October 2023, Kathryn Ewing was part of an international multi-disciplinary group with Gehl Studio from Copenhagen and New York, within a project called, *Social Infrastructure: Connecting People and Places for Thriving Communities*, where The Walkway Project was used as a relevant case study for the project research. Further, iThemba Walkway was recognised with a special mention in the International Design BuildXchange Award 2024, giving global recognition to the research.