rebuilding identity

THE DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE CURRENT REDEVELOPMENT OF THE DISTRICT SIX SITE

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I declare that this research paper is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters in Heritage Studies in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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• ABSTRACT
• INTRODUCTION
• CHAPTER 1
• CHAPTER 2: FROM AN EMPTY SPACE TO A SAFE SPACE: THE BIRTH OF THE DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM
• CHAPTER 3: FROM COMMEMORATION TO RESTITUTION: THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM
• CHAPTER 4: REBUILDING A COMMUNITY IMAGINED THROUGH THE DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM
• CONCLUSION
• BIBLIOGRAPHY
This paper examines how and to what extent the District Six Museum has contributed the current redevelopment of the District Six site. Since its inception, the Museum has challenged accepted definitions of heritage and has transcended common museological practices through its initiative as an institution to go beyond nurturing the memory of one of the most iconic sites of forced removal in South Africa, but to also contribute to the site’s redevelopment. The Museum grew out of an organisation that was dedicated to protecting the empty wasteland that the District had become since it was announced a ‘white area’ by the apartheid government and bulldozed. The same group of people became passionate not only about protecting the site, and conducting “memory work” surrounding it but eventually contributing to a process of restitution and rebuilding the homes and lives of those whose houses where destroyed and communities were fragmented. This paper considers such an initiative, which began in a pre-democratic environment where the concept of heritage was ill-defined and cultural institutions often served apartheid agendas. This consideration will involve an examination of the way in which the District Six Museum developed; the Museum’s role and how this role has evolved and the District Six that has been re-imagined through the Museum and how this “idea” is contributing to re-development.
introduction

The role of contemporary heritage institutions in South Africa is not reducible to a simple list of traditional and straightforward responsibilities and functions. A heritage institution is quite commonly expected to facilitate research, to be educational, promoting empathy and understanding but to also go beyond such initiatives. The 1999 Heritage Resources Act asserts:

Our heritage celebrates our achievements and contributes to redressing past inequities. It educates, it deepens our understanding of society and encourages us to empathise with the experience of others. It facilitates healing and material and symbolic restitution and it promotes new and previously neglected research into our rich oral traditions and customs. (DAC).

And yet various heritage institutions have aimed to transcend the expectation, encapsulated above, both of what Heritage itself actually is and what heritage institutions are meant to be doing. While most institutions inevitably administer a form of symbolic restitution some insist on facilitating more material or literal forms of restitution. It is my endeavour both to question if the District Six Museum is a primary example of such a taxing quest and to analyse the implications of such an approach.

District Six has become a highly iconic site and, as Annie Coombes states, has become ‘metonymic of all those dehumanizing instances of forced removals that were an integral part of apartheid’s master plan from the 1950’s onward’ (Coombes, 2003: 117). As dictated by the apartheid government’s Group Areas act thousands of people lost their homes, found their ‘communities’ fragmented and
their identities disjointed. The story of District Six is an element of South African heritage that can be celebrated [in terms of the vibrant narratives of the way the District was], that can teach lessons and ‘encourage us to empathise with the experience of others’ and can simultaneously contribute to ‘redressing past inequities’. District Six is thus many things; it is a place that once did and still does ‘provide a sense of belonging and a source of solidarity for its people’ (Soudien, 2001: 98); physically it is an almost empty and scarred wasteland; to those involved in the District Six Museum it is an idea and a place that offers the possibility of ‘recreating an environment in which civility is possible’ (Soudien, 2006: 3). My reasoning for selecting the District Six Museum as the subject of my research is because of its unique evolution as a heritage institution and its intimate connection and dedication to the actual District Six Site, to the people that once lived there and to finally bringing them back through a process of restitution and redevelopment. Chapter One will explore this reasoning in greater detail.

The District Six Museum never began as a heritage institution in the way that, for example, the Apartheid Museum or Constitution Hill in Johannesburg began. The process was far more organic and the Museum originated with a group of people interested in and dedicated to preserving and eventually developing the District Six site with a simultaneous passion for ‘rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town’ (Soudien, 2006: 2). Chapter Two will deal with an overview of how the District Six Museum began and how its origin has affected its contemporary role as a heritage institution involved in redevelopment over and above ‘memory work’.

Out of the Museum grew an organisation that is simultaneously separate and connected to the Museum: the District Six Beneficiary and Redevelopment Trust. The Beneficiary Trust is almost single handedly carrying out the practical development of the District Six site, for example, redesigning and rebuilding the site and facilitating the relocation of ex-residents. While the Beneficiary Trust claims to be disconnected from the Museum most of its initiators are Museum Trustees, and as I will argue in Chapter Three, it maintains a highly complex
relationship with the Museum and its staff. It also becomes questionable in light of the Beneficiary Trust’s very practical role what the role of the Museum has been in the process. Chapter Three will analyse the relationship between the Museum and the Beneficiary Trust but will also bring to light how the Museum has contributed to redevelopment. The generational tension between new Museum employees and those on the Trust that have been involved since before the Museum’s inception plays a key factor in both the relationship between the Museum and the Trust and how the new District Six is being conceptualised. Major questions in this Chapter will be not only how the Museum has been narrated and by whom but also which narrative/s is being applied to the new District Six, what are the characteristics of such a narrative and how this is being negotiated.

Something that is unquestionable is the amount of research carried out by the District Six Museum and the intimate relationship that has formed between the Museum and the residents who were forcibly removed. The argument put forward in this paper is that an ‘idea’ of District Six has been re-imagined through the Museum and the research carried out there. A central question within this argument is how has this rearticulation of identity, which has been formed through the thorny process of remembrance and oral witnessing and interpretation, affected the redevelopment of the District Six site? Who has facilitated such a process and what are the implications? Chapter Four tackles these questions.

On a broader level, the following paper aims to question how and if the heritage sector in South Africa is contributing to a process of redress and reconciliation through its contribution towards both nurturing and redeveloping seemingly lost communities. It is in this light that I will endeavour to assess through the heritage site of District Six if and how the accepted role of heritage institutions in South Africa has been transcended and what the components and implications of such a challenge are.
CHAPTER ONE

AIM

The aim of my research paper is to examine the involvement of the District Six Museum in Cape Town in the process of land restitution and redevelopment. I aim to continue a process of intensive research surrounding the development of the District Six site since. District Six remains one of the most rigorously researched forced removal sites in South Africa. From 1994 to the present the District Six Museum has played an enormous role in capturing and maintaining information about the site. There is now another phase of research that is beginning to develop: that surrounding the carrying out and implications of land restitution. I plan to pick up where many researchers have left off and deal with the process of land restitution and specifically the involvement of the District Six Museum in this process. In order to assess this process I have conducted interviews with museum employees, ex-employees, trustees and those who have done previous research on the site.

RATIONALE

While extensive research has gone into oral histories and recollections of the past, there is a new arena to work within: that of redevelopment. An organisation that has played a major role in carrying out the physical aspects of redevelopment is the District Six Beneficiary and Redevelopment Trust which was started and is run by a number of Museum trustees such as Crain Soudien and Anwah Nagia. Integral to my research has not only been the District Six Museum’s contribution to the
process of redevelopment but also the institution’s relationship with the Beneficiary Trust. Despite the fact that the Museum’s role becomes a complex one in light of this highly intricate relationship, my research has been based on trying to decipher how the museum has made the transition from commemoration to restitution. In other words the Museum’s work was for many years, as trustee Ciraj Rassool stresses, ‘memory work’, but there has always been another dimension: the Museum’s ‘desire to see the community of District Six restored and called back to resettle, redevelop and heal the scarred landscape at the foot of the mountain’ (2001: xi). What drives my research is the question of how the Museum is acting on this desire and what contributions the institution has made to the process thus far. The foundation of my research will be based on questioning how the heritage sector can contribute to a process of redress and reconciliation through its contribution towards both nurturing and redeveloping seemingly lost communities. As included in the introduction above (p.6) the Heritage Resources Act proclaims that ‘our heritage celebrates our achievements and contributes to redressing past inequities...It facilitates healing and material and symbolic restitution and it promotes new and previously neglected research into our rich oral traditions and customs’ (DAC, 1999). It is thus the expectation of Heritage institutions in South Africa to both facilitate healing and material and symbolic restitution. Many researchers have dealt with the way in which the District Six Museum has facilitated healing which will be mentioned and dealt with in the forth coming chapters but my primary research is based on the way in which the institution has facilitated both material and symbolic restitution.

My endeavor is also to assess through the heritage site of District Six the possible manifestations and implications of the way the concept of heritage has been described by the Heritage Resources Act and if and how this concept is being challenged. My analysis is situated in the question of if and how the District Six Museum has plausibly surpassed the role of heritage institutions on a national and global level by not only playing a hand in ‘symbolic restitution’ but material
restitution as well and what the complications and tensions of this transcendence are.

THE ORIGIN AND ROLE OF THE DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM

The District Six Museum, which was established in 1994, has been one of the major vehicles in the process of sustaining ‘public memory’ [a concept that will be dealt with in the literature review] surrounding the District Six site. The Museum acts as a tangible form of memorial representation. The forced removal site, despite its fundamental emptiness and absence, is more representative of the memorial value it innately contains than a forced removal site such as Sophiatown which structurally is a completely different place and reveals relatively nothing of its history before the forced removals. The Museum emerged out of the Hands Off District Six (HODS) Committee which ‘thwarted all plans to redevelop the destroyed district’ [Minty, 2006: 427]. Once the Museum was established after the success of the HODS of protecting the site there appeared to be an instinct to ‘heal the scarred landscape at the foot of the mountain’ [Rassool: 2001: xi]. The District Six Museum has in this light strived to both preserve and develop the history of the site and has done so primarily through a relationship with the ex-residents. Sandra Prosalendis, Jennifer Marot, Crain Soudien and Anwah Nagia in their article “Punctuations: periodic impressions of a museum” elaborate on some of the Museum’s involvement:

The museum has played an important role in the many struggles around the social, cultural and civic renewal that are taking place in the city of Cape Town... [it has] created a space for ordinary people to intervene in the bigger politics of urban renewal and to express their views about the future of the city. It has facilitated several cultural events, mainly in the forms of exhibitions, which have drawn heavily on the input of ordinary District Sixers. These events have been path-breaking in so far as ordinary people have been able to describe themselves as they wish to be seen [2001: 84].
The Museum has thus both cultivated and developed the memorial process of the site through the ex-residents and has allowed a high level of interactivity. It seems only natural then, when it comes to the issue of land restitution, that the Museum is a vital source of both input and initiative.

LAND RESTITUTION

The restitution of Land Rights Act was passed in 1994 by parliament and is aimed at providing reconciliation to those who were dispossessed of property through racist laws or practices (Field, 2001: 119). The land restitution process in District Six appears to be aimed at developing the site with a principal sensitivity to the past, allowing the site itself, in a sense, to become a memorial and spatial reconstruction of identity. Yet what will be explored in the forth coming chapters is the fact that the re-development of District Six is being applied to a new set of circumstances. Despite these new circumstances, those who are returning are doing so because they are ‘driven by dreams of returning to the home or community where they feel they belonged’ (Field, 2001: 120). The lengthy process of land claims has not been an easy one, and for many claimants has been a frustrating one. At the same time, because District Sixers will receive new houses on the original land there is a heavy emotional burden. Sean Field states:

Sad there will be no instant relief from the emotional burden of the past. Many people have refused to apply for restitution because it is too difficult for them to relive uncomfortable memories. And many others that did apply said it has made their emotional burden even worse. Nevertheless, people’s struggles for restitution are driven by dreams of returning to the home or community where they feel they belonged. But this struggle is also about wanting to be heard, wanting to be seen and wanting to be remembered (2001: 120)
The re-developed site is thus inextricably linked to the past and will simultaneously act as a memorial site and in another sense as the possible resurrection of a lost identity. Yet how exactly is District Six being remembered and where does the concept of this lost identity come from? District Six’s ‘identity’, which many argue cannot be summarised is in many ways being constructed through the District Six Museum and its relationship with ex-residents. This paper aims to question how and by who this ‘identity’ is being established which has implications not only for the way in which District Six is being portrayed on the Museum walls, but also for the way in which the site is being re-developed. Another implication is the fact that it is not the Museum that is physically redeveloping the site but the Beneficiary Trust which is run by Museum Trustees. It thus becomes relevant to ask not only what the relationship between the Museum and the Beneficiary Trust is, but how they are influencing and informing each other and the ‘idea’ of District Six which is being re-developed.

QUESTIONS

• What kind of development is occurring or being planned in District Six in light of the restitution process and what is the role of the Museum in this process?
• What is the relationship between the Beneficiary Trust and the Museum?
• If and how is the development of the site viewed as a continuation of the Museum’s ‘memory work’? In other words is District Six being memorialised through redevelopment?
• If the memorial process has been integrated into the development of the site, has it been embraced or detrimental to the restitution process?
• How do these processes possibly contribute to notions such as redress and reconciliation in the 1999 Heritage Act and the 1997 White Paper on Arts Culture and Heritage?
• How can heritage institutions contribute to social cohesion?
• How has the identity of District Six been established through the District Six Museum?
• Is this established identity symbolic or supposedly factual?
• How is that identity possibly being reconstructed by various parties in the process of restitution and development?

LITERATURE REVIEW

I have combined the literature review and theoretical framework as all the texts I am dealing with are driven by strong theoretical concerns. I have first given an overview of the two main texts I am utilising and then provided a general theoretical framework.

OVERVIEW

The two main texts I have chosen for my literature review are compiled by those who were previously or are currently involved with the District Six Museum. They involve a variety of contributors and offer various forms of analysis and historical accounts. Both were published in 2001 and much of what has happened since has yet to be recorded. I view my endeavor as both an analysis and a continuation of the issues dealt with in both texts.

Field, Sean (2001) Lost communities, living memories: remembering forced removals in Cape Town

Field’s text deals explicitly with information surrounding forced removals in Cape Town captured through oral history, storytelling and the process of remembrance. While drawing on oral history Field’s text asks central questions about the process
of forced removals such as why they happened and how they have changed people’s lives (2001: 11). As Field argues Lost Communities is not a complete story of forced removals in Cape Town but rather focuses specifically on the stories of District Six, Windermere, Tramway Road, Simon’s Town and Lower Claremont. The chapters of the text are put together through both oral testimonies and photographs. The principal aim of the book is to reveal the way in which oral history and story-telling can be an evocative process of the historical disclosure of forced removal sites.

Rassool, Ciraj and Prosalendis, Sandra [eds] [2001] Recalling community in Cape Town: creating and curating the District Six Museum

Recalling Community is an in-depth historical account and analysis of the District Six Museum and the role it has played in the process of recollection, redress, remembrance, archiving, collecting and developing the once empty and fragmented site. The text is a compilation of various voices including those of Ciraj Rassool, Crain Soudien, Vincent Kolbe, Lucien le Grange, and Peggy Delport among many others. Rassool describes the complex way in which the non-government funded institution grew and developed and depicts the book as the ‘history, the cultural work and the ongoing thinking on the part of the District Six Museum’ (2001: vii). Recalling Community is essentially a collection of stories revolving around the Museum told by those most involved. The text aims to show how the Museum has contributed to the transformation of curatorship and heritage in South Africa. Another of the principal initiatives of the book is to articulate how the history and the complexity of District Six are reflected in the Museum. The text ends with an enthusiastic explanation of plans to reconstitute and redevelop the once ‘empty traumatic landscape’ which are ‘challenges that the Museum awaits to address with enthusiasm’ (2001: xxi).
LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

IDENTITY AND FORCED REMOVALS

Since South Africa became a democratic country in 1994 there has been an aching need on many social levels to begin to construct a new national identity. Over twelve years later, however, there still remain grey areas and seemingly impossible challenges to such a thorny venture. The reality is that even the concept of 'community' is difficult to grasp on a global level in that there has in some cases been a gradual loss of 'public memory' and social groups often exist in what are essentially segregated islands. Yet sites like District Six, compared to some of the desolate and harsh environments that now exist in South Africa, according to Lucien le Grange 'somehow continue to stimulate public memory' [2001: 108].

District Six as a community was many things and one could easily say that an attempt to assign the place an overall identity would be in vain. The District was home to a variety of races and nationalities. As well as the large population of coloured people within District Six, Felicity Swanson and Jane Harries in Lost communities, living memories refer to the District as 'a melting pot of cultures including people descended from freed slaves, Africans, European immigrants from Ireland and Jews from Eastern Europe' [2001: 63]. Yet the characterisation of District Six and its overall identity lies in many ways in its heterogeneity. This hybrid mixture of various identities seemed to be both organic in its development as a working class and fairly impoverished district and a conscious reaction to the inhumane social order engineered by the apartheid government. Crain Soudien asserts:

...District Six, like many other places in South Africa, and indeed elsewhere in the world, is a communal landscape constructed both in response to and independently of the hostile social
order of apartheid. From this landscape came and continues to come, an identity that provides a sense of belonging and a source of solidarity for its people. Against the apartheid order that sought to present people’s identities in the narrow terms of race, people found in District Six the space to take on a variety of identities [2001: 98].

In District Six there seemed to be no limit on the possibility of identity, and this situational openness appeared to contribute to the environment of solidarity. Soudien continues to say that despite the poverty that existed:

‘District Sixers could feel that they were participating in the reproduction of their religious, cultural political and other identities, but the amplitude and openness of its discourse allowed them to be open too [Soudien, 2001: 104]’

One of the major elements that allowed this solidarity to form was the urban structure of the District and way in which such a structure created a dynamic street life. Le Grange describes some of the reasons behind how the physical urban environment of District Six is capable of stimulating public memory:

As an urban district it served more than one primary function, accommodating closely related places of residence, worship, education, entertainment and work. This mix of uses ensured the presence of people who were outdoors at different times and who were able to use many facilities in common... In addition it had a dense concentration of people, of different classes, resident in the area. Within this context, urban places assumed many different characters- the schoolyards were neighborhood playgrounds, school buildings, churches and mosques were the community centers and the streets were the space for public contact. [2001: 109]

District Six was a place where identity was established through the streets and the intimate intermingling of diverse communities. The communities that existed in District Six, once they were dispersed after the forced removals took place were lost, yet now as le Grange says ‘somehow continue to stimulate public memory’. Since the forced removals began in 1966, the site degenerated into a wasteland, and despite and possibly because of the absence that pervades the site there exists a strong and ever-growing construction and reconstruction of ‘public memory’.
Yet at the same time there are many complexities that lie at the root of the question of ‘public memory’. How reliable are the constructions of District Six identity? Many of the definitions of what District Six was may lie in retrospective identity seeking. The site, despite the fondness with which it has been described has also been referred to as a slum, a violent and dangerous area and a breeding ground for gangs. But because of the established notion of multi-cultural solidarity in an urban context, the site often plausibly and complexly becomes a synecdoche for the establishment of a new national South African identity. This becomes complex in that through the national approbation of the symbol of District Six, an understanding of what “nation” means is called into question. Simultaneously, how is the ‘issue of District Six’ in its apparent symbolism detracting attention and funds from other forced-removal sites? Is the attention paid to District Six detrimental to other sites? The implications of District Six development in this light become highly fraught on a national level. Another problematic area is that District Six as ‘multi-cultural’ model often detracts attention from an analysis of class distinction. The restitution process contributes to such issues, in that those who are relocating are race specific which further complicates the ever-growing construction and reconstruction of ‘public memory’ as mentioned above. These complications will be examined in this paper.

THE COMPLEXITY OF COMMUNITY

In terms of a theoretical framework I will be dealing quite intimately with the notion of ‘community’, how the term is often defined, redefined and sometimes exploited and misrepresented. The term ‘community’ and the consequent identity that belongs to a community become highly complex. For example, as Sue Krige states, ‘community’ in ‘post apartheid SA is often an imaginary group used to legitimate a range of policies and practices in and outside heritage institutions, but
also to derail them’ (2006, notes). Another more general text I intend to focus on is Annie E. Coome’s _History after Apartheid_. Coombe states that:

Despite local awareness of the ways in which colonialism and apartheid have contributed to both the artificial construction of apparently homogenous ethnic constituencies and the destruction of other forms of viable community, the single most frequently used justification for much government expenditure in the public heritage sector is a much vaunted recourse to an ideal of “community” (2003: 4).

Coombe further points out the need to analyse the particularities in which a concept such as community is ‘mobilized and constructed in instances where specific histories or sites imbued with historical significance are being contested’ and to understand ‘what stakes might be involved in negotiating different pasts and histories at times of social and political transition in the history of any nation when the very notion of what constitutes a “citizen” is being radically redefined (2003: 8).’

In light of this it becomes a complex endeavor not only to define what kind of community existed in District Six prior to the forced removals but also to define the kind of community that has been researched and imagined through the District Six Museum. The identity that once belonged to District Six has been studied by researchers such as Sean Field and the District Six Museum largely through oral history and storytelling. This process of remembrance is in itself slippery, yet as Field says: ‘it is of limited value to understand memories only through scientific definitions of what is true or false. It is far more useful to record and interpret how people make their own truths and their own meanings’ (2001: 118). On a larger scale South Africa is still virtually in a state of transition and definitions surrounding both community and identity are not easily defined; within this atmosphere of uncertainty how does one negotiate a possible reconstruction of a past identity? The notion of restoration becomes deeply questionable here. Peggy Delport in her article “Signposts for retrieval: a visual framework for enabling memory of place and time” asks ‘can the loss of place ever be reversed, or
is the reality of dispossession too complex and final for it to be recovered in concrete and social terms? [2001: 40]. Delport continues to say:

The yearning for restoration is not, in the main for literal return to the physical place, for it is repeatedly and realistically said by most ex-residents that what is remembered cannot be reconstituted. Rather a need is expressed for recalling the experience of those who were dispossessed and for acknowledging responsibility for those acts. Also, those aspects of individual and collective identity, and of human capacities that could not be annihilated, need to be affirmed and celebrated [2001: 41].

Delport makes it clear here that to attempt to physically reconstruct the site as it once was would be in vain. There is a further complexity in that there is a slippage between restoration and restitution. The restitution process does not essentially allow for restoration in that the society that was lost was multi-ethnic, and the restitution process is more about compensation than restoring what was. Yet at the same time, as I have mentioned above, it would be impossible for the physical reconstruction of the site to bear no connection to the site’s past.

In light of the above theoretical frameworks and dilemmas I will endeavor to ask many speculative questions concerning community, identity, remembrance and place and the various perceptions of such notions and how these perceptions are influencing the way in which District as a place as a community and as an identity is being rebuilt.

**METHODOLOGY**

**THE PEOPLE**

My research subjects include researchers that have been involved with the District Six site and the Museum, museum trustees, museum employees, and the
previous director of the museum. I initially planned to additionally interview those ex-residents who have relocated back to District Six. However, after a discussion with researchers from the District Six Museum I was advised that my research project is not extensive enough to converse in an appropriate way with the ex-residents. I thus resolved to utilise recent interviews done by researchers at the District Six Museum with relocated ex-residents.

Interviewees were of an academic background and were diverse in terms of race and sex between the age of 30 and 50 years. I conducted interviews with the following candidates: Sean Field [researcher], Sandra Prosalendis [previous director], Crain Soudien [researcher, Museum trustee, member of the Beneficiary Trust], Utando Baduza [ex-employee] and Bonita Bennet [museum employee, Research Manager]. I requested permission to record the interviews on a dictaphone before the interview began. I advised the interviewees that they can remain anonymous and will be able to view the transcripts before they are used in the research paper. I also made it clear that I am a student and that any interview conducted will become part of a research paper that will remain within the University of the Witwatersrand and will only be accessible through the University Library.

DESCRIPTION OF DATA

The source of the data that I have for evidence involves oral observations and opinion and entails a series of interviews. Aside from these testimonies I have made use of certain relevant reports and acts from both the Department of Arts and Culture and the Department of Land Affairs, namely: the 1999 National Heritage Resources Act and the 1994 Restitution of Land Rights Act. It was not necessary to speak to government officials directly as the related information I was looking for was extracted from the above mentioned documents. As mentioned
above I also accessed the District Six Museum`s Archives which includes transcripts of interviews and meetings.

ACCOUNT OF INSTRUMENT

The means with which I accessed the data that has made up my research paper has been, as mentioned above, a series of interviews. These interviews involved pre-planned questions based on the questions asked in my rationale section yet the interviews were open to an element of fluidity.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews were recorded by dictaphone and once complete they were transcribed by me personally. In the case of interviews done with museum employees and previous researchers I was looking for information that could act as a both a theoretical situational analysis and guidance. What I was looking for is an analysis of how relationships, roles and situations have developed since the restitution process began. I was looking for definition of what the relationship was between the Museum and the Beneficiary Trust, what both organisations’ approaches towards redevelopment were and if these approaches were realised or compromised. The over-arching themes that I attempted to draw out involved the notions of living heritage in which the past cannot be avoided; constructs of both identity and community; and the contribution of heritage to both redress and social cohesion.

The following is an example of the kinds of question I asked:

1. In your view, how has the museum ultimately played a role in the redevelopment of the District Six site?
2. What is the role of the Homecoming Centre and what has it achieved so far?

3. Do you feel the museum’s role in the redevelopment process transcends a purely educational and informative one?

4. In your view, what is the relationship between the District Six Beneficiary Trust and the Museum?

5. How has the Museum informed and contributed to the Beneficiary Trust?

6. I am aware of the recent conferences and meetings held with the relocated ex-residents; to what extent has their input contributed to the process of redevelopment?

7. What other parties or organisations have contributed to the process?

8. There have been 24 houses built by the Beneficiary Trust and there are plans for another 100. To your knowledge who has ultimately informed and decided how these houses are structured and how the urban plan will work? Has the museum in any way contributed to the new structural plans?

9. To your knowledge will the urban plan in any way be based on the original plan of District Six before the forced removals?

10. If so what do you feel are the implications of such a plan?
11. I am aware of the memorials that are being planned for the site such as memorial park. Who will be managing such projects, the Museum or the Beneficiary Trust and how will such projects fit into the housing plans?
There are various heritage sites world-wide that have become empty natural spaces or wastelands and offer very little visually that might explain their ascribed importance. These empty spaces have an evocative hold on the viewer in that, as Annie Coombes believes, there is a felt need for them to be reanimated symbolically and sometimes physically [2003: 120]. Anecdotally, many people may long to acknowledge their own similarities with a kingdom that once existed on
Mapungubwe Hill, a site that holds seemingly little evidence that a community once lived there. Others want the needless deaths of the millions who were murdered and given mass-burials during the Holocaust in what are now peaceful forests in Europe to be memorialized. And some, such as the District Six Beneficiary Trust, want to rebuild both the homes and the lives of those who were forcibly removed from District Six which has been left largely undeveloped since it was bulldozed between 1966 and the 1980s. These empty spaces are often more evocative than solid structures such as palaces, gas chambers and houses because we long to reanimate them, and give them meaning in an attempt to grasp what happened there. In the case of District Six however, such reanimation is not only possible but is actually happening as the site is gradually being redeveloped through the restitution process. This redevelopment makes the empty wasteland in the centre of Cape Town even more evocative as many begin to imagine not only what it once was but also what it will eventually become.

It is Crain Soudien’s assertion that the vision held up by those involved in the District Six Museum, from the very start, has been to ‘rebuild a non-racial Cape Town’. The initiative of rebuilding not only the homes but also the ‘lives’ of those who will be returning to District Six is linked to the nostalgic vision of District Six as a place where, according to Anwah Nagia, ‘pale faces slept with black faces’ and ‘they didn’t feel, sense and permeate that difference, or the idea that they were different’ (2001: 177). This vision derives from the need to not only reanimate the empty space that is the District Six site but to also use it as a symbol and motivation for social cohesion in Cape Town, and by extension, South Africa. Nostalgia is in this light intersecting with a strong political desire that follows on from the success of the HODS Campaign, which ‘thwarted all plans to redevelop the destroyed district’ (Minty, 2006: 427). In the introduction to The Struggle for District Six Past and Present (1990) Shamil Jeppe and Soudien say that the ‘perspective of the Hands Off District Six committee...is that the present struggle in and for District Six is more than simply one about housing for needy and
displaced persons. It is that, but it is also part of the struggle for political hegemony’ (14). And, Soudien says, the Museum’s vision ‘came directly out of the antecedent organisations that gave birth to the Museum, particularly the Hands off District Six campaign’ (2006: 2). Thus, while the Museum is ultimately a space that memorialises District Six through its collection of what remains of the site and its research into the narratives of ex-residents, its initiatives as an institution have always transcended that. As well as its initiative, the Museum’s vision has essentially from its inception exceeded being merely about nostalgic preservation. This chapter will deal with the way in which the District Six Museum developed; how it was not initially conceived as a heritage institution but was born out of other initiatives and how its origin has affected its contemporary role as a heritage institution.

Soudien says that the museum got off the ground on the basis of a whole range of community initiatives that essentially Anwah Nagia and he were leading at the time through the HODS. The HODS was an alliance of civics, religious organisations, schools, sports organisations and political structures (Rassool & Prosalendis, 2001:146). They organised a conference in 1988 that led to the publication of A Struggle for District Six and out of that conference they took the decision to start a museum which only officially opened in 1994 (Soudien, 2006: 1). When this decision was made the concept of heritage was undeveloped. The notion was either centered on apartheid agendas or was not yet as relevant as it would be in a post-apartheid context. For those involved in the development of the District Six Museum, in the context of 1980s South Africa, it had been more important to mobilise change than to purely commemorate crucial and painful historical events. Sandra Prosalendis, who was one of the first people employed by the museum, claims ‘it wasn’t a museum... it was a group of people who had very political interests in terms of what was going on in South Africa... so people formed this foundation with different agendas but all with human rights
initiatives... Heritage wasn’t a word we used at that time... heritage came into play in 1996, 1997.⁵

There were some people involved who further questioned the notion of a ‘museum’ as the appropriate kind of institution to represent District Six and the people who lived there. Some people involved in the institution, such as Peggy Delport, felt that the conventional concept of a museum, with its connotations of stasis and historical grounding, was not a suitable enough space to nurture the ‘living heritage’ that District Six embodied (2001: 11). The museological context within which the District Six Museum was developing was that of the apartheid museum. In his essay “Emerging Discourses around Identity in the New South Africa: New Museum Exhibitions in South Africa”, Soudien discusses the shift that has happened in museums in South Africa since the end of apartheid. He begins by discussing the historical role of the apartheid museum, which, according to Deacon ‘was used...to the detriment of the heritage of indigenous peoples’ (2004: 119). Soudien elaborates on this argument that is shared by many other historians by saying ‘[the apartheid museum] both displaced and denigrated the experiences of people who were not deemed to be white’ (2006:1). It is in this light that the concept of heritage was at times very politically charged and the initiatives of ‘heritage institutions’, not in all cases but often, involved serving apartheid government ideology. It was thus a highly disconcerting venture to attempt to place the story of District Six within such a framework.

Yet instead of denouncing the proposition of a museum there seemed to be an unspoken understanding that this space would transcend the notion of what a museum was accepted to be in South Africa in that it would be an ‘activist space... [playing] a vital role towards “healing the city” (Minty, 2006: 428). The space, from the very beginning was perceived as alive and organic. Peggy Delport, who was one of the first members of the District Six Foundation committee, has given much consideration to the matter:
I often wonder in what spirit and with what intention the term ‘museum’ was first used in the context of District Six. Thinking back on this problematic notion of a ‘museum’, with all the connotations of collections and displays, the term seems at odds with the intense six-year life of the museum project as a living space and place for working with memory. Recalling that time, I believe that the term ‘museum’ may have been evoked as something that suggested a solidity, a continuity and a permanence that could withstand even the force of the bulldozer and the power of a regime committed to the erasure of place and community. [2001: 11]

Delport provides an interesting appropriation and conversion of the idea of a ‘museum’. What she proposes is despite a resistance towards establishing what is traditionally considered to be a ‘museum’ as a home for the memory of District Six, such a structure had the ability to provide both ‘a continuity and a permanence’ that were needed as a means to resist the erasure of the site. What Delport is also suggesting is that a reinterpretation of what a museum is and can achieve was necessary. The concept of a ‘living space’ is also important in light of how the District Six Museum was conceived. This term relates directly to the notion of ‘living heritage’. The suggestion at the time of a ‘living space’ that both memorialises and nurtures ‘living heritage’ was fairly contentious in the context of the apartheid museum. What this approach suggests is that identity and community are concepts that cannot be categorised, neatly placed in glass cabinets and ultimately forgotten about. The term ‘community’ and the consequent identity that belongs to a community are complex. No community can be entirely classified, specifically the community that lived in and was removed from District Six. Coombes points out the need to analyse the particularities in which a concept such as community is ‘mobilized and constructed in instances where specific histories or sites imbued with historical significance are being contested’ and to understand ‘what stakes might be involved in negotiating different pasts and histories at times of social and political transition in the history of any nation when the very notion of what constitutes a “citizen” is being radically redefined’ [2003: 8]. As mentioned above (p.19), in light of this it becomes a complex
endeavor to define what kind of community existed in District Six prior to the forced removals but on another level also to define the kind of community that has been researched and imagined through the District Six Museum. There seemed to be an acknowledgement however, specifically on the part of Delport, that the District Six community is something that cannot be pinned down and needs to be remembered within a ‘living space’ that will allow it to transform and grow. Delport’s conversion of the idea of a ‘museum’ changed as the Museum grew and it eventually became, according to Valmont Layne, the current museum Director, ‘a space of dialogue; of interplay between its visual framework and of voices’ (Minty, 2006: 6).

Delport goes on to comment that the ‘common impulse in the call, however, was for a place of memory, not a monument but a focus for the recovery and reconstruction of the social and historical existence of District Six’ (2001: 11). There is a suggestion here that the museum was anticipated to be a nurturing space that would not be merely nostalgic and concerned with the documentation and preservation of past events but would be able to cultivate both the memory and the existence of District Six that would assist in the reconstruction of the site, no matter how abstract that existence happened to be.

As mentioned above (p.27), according to Prosalendis, the concept of heritage was not used in the pre-1994 period. Once apartheid was abolished and the transition to democracy was made, the redefinition of what heritage meant in South Africa began. Heritage became a concept that could contribute to a process of redress and reconciliation through nurturing and redeveloping seemingly lost communities. The proclamation that our heritage should ‘facilitate healing and material and symbolic restitution’ (DAC, 1999) is vital to the way in which the District Six Museum was conceptualised. This very necessary redefinition of what heritage can and should be applies to several contemporary South African heritage institutions. Yet what this paper will aim to argue is that the District Six Museum has plausibly prematurely anticipated and surpassed this definition by not only
playing a hand in `symbolic restitution` but being dedicated, from the beginning to physical restitution as well.

It is interesting to make a comparison at this point between the origin and initiative of the District Six Museum and other institutions dealing with the history of apartheid. Soudien, in his exploration of emerging discourses around identity in new South African museums, interrogates the intentions behind exhibitions at institutions such as the Apartheid Museum in Gold Reef City, Johannesburg and the Constitution Hill reconstruction of the Johannesburg Fort Prison (2006: 5). Once the notion of the heritage institution began to develop post-apartheid it became clear that the public needed to be shown what they had been previously denied. These institutions, including the District Six Museum, became a source of information for not only foreigners but also South Africans who had relatively little knowledge about the processes of apartheid. It is Soudien’s view that despite the importance of the exhibitions at the Apartheid Museum and Constitution Hill, their initiative to reveal the excesses of apartheid means that they have omitted `the intensely complicated social structures, relations and habits that surround, precede and follow the horror of oppression and persecution’ (2006: 6). Because `life is presented in its most extreme and egregious forms’, Soudien continues, these exhibitions have excluded the `drama of people’s everyday worlds’ (2006: 5).

What is interesting about Soudien’s analysis is the fact that apartheid was an extreme event which in this light makes it a difficult one to represent. What is being lost in the representation of such an extreme event is the more intimate representations of people’s everyday lives. Institutions such as the Apartheid Museum and Constitution Hill do not only attempt to represent the extreme aspects of apartheid but also to impart moral lessons to the visitors. Yet an important question to ask is: are there valuable lessons to learn from extreme events that in a sense cannot be replicated? Although it is advisable in some cases to avoid comparisons between apartheid and the Holocaust, there is an element of both atrocities that is unavoidable: their extremity. For Peter Novick, author of
The Holocaust and Collective Memory, this extremity makes the Holocaust an unlikely source of important lessons. Novick’s controversial argument is that ‘if there are, in fact, lessons to be drawn from history, the Holocaust would seem an unlikely source, not because of its alleged uniqueness, but because of its extremity [Novick: 13’]. The repercussion of making such an extreme atrocity a benchmark of oppression is, according to Novick, that it underplays less excessive atrocities. He elaborates that the ‘principal lesson of the Holocaust, it is frequently said, is not that it provides a set of maxims, or a rule book for conduct, but rather that it sensitizes us to oppression and atrocity… But making it the benchmark of oppression and atrocity works in precisely the opposite direction, trivializing crimes of a lesser magnitude’ [Novick: 14]. Andreas Huyssen offers an interesting spin to Novick’s argument in that he suggests it is impossible to represent the Holocaust in its entirety; therefore the lessons learnt may come from particular aspects in specified contexts. Huyssen states that ‘if the Holocaust can be compared to an earthquake that has destroyed all instruments of measurement, as Lyotard has suggested, then there surely cannot be only one way of representing it’ (1994: 13). I feel that a similar analysis could be applied to representations of apartheid and may be a reason behind Soudien’s disappointment in the Apartheid Museum specifically: lessons cannot be learnt from an attempt to represent such an excessive atrocity in its entirety. Lessons can however be learnt from magnified and specific aspects, an example of which is the ‘drama of people’s everyday worlds’ (2006: 5). Soudien, being a trustee of the District Six Museum and someone who was involved from the outset, is no doubt predisposed towards it as a heritage institution. It is a valid point, however that the District Six Museum does achieve a level of intimacy that is absent from the harsh extremity of the Apartheid Museum.

To return to an earlier comment, the origin of both the Apartheid Museum and the District Six Museum becomes important here. In a sense, the way in which a Museum is established has an effect on both the vision and the mission of
an institution. Sean Field says that the District Six Museum brought together ‘key intellectuals from various organisations and the community... and suddenly there was synthesis’.6 He continues by saying ‘I don’t buy into this idea that heritage community projects just emerge’ [2006: 2]. This synthesis, according to Field has ensured that the District Six project is the ‘most shining example of community regeneration’ [2006: 2]. The Apartheid Museum on the other hand did ‘just emerge’. And the motivation behind its sudden emergence is very different to that of the District Six Museum. It is no secret that the reason behind the existence of the Apartheid Museum and its attachment to Gold Reef City lies behind the Casino’s need to stimulate economic and community development in order to attain a gambling license. Its beginnings were in this light far more expedient and contingent to other agendas than the synthesis of ‘key intellectuals from various organisations’ as is the case with the District Six Museum. The Apartheid Museum website supplies a short history:

In 1995 the South African government set up a process for the granting of casino licenses, establishing an agency to do this called the Gambling Board. The bid documents stipulated that bidders should demonstrate how they would attract tourism and thereby grow the economy and stimulate job creation. A consortium, called Akani Egoli, put in a bid that included the commitment to building a museum. Their bid was successful, the Gold Reef City casino was built and an adjacent piece of land given for the construction of a museum
[www.apartheidmuseum.org.za].

And what a better, all-encompassing museum to build than one that would represent the apartheid era in its entirety? Such an extreme challenge was taken on for many reasons one of which being that the concept of an Apartheid Museum was a powerful suggestion that made it more likely for Gold Reef City to successfully run its casino. Yet the Apartheid Museum also became part of the social responsibility element of a bid that forced casino owners to do something educationally worthwhile. But this dictated that its origins differed from the
District Six Museum, which was about a group of individuals who shared a similar vision and were genuinely ardent about both commemorating and developing the District Six site. And while the Apartheid Museum remains a highly important contemporary South African heritage institution, its original initiative has dictated that it becomes a highly fraught place to visit. It was constructed deliberately and out of necessity whereas the development of the District Six Museum was far more organic and investigational. When I posed the question ‘Do any other heritage institutions compare to the District Six Museum?’ to those that I interviewed including Soudien, Field and Prosalendis the answer was unanimous: no. Most of the reasons given were because of the way the Museum was established and the initiatives that drove it. To reiterate Field’s assertion: District Six is ‘the most shining example of community regeneration... Many similar other projects have fallen apart’ [2006: 2]. Soudien states: ‘Mandela House, Apartheid Museum, Constitution Hill, they are all manufactured spaces, invented places. Of course the D6 Museum is invented too, but we can own up and narrate what it is that has shaped this process in maybe more authentic terms than other spaces’ [2006: 9].

The District Six Museum is not a typical heritage institution in many regards beyond its process of development and the way it defined itself. The institution has always had a tenuous relationship with the government and other heritage organisations. By the time the new democratic government was well instituted other ‘heritage institutions’ were receiving large sums of money from government funding bodies and the District Six Museum was strangely disregarded. Coombes examines the situation:

Despite the overwhelming evidence of local, national and international interest, the District Six Museum [which is essentially the public face of the District Six story] receives a minimal government grant, whereas Robben Island snapped up 80 percent of the government grant for “arts culture and heritage institutions” in 1998. In 1996 the museum received R200,000 from DACST and was told that this was a one-off grant. This was at a time when the government was spending R 1.5 million on the Oorlogs-museum van die Boererepubliek [the War Museum
The District Six Museum, according to Coombes, has ultimately had to rely on funding from external foreign agencies. And while as an institution it has gained little national recognition, it has received considerable attention outside of South Africa. The Museum, for example, was voted one of the world’s nine “Historic Site Museums of Conscience” (Coombes, 2003: 119). The shared belief of this faction is that “it is the obligation of historical sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of our sites and its contemporary implications. We view stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function’ (Coombes, 2003: 119). What is important here is that there appears to be more recognition of the Museum’s initiative on an international level than there ever was on a national one. The District Six Museum was never purely going to be about commemorating the past, as many of the institutions that received large sums of government funding essentially are.

This is important to recognise as the Museum’s tenuous relationship with the government is not only one-sided. In many ways the Museum made a conscious decision to distance itself from the government in order to maintain its own autonomy, which is something Coombes does not mention. She deals with the pros and cons of the degree of autonomy the museum had by being distanced from the state, but not if this distance was voluntary on the part of the museum. There still remains a great distance between the government and the District Six Museum today which becomes interesting in light of its involvement in land restitution. A recurring element of the Museum is its position as mediator between people and government. Those involved in the Museum have always found it more beneficial to maintain a level of detachment from the state. Prosalendis...
says that ultimately from the birth of the museum they steered clear of any heritage organisation, for example the Monument Council:

...because we didn’t want to have to carry their agenda… we were afraid that they wouldn’t understand what we needed or wanted to do. And in fact they didn’t because they were very much a bureaucratic body. In early 1994 we had applied for government funding and we were quite impatient about when it would come. And in fact we did get government funding in the end but it just didn’t seem enough to sustain and to build. We were competing very much with Robben Island... I remember when Robben Island got R28 million we felt quite overlooked... but some people used to say to us it was wise not to get too close to the government because it gave us an independent voice and it’s true [2006: 2].

Establishing that independent voice, however, was a process in itself. While Crain Soudien had a clear vision from the very start that he still maintains today, Prosalendis depicts a slightly different scenario. She describes a very passionate group of people with different ideas that somehow managed to come together quite well. Because there was very little definition of what a heritage institution was and was expected to be once apartheid was over, there seemed to be a more opened-minded and experimental approach towards what the District Six Museum could achieve. There was no real formula to follow, no benchmark to base the institution on. And yet even if there had been, the District Six Museum would probably have followed its own direction anyway; there eventually existed a determination that, as mentioned before, many feel to be lacking in other heritage institutions in South Africa.

The Museum began in the Methodist Church that was still standing on the District Six site and an exhibition was planned within the first nine months of the Museum being open in 1994. This appears to be when the debate began. Other people on a committee, aside from those employed by the church, had been working behind the scenes on their District Six agenda. Prosalendis states:
There was one group that was very much about forgiveness and reconciliation. There was another group that was about returning the people and having the mandate and the means to actually develop District Six. There was another group that just wanted it to remain in its most powerful form: a big space that would always remind people what had happened... there were very vibrant dialogues and arguments, but the point is everyone wanted this thing to work. And I think the strongest voice outside of education and human rights was the voice of restitution... and the museum gave that voice a very strong platform... (and) became aligned with redevelopment. Everyone had built the museum together and we now felt we could rebuild District Six together (2006).

This tendency towards redevelopment has been both nurtured and taken further ever since the museum’s beginning stages. According to Soudien there is an unflinching dedication to this cause. Anyone who gets involved in the museum, even now, is expected to share the same sentiments as those that have been involved since the beginning:

Its quite a delicate thing but what we’d be going out and looking for in finding trustees are people that share the vision of the museum and that vision is essentially the rebuilding of a non-racial Cape Town. That’s the ultimate concern. If people are going to come onto the trust we’re expecting people to come on with that kind of commitment. So we don’t want to nurture that commitment into being, and to tutor people about what it is that this museum is all about, we’re expecting people from the beginning to have a sense of the significance and all of that. So it’s a self-perpetuating and very political agenda but I think that nobody is going to apologize for it (Soudien, 2006: 2).

Some feel that such a political agenda ensured that certain number of important people backed out. Vincent Kolbe says that the ‘political agenda, forged by Anwah Nagia, saw the exit of some prominent campaigners (2001: 16). The discrepancies mentioned by Prosalendis were also an issue when it came to deciding what should happen with the wasteland District Six had become. The one major defeat HODS and those who were determined to protect District Six had suffered was the government-led construction of the Cape Tecknikon over a 21 ha site in 1979
Many potential investors and developers were dissuaded by HODS and other political organisations which is why most of the land remained otherwise empty. When determining the mission of the District Six Museum Terence Fredericks felt they should not only prevent the apartheid government from developing the site (which was undoubtedly unanimous) but that it should also remain the empty scarred wasteland that it has been for decades. He asserts that there was a pressing need to ensure that all plans by the authorities to redevelop the area of District Six were obstructed so that the abandoned, scarred slopes of Devil’s Peak would be a ‘living’ reminder to all of what had happened there and elsewhere’ (2001:13). This was a common sentiment shared by various people in those years during apartheid that District Six remained empty. Richard Dudley states in his essay “Forced Removals- the Essential Meanings of District Six” that ‘today the bare, scarred earth and the hate and the anger which its destruction generated have created a special kind of monument’ (1990: 197). Yet the more popular sentiment, as Prosalendis says, appeared to be that of redevelopment. And despite the disagreements over the mission of the District Six Museum that are in many ways to be expected, Lucien le Grange speaks almost nostalgically about the shared purpose of those involved at the time:

The memory I have about the origins of the District Six Museum is the capacity it had (first as an idea and later as an organisation) to engineer a collective spirit and camaraderie amongst all who were involved with it. This capacity to inspire a shared purpose had as much to do with the prevailing political situation we found ourselves in, during the late 1990s as it had to do with the memory of District Six itself. For many of us, this collective spirit was stimulated during the Hands off District Six campaign and the period of heady protest politics. It was out of this that the idea of the District Six Museum emerged. (Le Grange, 2003: 7)

Something phenomenal about District Six that Sean Field points out is the candid ability of ex-residents to remember the site in such a similar way. Field asserts that ‘forced removal socially fragments community... yet somehow there is some
notion of collective identity’ (2006: 1). Field argues that this ‘collective identity’ is more delicate than the concept of a collective unconscious. This similarity of the way ex-residents remember District Six does not verify what they recall as truth (these memories are affected by nostalgic transmission and the harsh environments, such as the Cape Flats, that they were relocated to). Yet there is another similarity regarding District Six that becomes interesting: the dedication that outsiders have to the site. Le Grange points out the similar ability of those who never lived there to be dedicated to it in such an analogous way. This seemingly unanimous dedication that le Grange describes is in some ways related to the iconic status of District Six and the way in which the site ‘has become metonymic of all those dehumanizing instances of forced removals that were an integral part of apartheid’s master plan from the 1950’s onward’ (Coombes, 2003: 117). N. Dewar, in his article “Seeking Closure: Conflict Resolution, Land Restitution, and Inner City Redevelopments in ‘District Six’ Cape Town”, describes the way in which District Six ‘has long been the site of struggle, particularly between the poor and relatively powerless against those with status, influence and power; in this regard it has come to assume great symbolic significance for an emerging nation’ (2001: 48). While District Six remains a highly emblematic part representing a whole string of forced removal incidents that many people believe have been overshadowed by a longstanding fascination with the District Six site, it symbolically transcends being only about forced removals. Many researchers feel the need to continue to acknowledge District Six as crucial site yet conduct more extensive research on other, more disregarded forced-removal sites. And yet the District Six Museum itself has perpetuated the need for more research in its dedication not only to the site itself but also to its original vision: rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town. Dewar also points out that District Six is a ‘key element of inner city economic development’ (2001: 48). Thus when it comes to those who are dedicated to rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town it seems appropriate that they would start with District Six.
This dedication is driven by the empty space in the centre of one of South Africa’s oldest and most important cities. Other sites are less obvious and less evocative than are those that never experienced forced removals. One is more likely to feel compassion towards an open wound than an internal injury. Driving down the M4 highway with a mere surface knowledge of the history of the site, it is impossible not to view the wasteland that is now District Six as ‘bare, scarred earth’. Coombes, in her comparison of the District Six Museum and the Robben Island Museum (RIM), speaks about the need to reanimate such empty spaces. Both museums are insistent about ‘finding a way to incorporate an acknowledgement of trauma in a form of commemoration that is also a means of recovering memory for the construction of a better future’ (Coombes, 2003: 120).

But, while the focus and vision of the District Six Museum has always been redevelopment and the rebuilding of a non-racial Cape Town, it has never been about recreating District Six. When the Museum opened a banner proclaimed:

In this exhibition we do not wish to recreate District Six as much as repossess the history of the area as a place where people lived, loved, and struggled. It is an attempt to take back our right to signpost our lives with those things we hold dear... The exhibition is also about pointers to our future. We, all of us, need to decide how as individuals and as people we wish to retrace and re-signpost the lines of our future. Such a process is neither easy nor straightforward. It is not predictable either (2003: 120).

While an attempt to recreate District Six would be in vain there remains the assertion that the District Six Museum will not merely commemorate the past but will ‘re-signpost’ an unpredictable way forward. Since that point onwards the museum has been dedicated to carrying out extensive research into oral histories and recollections of ex-residents and basing their exhibitions on this research. It is only more recently that the museum has been involved in the arena of redevelopment. And yet, although there is much debate about this, it has never been the Museum itself that directly mobilises change. It was the HODS
Committee which halted investment and redevelopment in District Six after the forced removals and it has primarily been the District Six Beneficiary Trust that has been managing the process of restitution by which claimants will get their land back. All of those involved in both organisations, however, are in some way involved in the museum. While the museum is not directly involved, however, what I will deal with in the forth coming chapters is the way in which such development could not happen if the museum had never been established.

What the District Six Museum has achieved since it was established in 1994 is that it has ultimately transformed the empty space that District Six had remained for so long into something that has become both symbolically and physically alive. Something both Field and Prosalendis believe in is the concept of the museum as “safe space”. It is safe in that it has created a home for the memories and the remnants to live. The unpredictable element is the fact that this safe space is undoubtedly paving the way for redevelopment. It is where District Six has lived for the past few decades and it is from where District Six will come in the process of redevelopment. This condition is not without its complexities. The way in which District Six has been nurtured and in some ways preserved is in many ways unreliable. It is not the real District Six, but the District Six that has been re-imagined through the District Six Museum. Many cover their ground by claiming that what is being attempted through the redevelopment of the District Six site is not the recreation of District Six but rather the rebuilding of District Six. Another approach seems to be that the relocation of ex-residents is not about rebuilding District Six as the community it was, but rather as Crain Soudien points out, ‘rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town’. We thus return to the notion of District Six as the iconic site that ‘has become metonymic of all those dehumanizing instances of forced removals’ (Coombes, 2003: 117).

And yet there is a further complication: a generational concern. As those that established the District Six Museum get older there is a younger generation with a different approach that is jumping on board. Many of the trustees remain those
that have been involved since the outset, yet many new Museum employees are of a younger generation. The ‘collective spirit’ that le Grange speaks so fondly about seems to face on-going challenges. Similarly Soudien’s expectation that those that come on board should share the ‘vision of the museum [which] is essentially the rebuilding of a non-racial Cape Town’ is being frequently contested. Soudien acknowledges that there is rift between the museum trustees and the new, younger employees. This rift is possibly the reason Soudien insists on a dichotomy between the Beneficiary Trust and the Museum. In many ways both bodies contain different people with different initiatives. While the Museum staff does not maintain the mission of rebuilding District Six they have not let go of the Museum’s involvement in redevelopment. In a document written by the District Six Museum’s current Research Officer Bonita Bennet it is expressed:

In its simplest terms, the return of people to District Six has significance for the District Six Museum. The struggle for the land which formed the backdrop to the museum’s formation continues into the present, albeit in a different form. Having started its institutional journey by committing not to rebuild District Six, but to work with its memory, it is bound to continue the mission by supporting the process of ‘reinventing’ District Six for the present... Without dedicated resources and supported protection, the intrinsic values associated with District Six as embedded in its remaining fabric, its community ethos and its striking emptiness, may be lost beneath the construction and development plans which are essential to the restitution process. The building of new homes in the historic community presents both challenges and opportunities for conservation. This physical reconstruction combined with the intricacies of rebuilding a traumatised community, is in itself a huge project which forces the museum to confront the concrete realities associated with the return. [Bennet, 2006]

The next two chapters will deal more intimately with the complex role of the Museum in redevelopment; the Museum’s relationship with the District Six Beneficiary Trust; the way in which District Six has ultimately been re-invented by the District Six Museum; the effects such a re-invention will have on
redevelopment; and the overwhelming complexities and issues involved in
developing such an iconic site.

(above and below) District Six today. Photographs by
Lara Simone Koseff
There is a great deal of debate over the perceived role of the District Six Museum in terms of the redevelopment of the District Six site. According to Crain Soudien, the Museum’s role is ultimately an educational one. Current employees of the Museum, such as Bonita Bennet, feel that the Museum’s role transcends being merely educational and that the institution has played a larger role in facilitating the return of the ex-residents and supporting their claims to land. Outsiders to the Museum such as Sandra Prosalendis (who has not been involved with the
Museum for over five years) and Sean Field feel that the institution’s role remains creating a necessary ‘safe space’ or a sanctuary for ex-residents to deal with the past, present and future of District Six. The reason the Museum’s role in redevelopment is disputed seems to be due to the institution’s complex relationship with the District Six Beneficiary and Trust and a generational tension between those who have been involved since the Museum’s inception and those that are new on the scene. This chapter will deal with, how, despite this tension the Museum has played a role in redeveloping the site through its relationship with ex-residents and the support it has provided them in terms of land claims; through its provision of a safe space in which District Six has physically and symbolically lived since the forced removals and through its conceptual contribution to what the development will eventually become. This will all be explored through an analysis of the role of the Museum as a heritage institution involved in redevelopment and the Museum’s relationship with the Beneficiary Trust.

(left) The new houses on Church Street that form part of the redevelopment process being carried out by the District Six Beneficiary Trust. Photograph by Lara Simone Koseff

In 1994 the new democratic government passed the Restitution of Land Rights Act⁸. It was 10 years later that on the 11th of February 2004, as a result of a land
claim facilitated by the District Six Beneficiary Trust, two former District Six families returned to live in the place they were forcibly removed from decades ago. This marked the beginning of land restitution in District Six and paved the way for further development to follow. As Bonita Bennet expresses, this return had great significance for the District Six Museum (2006:1). In those ten years between the Restitution of Land Rights Act being passed and its slow move towards implementation the Museum had established an on-going relationship with the ex-residents of District Six.

Yet it was not the Museum that had ultimately orchestrated the return. The people’s return was and still is the culmination of a land claims process initiated in 1993 when the District Six Civic Association attempted to unite ex-residents in the land restitution process. The District Six Beneficiary Trust was formed by a number of District Six Museum Trustees, including Soudien and Anwah Nagia in 1997 with the specific role of coordinating and supervising the restitution process in consultation with significant stakeholders. In November 2000 an agreement was signed at a celebratory homecoming ceremony addressed by President Thabo Mbeki. This delegated the redevelopment of the land to the District Six Beneficiary Trust. The Beneficiary Trust has planned for 20 000 people (2600 claimants and their families) to eventually be accommodated in about 4000 two or three-storey units on the 40 hectare site. The rest of the development is ultimately meant to consist of medium density housing, religious buildings, educational and community facilities, shops, offices and limited light industry (District Six Museum, 2004).

Considering the publicly declared responsibility of The Beneficiary Trust, it not only becomes debatable what exactly the District Six Museum’s role in redevelopment is, but also what the Museum’s relationship is with the Beneficiary Trust. While Soudien does admit that there are lots of shades of grey, his view on the matter is ultimately very clear. He feels that there certainly is a cross-over between those involved in the Trust and the Museum but ultimately they remain
very separate bodies (2006: 5). According to Soudien there are about four or five people from the Museum who serve directly on the Beneficiary Trust. An example of this complex crossover is the fact that Anwah Nagia is both head of the Beneficiary Trust and one of the founding trustees of the Museum, and Terrence Fredricks is head of the Museum Foundation as well as being the vice-chairperson of the Beneficiary Trust (Soudien, 2006: 5). For Soudien these crossovers mean that ‘people often have to wear two hats and you’ve got to separate those hats out sometimes for them... it gets murky’ (Soudien, 2006: 5). The reason these two bodies, in Soudien’s opinion, must remain separate is because their roles as organisations are different and he suggests they should be. The Beneficiary Trust is about the resettling of people in the area... and the museum’s role as we would now argue is largely to facilitate that return, that home coming... the museum’s role is largely an educational one’ (Soudien, 2006: 5).

A reason Soudien may be suggesting that ‘the Museum is a different thing to the Beneficiary Trust’ (Soudien, 2006: 5), despite the fact that similar people are involved, is because the practical issues involved in redevelopment may be too demanding for the institution to take on over and above its obvious role of facilitating memory work. Zayd Minty, who was an employee at the Museum, speaks about the Museum’s ambivalence ‘about its relationship to the notion of “building” as opposed to “recalling” community’. According to Minty, the Museum ‘feels itself ill-equipped to take on the task of community development, on top of building capacity in research, collecting, education and exhibition development’ (2006: 13). Minty’s mention of the notion of “recalling” community is an indirect reference to the Museum’s publication Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating and Curating the District Six Museum. Ciraj Rassool in the introduction to the publication claims that it is “out of its “core business” of memory work conducted in support for the struggle for the restitution of land rights in District Six that the District Six Museum seeks to recall community’ (2001: xi). This notion of “recalling” is in a sense linked to the notion of “rebuilding”, in that the recalling
of the District Six Museum is aimed at supporting the restitution process. Rassool continues by saying: ‘the notion of “recall” used here and in the title of this book refers both to the Museum’s memory work on District Six and its desire to see the community of District Six restored and called back to resettle, redevelop and heal the scarred landscape at the foot of the mountain’ (2001: xi). The Museum’s ‘memory work’, in this light, has always been carried out in order to assist the process of redevelopment.

Yet Minty seems to suggest that both recalling and rebuilding would be too much of a responsibility for the Museum and that the Beneficiary Trust is assuming a more practical role that would be too overwhelming for the institution. When it comes to the responsibility of such a practical role, Soudien clearly outlines how positions are delegated:

The Beneficiary trust is an openly and explicitly political wing of this process. It has to negotiate with the state, negotiate with the province, and negotiate with the city. The museum has got nothing to do with that, that’s not the Museum’s job. And when the Beneficiary Trust organises these public consultation processes, the museum goes there to learn, to hear what’s going on and sometimes participate and have participated but the process happens under the aegis of the Beneficiary Trust and there are politics there that have a completely different integrity... to what the Museum is all about. [2006: 6]

The Museum thus participates in Beneficiary Trust activities but, according to Soudien, is not directly involved in the politics of the Trust which has a ‘completely different integrity’. What Soudien may be suggesting is that they are accountable in different ways; while the Beneficiary Trust is accountable in terms of physically reconstructing the District Six site, the Museum is accountable in terms of interpreting the recollections of ex-residents. Bennet’s view is that the two organisations ‘are partner organisations and broadly speaking have the same overall goals’ (2007: 2). The difference, Bennet explains, lies in the ‘ways in which we support the return, and the nature of the return which we support... While the
Beneficiary Trust is closely engaged with the “bricks and mortar” aspects of the return and redevelopment process, the Museum is much more closely involved with cultural issues linked to the return’ (2007: 2). What Bennet means by “cultural issues” will be dealt with in a later part of this chapter but what is important to point out here is that while she describes the two organisations’ positions as being different but on equal footing when it comes to development, Soudien says that the Museum only participates in ‘a process that happens under the aegis of the Beneficiary Trust [my italics]’ (2006: 6). It is my argument that the clear dichotomy expressed by Soudien can not only be ascribed to ‘different integrities’ and different means of ‘support’. The Museum in a sense holds the position of a younger sibling to the Beneficiary Trust in that the Museum employees comprise a new, younger generation; one that does not necessarily share the same vision as those involved in the Beneficiary Trust. What becomes interesting is that the while the Beneficiary Trust’s role involves the practical issues of redevelopment, the Museum’s current role appears to be more conceptual and these differences relate to divergent approaches between those who were involved in the birth of the District Six Museum and those who are currently employed there.

The generational tension between those on the Museum staff and those that run the Beneficiary Trust and have been there since the birth of the museum is a major factor. In Chapter Two I dealt with the way in which those who were involved with Museum from before its inception ultimately shared a “collective spirit” and believed in the same initiative: rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town. Yet in the past few years a new generation of employees has begun to run the Museum including the current director Valmont Layne, and Bonita Bennet. Soudien admits that there is tension specifically between the staff and the trustees. He even goes as far as to say that the trustees ‘are very jealous of what goes on at the museum’ (2006:1). Soudien explains the tension by claiming that ‘as the staff, and it’s a pretty young
staff as you have seen, has gained more experience, they have been taking initiative and that initiative has slipped away from the trustees' (2006:1).

Both generations acknowledge a sentiment that Kwame Anthony Appiah expresses: 'it is not the past but the way we narrate it that matters' (2006:10). But in the case of District Six the way the past is narrated is continually up for debate. In this case there is clearly a contest about who gets to decide how the past is narrated. This conflict seems to be at the heart of the complex relationship between the Beneficiary Trust and the younger Museum employees. Sean Field has a more analytical approach than Soudien to explain this cross generational issue. He recognises the tension created by the question of how the past is narrated through the District Six Museum:

There was a time when the older generation ran the show and those that are part of the Beneficiary (Trust) are part of this older generation...There are cross-generational problems... the older generation want primary narratives told in a certain way, constructing a certain vision for the next generation... the more didactic the survivors are in that vision the less the next generation will listen... that’s the tension. (2006: 2)

Field points out an interesting tension that not only applies to the District Six Museum. He describes a critical situation of an older generation that strives to create a vision for the generation to come in an attempt to foster their “primary” or fundamental narratives. Yet the more didactic those narratives are, the more they will be questioned. It seems it is the didacticism that gives such narratives a “primary” nature, something that will be resisted by a generation more open to fluidity. With the emergence of a new generation, a heritage institution’s primary narrative is likely to change. The unique case of the District Six Museum makes this condition even more complex in that the District Six story is not merely situated in the past, but is more fluid and in a state of changeability due to the fact that the site is being re-developed. Many of the trustees, however, are not prepared to embrace the fluidity of the District Six narrative, preferring to maintain a clear
vision that is ultimately respectable and involves ‘recreating an environment in which civility is possible’ (Soudien, 2006: 3). Yet it appears that with Soudien’s insistence that those who get involved must share the very same vision, he has created a tension between the original people involved and the new-comers. Employees of the Museum do believe in such an initiative, but their approach is less didactic and more analytical. The new generation, dealing with both the memory of District Six and what it means for the present, appears to be more inclined towards a narrative that is fluid and allows for dialogue between, for example, ex-residents and museum visitors and metalogue over and above monologue. Layne asserts that the Museum ’has framed its primary space not so much in terms of an exhibition, as in terms of a space of dialogue; of interplay between its visual framework and of voices’ (Minty, 2006: 6). This framework implies a resistance towards one strong narrative. The space has in this way become one which is very different to the silent museum displays that are meant to speak for themselves. Instead, by including a level of interactivity which allows ex-residents to add to the displays and by recording everything that is said within the museum walls the District Six Museum is continually appending new narratives instead of merely presenting one didactic narrative.

It is not that Soudien, as a member of the older generation, rejects the need to accept that a multiplicity of voices exist within the context of District Six. He even feels that the ‘new understandings of history’ (2006: 8), endorsed by the newer generation of museum staff, have motivated the trustees to be more critical of themselves and to be ‘conscious of their own construction’ (2006: 8). He states that ‘these new understandings of history’ have at times been taken up by other trustees. Many of these trustees, who belong to the older generation that Field speaks of, have developed a different way of speaking:

It’s really interesting listening to the different ways that they speak, to the way in which they may have spoken before... so they now talk about provisional truth rather than truth. Even our
‘on the street’ activist trustees who have come out of that history... even they now are very conscious of their own construction. And that’s quite an extraordinary thing. They’ve got this ability to stand up and see themselves below. To see themselves and read themselves and it’s a gift in some way that the museum has given them. (Soudien, 2006: 8)

There is not a clear boundary between the varying understandings of history held by both the trustees and the museum employees and they at times influence each other. Many artists and writers believe that in a post-apartheid state it is imperative that more voices join the discussion despite the discord that might occur as a result. Siemon Allen claims in his essay “A Black Voice” that the ‘issue is perhaps not a question of “who has the authority to represent whom”, but rather an urgent need for more voices in the debate’ (1997: 36). Layne explores the Museum’s initiative (a project conceived in 1997) to do this quite literally with the sound archive that now exists in the Museum. The sound archive was envisioned as having an ‘activist role, helping to stimulate the production of new knowledge’ (Layne, 2004: 188). It is a means of capturing the act of telling but also creating a ‘common denominator’ for such a multiplicity of voices and narratives. In an interview conducted with Sean Paul Abrahams11, the grandchild of a returning ex-resident, Abrahams described a conference with the Museum in 2006 that was attended by both Museum employees and a group of ex-residents that were returning. He remarked that what stood out at the conference were the many voices that were heard and that the elements of dialogue and metaleague stood in heavy contrast to the ‘monologue of apartheid’ (2006). This statement becomes highly relevant to an essay by Soudien and Lalou Meltzer in 1995 on the Streets exhibition which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four. Yet what is relevant here is that by 1995 the older generation was more concerned with combating the “official” narrative of apartheid that Abrahams refers to than with maintaining the more didactic narrative that Field speaks about. But it seems that the closer the District Six site has come to being redeveloped the more the older
generation has become focused on what Soudien refers to as the ultimate vision and concern: rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town. The danger of the younger generation’s embrace of a more fluid, analytical approach is that it lands up becoming too academic, as Abrahams points out, for the ex-residents to comprehend. Abrahams further describes the conference as being baffling to some of the ex-residents due to theoretically charged language used by some of the Museum employees [2006]. The ex-residents may in this case be inclined to comprehend the more practical language of the Beneficiary Trust in the Trust’s ability to describe reasonably clearly what their intention is.

Both trustees and museum employees, as I have mentioned, seem to share the opinion that there should be a multiplicity of voices heard when it comes to ex-resident narratives. But Soudien feels that the discordance in the voices captured by the District Six Museum ought to be explored and understood, instead of merely being allowed to coexist in an unmediated way. He says that there is often a desire for simplicity; a need to ‘eclipse all this messiness’ [2006: 9]. He argues that ‘discord’ cannot be repressed, but neither should it remain unquestioned. Soudien elaborates:

You’ve got to constantly be working with the fact that the voices are always going to be discordant. There is always discord. Discord isn’t something that you want to disavow or deny... you want to deal with it... so the museum is structured around that sense of difference. We’re different... we’re not coloured etc... we’re different. And that difference is resubstantiated everyday. And we need to understand how that difference is constituted in its multiplicity. And its not playfulness... it’s deeply political. It’s not that kind of postmodern reveling in one’s difference and absolving people from responsibility. What a lot of that multi-culturalism does is it takes away from the need to take a position. [2006:9]

Thus, it is Soudien’s argument that simply to embrace the multiplicity of voices is an abdication of responsibility: one needs to take a stance. And what Soudien suggests here is the need to take a political stance; as quoted in Chapter Two
Soudien asserts that the Museum from the beginning has maintained ‘a self perpetuating and very political agenda’ (2006: 2). This political agenda is the fundamental vision of rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town which relates to using the vision of District Six as a place where ‘pale faces slept with black faces...[and] didn’t feel, sense, and permeate that difference, or the idea that they were different’ (Nagia, 2001: 177) as an example for future social regeneration. It is thus the belief of Soudien and many others involved in the Museum that a new national South African identity must involve non-racialism and that a level of civility can be achieved through this rigorous model. Ivan Karp asserts in his introduction to *Museums and Communities* that ‘communities are often thought of as things and given thinglike names such as “the Irish,” “the blacks,” “the Jews,” “the WASPs.” But they are actually experienced as encounters in which cultures, identities, and skills are acquired and used’ (1992: 3-4). In his denunciation of the “thinglike” aspect of race, Soudien suggests that communities go beyond their differentiating labels yet this difference can be ‘experienced as encounters in which cultures, identities, and skills are acquired and used’.

This agenda could be placed in contrast to a more postmodern initiative. Soudien’s reference to ‘that kind of postmodern reveling in one’s difference’ is related to the concept of postmodernity as ‘liberation from the illusory grand narratives of the Enlightenment and its successors’ (Macey, 2002: 309). Many critics (specifically black writers and feminists) of Lyotard’s version of postmodernism that ‘announces the demise of grand narratives’, claim that the ‘grand narrative of their emancipation has by no means come to an end’ (Macey, 2002: 307). The suggestion here is that to purely denounce grand narratives in favor of a multiplicity of voices is futile, as many grand narratives relentlessly continue to exist. Soudien’s critique of postmodern thought is based on the grounds that it celebrates difference without trying to explain it. And while Soudien would agree with postmodernism’s rejection of the grand narrative, he would not simply settle for a multiplicity of narratives that are not evaluated or challenged.
Appiah discusses such narratives in terms of colonial archives that have been passed down to the South African nation and the implications these archives have for the development of a South African identity [2006: 15]. He states that these inherited archives can still be used in the development of a national identity:

Since...it is not the past but the way we narrate it that matters, the fact that the archive you inherit is a colonial archive, shaped profoundly by the politics of apartheid—of separation—does not mean that you cannot use it—and the alternative archives of resistance that the state’s archive inevitably generates in response—to construct a democratic nationality. In speaking not of identity in South Africa, but of South Africa as an identity, we should recall Renan’s insight that the nation is constructed not only by its narratives of the past but also by its shared projects. The real place of the nation, in South Africa as elsewhere, is not in the past, not even in the present, but in a future that your citizens will have to try to construct together. (Appiah, 2006: 15)

In creating a narrative for South Africa’s past, it is important to consider, Appiah claims, that ‘the South African identity is a work in progress. Its meaning will repose in an archive that remains to be written’ [2006: 15]. It is in this light that the primary narrative put forward by the Beneficiary Trust or at least the older generation involved in the development of the District Six site, which as Sean Field suggests is fundamentally didactic, is questioned by the next generation. The older generation’s attempt at ‘constructing a certain vision for the next generation’ will be resisted as the younger generation comes to accept South African identity as ‘a work in progress’ with ‘an archive that remains to be written’. While Soudien insists that one needs ultimately to ‘take a position’, the new generation working with the past, present and future of District Six might be more inclined towards the fluidity of metanarratives as is being suggested by Appiah.

The result of this generational tension is that while the Beneficiary Trust is physically carrying out the process of implementing land restitution, the Museum is taking a back seat, facilitating certain elements but ultimately focusing on the
more academic, theoretical elements of the restitution process. The Beneficiary Trust, is more interested in realising its politicised agenda to rebuild a non-racial Cape Town. It is my argument that the split between the two organisations is in some ways deliberate in order to ensure that those who have been involved since the beginning carry out the process of redevelopment as they have always imagined it, without the hindrance of ‘discordant voices’. It is important to consider, at this point, the Museum’s initial decision to remain independent from the government. This independence has been carried through in terms of relationships between old and new generations. Both Soudien and Prosalendis speak about the insistence of the Beneficiary Trust carrying out the development plans on their own. According to Prosalendis it was Anwah Nagia who has played an enormous role in both redevelopment and capturing the imagination of those involved. Yet he inspired a determination ‘that they were going to do it alone... they were not going to take anyone’s money... they were going to raise the money; they were going to make it happen’ (2006: 3). Prosalendis feels that the redevelopment has not really happened yet and the slow process is due in part to the fact that the Beneficiary Trust ‘refused money from many sources in order to do it their own way and I think they never acknowledged the role that others have to play’ (2006: 3). What began as an unyielding initiative to re-develop the District Six site in the ‘right’ way has become a complex stance of exclusivity on the part of the Beneficiary Trust.

Another tension between the Museum and the Beneficiary Trust is the fact that financially the District Six Museum is better shape than the Trust (Soudien, 2006: 6). Soudien says that the ‘Beneficiary Trust has to fight for funds from the state and is currently in this deadlock with the city’ (2006: 6). Yet for the most part, as Prosalendis indicates, the Beneficiary Trust is less willing to take funds if the funding body will potentially compromise their vision.

And yet, at the same time, the Beneficiary Trust’s determination as Field claims, has resulted in the ‘most shining example of community regeneration’
Soudien describes the situation as extraordinary in terms of what the Beneficiary Trust has achieved despite its current ‘deadlock with the city’. What is extraordinary, according to Soudien, is the way in which District Six is being re-developed ‘on its own terms’. Soudien says:

The Beneficiary Trust has gone ahead and built those houses without formal approval, those plans haven’t been passed. So none of those houses in a sense are legal and it puts us in this crazy situation where we’re back in this position where District Six is almost operating as an independent state. I say almost… Anwah Nagia is the president of that small little state... but we’ve gone ahead and the city has dragged its heels on us. Of course the city can’t come and say that these are illegal and we have to tear them down... which they theoretically and legally have a right to... This community in a sense has to fight against the politics of local government and the politics of the state. Both of which have used District Six, like the old government did, like a football. Anwah Nagia is in hospital today as he’s had a heart attack because of all of this. This is why District Six is different to Marabastad, different to Kliptown. All of those...have been driven from the top. District Six is in the process of trying to establish itself on its own terms. [2006: 10]

District Six establishing itself ‘on its own terms’ however is a problematic initiative. It would seem that District Six is re-establishing itself, independent from the state, on the Beneficiary Trust’s terms. A major reason the Beneficiary Trust’s terms could be considered admirable is because of their well-established relationship with the ex-residents. This relationship was nurtured in and through the District Six Museum. The following section will aim to show that, despite the Museum’s non-involvement in physically re-developing the District Six Site and the generational tension described above, restitution could not be successfully implemented without the District Six Museum. This argument is based on two related elements. The first, as mentioned above, is the Museum’s extensive and intimate relationship with ex-residents. The second is that District Six, since it was bulldozed over twenty years ago, has both memorialily and in a sense physically lived in the District Six Museum.
The intimate relationship between the District Six Museum and the ex-residents of District Six officially began in 1994 with an exhibition entitled *Streets: Retracing District Six*. The exhibition was arranged in the main space of the new museum which, according to Peggy Delport, was an “aesthetic arena for ‘working with memory’” (2001: 34). It was Prosalendis who viewed the exhibition as a “sieve” to capture memories generated in the exhibition space for prosperity (Layne, 2004: 188). This was the beginning of an analysis on the part of the Museum of the various narratives that have come out of District Six. According to Layne, the museological premise was ‘an invitation to ex-residents and those who knew the District to remember and, through remembering, to collaborate in the creation of public memory about place and its significance’ (2004: 188). What is notable about the *Streets* exhibition is the level of interactivity that was involved in its development. Some of the most striking features of the exhibition, which remain part of the museum today, include a large street map painted on white tarpaulin covering most of the floor space and three vertical hanging columns constructed of an original set of the old street name signs of District Six. It was the large street map in particular that began the long process of ex-resident interactivity within the Museum. Charlene McEachern claims that ‘people took over and turned it into something else, something living’ (1998: 6). The ex-residents were offered cloths on which to write their names and addresses and began to extend this to the map on the floor. They marked in their houses, their family names, shops, bioscopes, markets, bus stops and so on.

As the exhibition gained more attention ex-residents arrived with both their own narratives and their personal belongings. The museum was flooded with memorabilia from the district; anything from family photographs, bottles, toys to furniture and doors (Layne, 2004: 186). This was the beginning of a collection that constituted both personal narratives and physical objects. Ex-residents seemed to have respected the Museum enough as an institution to trust it with both memories and objects that were invaluable to them. The *Streets* exhibition’s level
of interactivity paved the way for the Museum to become a place that people used ‘to meet, gather and engage with each other’ (Minty, 2006: 5). Minty claims that through the years ‘the exhibition space was layered and added to through inclusions by ex-residents’ (2006: 5). Those involved with the Museum had always viewed the institution as a means to ‘mobilise the memory of District Six and forced removals towards healing and transforming the city’ (Minty, 2006: 5). Through this initiative of mobilising memory, some began to question the ability of the museum to capture and ‘arrest the engaging interactions that happen every time an ex-resident walks in and recognizes the Hanover Street sign, or the image of the fish market or remembers the Globe Gang, Cissie Gool’s fiery speeches on the Grande, diba dance with the Merry Macks or New Year’s Eve with the nagtroupe’ (2004: 186). Layne continues this question by asking how the museum could capture ‘the more painful memories of loss, domestic abuse, of poverty, of aspirations to live in the suburbs?’ (2004: 186). The solution to this was ultimately a ‘memory booth’ that was introduced to the Streets exhibition and was conceptualized as ‘a space to integrate with the core exhibition and a space in which to render and capture memory in electronic form’ (Layne, 2004: 188). Out of the introduction of a ‘memory booth’ came the decision to create a sound archive so that the recorded voices could actually be heard.

Such initiatives ensured that the District Six Museum was in fact creating a ‘living space’ that challenged what Peggy Delport refers to as the problematic notion of a ‘museum’. This relates back to Layne’s assertion that the museum has ‘framed its primary space not so much in terms of an exhibition, as in terms of a space of dialogue; of interplay between its visual framework and of voices’ (Minty, 2006: 6). And, if there is something that was passed on from the older generation that started the museum, to the younger generation that has slowly taken over, it is the continual initiative to challenge the boundaries of what a heritage institution can achieve. Minty states that the Museum’s ‘mandate is as a heritage body albeit a radically different sort of museum, one that resists the traditional/institutional
role in favor of a more participative/inclusive approach in the very formation of its
dialogic space and programmes’ [2006: 13]. As the Museum grew into a space for
participation and process it became more than a place that facilitated the
‘gathering of people, their remembering and generating of new meanings and
knowledge [using the exhibition as a dialogic tool]’ [Minty, 2006: 13]. It became a
more-forward looking space that was not merely concerned with capturing the
past but also with ‘working together to create a new community’ [Minty, 2006: 13].

It in this light that the District Six narrative is ‘a work in progress’ with ‘an archive
that remains to be written’. Such a condition dictates that the District Six Museum
is very different to other Heritage Institutions in South Africa. Its narrative is not
merely relevant to the present in its ability to create ‘symbolic restitution’ but in its
contribution towards rebuilding the community it is remembering.

In the years of the restitution process the District Six Museum, which had
become a space in which residents felt a sense of security, served as a space
where public meetings towards claiming restitution took place and a place where
ex-residents could confirm their claims to having lived in District Six [Minty, 2006:
6]. Bennet asserts that the Museum played an invaluable role in a range of matters
related to the land claims of ex-residents. She elaborates:

When claims for restitution were being processed, it served as an important and convenient
space where information relating to compliance issues could be obtained. It played a role in
supporting the verification of claims by assisting with oral testimonies in support of claims,
collation of documentary evidence... As a centre of/for memory, it has helped with the
reclamation of District Six by facilitating narrative processes which, in the absence of
documentary evidence, helped people to declare ‘I once lived here even though officialdom has
not recorded my impact’. Through their stories, reconnections with neighbours and others in
their then community, as well as by relating to the remaining fragments of the once dense
area, claimants were able to make a very strong relational statement of belonging. The living
archive located within the Museum’s space and processes has also helped to affirm a history
of people who had been the unvoiced. [2007: 1]
The result of the Museum’s interaction with ex-residents is not only meant to serve the redevelopment process. It is a ‘process of declaration being led by the museum (which) is based on careful listening to the stories and recollections of many people over the years, and being involved with the different ways of making meaning in their lives, and for others’ (Bennet, 2007: 1). Thus the ‘interpretation of statements’ has implications for a broader spectrum of people. Bennet claims that it ‘has been an interpretation of statements made repeatedly about why the area has been and continues to be an important place to those who live there now, to those who lived there before, those who are planning to return, as well as those who have known its story through the lives of others (Bennet 2006: 1)’. The museum in this light provides a sense of validation in that, through its interpretation of statements it brings out the importance of District Six, past, present and future. Karp asserts that *Museums and Communities* perceives museums as ‘places for defining who people are and how they should act and as places for challenging those definitions’ (1992: 4). Karp continues to say that ‘because museums are drawn into the process of according or denying identity to communities, they become embroiled in communities’ struggles for public recognition’ (1992: 14-15). The District Six Museum has become embroiled not only in the struggle for District Six but in a broader struggle for ‘public recognition’. For many ex-residents the Museum has provided a sanctuary through this validation and a place in which they can reenact and explore the meanings of their memories – and meet with others engaged in the same process and engage in dialogue with them within this struggle for ‘public recognition’.
Attempts to relocate much of this process to another space appear to have got off to a slow start. In the past few years there has been a move to facilitate the ‘return’ outside of the Museum walls in a space that was close by but separate from the ‘integrity’ of the Museum. The establishment of the Sacks Futeran Complex as a cultural, Homecoming Centre for the new District Six is meant to serve as a community hub within the East City precinct adjacent to the District Six site. Soudien says that the Beneficiary Trust is now situated within the Sacks Futeran building, has the use of the large bottom space, and future plans for developing the space is largely so that the Beneficiary Trust can facilitate the return. Once again, Soudien says, ‘the Museum’s role in all of that is completely different’ (2006: 8). Bennet says that it is ‘meant to be a place which encapsulates the history and heritage of the area – both in material form and productive processes within the space, and to be a ‘place of belonging’ through which people can enter the city space which in many ways has become alienating to those who have been disconnected from it’ (Bennet, 2007: 4). Plans for the space include a local crafts component, Conservation Centre, library, theatre and space for exhibitions. It is currently under construction but according to Bennet it still serves as office space for some District Six Museum staff, for volunteers assisting the District Six Beneficiary Trust. At the time I conducted my research (September 2006) the Sacks Futeran building was closed off to the public and appeared to be just as abandoned as many other old buildings in the centre of Cape Town. In
comparison to the Museum itself, which on every occasion I visited it had a bustling, alive atmosphere, the Homecoming Centre has a long way to go to become the ‘place of belonging’ that many feel the Museum already is. The significance of this space is, however, that it reveals a further determination of the part of the Beneficiary Trust to enforce a dichotomy between the two organisations. The fact that it has not yet taken off reveals that the Museum as a physical space has provided a sense of security amongst the ex-residents that is not simple to replicate.

When I interviewed both Field and Prosalendis they both spoke of the District Six Museum as a ‘safe space’. Once the ex-residents developed a level of trust with the employees at the Museum, they also came to trust the space itself, which in a sense became a sanctuary. And yet it would seem that visiting the Museum for some would be a traumatic experience. In a short interview with Utando Baduza, a former employee of the District Six Museum who now works with Sandra Prosalendis for the Human Sciences Research Council in Cape Town, he made the comment that in many ways it is probably difficult for ex-residents to return to District Six every time they visit the Museum as they have eventually to go home to their lives in Mitchell’s Plain, or wherever they were forcibly removed to. Many ex-residents feel that since the forced-removals they have lived empty lives; one ex-resident claims about the area he was moved to: ‘here everybody’s for themselves. They don’t worry with nobody’ [Field, 2001: 79]. Baduza observes that when ex-residents go home to a place where ‘everybody’s for themselves’, after returning to the warm memories created by the Museum, it is bound to be traumatic. In Lost Communities, Living Memories Field deals with the fact that ‘there will be no instant relief from the emotional burden of the past’ [2001: 120]. He goes on to point out that many ex-residents refused to apply for restitution as it would be ‘too difficult for them to relive uncomfortable memories’ [Field, 2001: 120]. On top of that many ex-residents that landed up applying claim that it has exacerbated their emotional burden [Field, 2001: 120]. If many ex-residents feel it
would be difficult to physically return to District Six, how do they deal with emotionally returning there every time they visit the Museum?

When I presented Baduza’s argument that ex-residents’ emotional burden may be exacerbated through their interaction with the Museum to Field, however, he disagreed and responded by claiming that:

The Museum has a multiplicity of memory triggers and it triggers feelings that are there anyway. If anything the museum has provided a safe space for people to release these emotions on a consistent basis which is something the TRC couldn’t do. The TRC could only last for so many years. [At the Museum] there is a constant process of regeneration. [2006: 3]

Prosalendis emphasises this by claiming that the Museum is ‘a safe space, a space where people can do things and confabulate… in order for some kind of cohesion you have to have a real space not a virtual space… it has to be performed… it has to have a home… Our first impulse just as organisms is seeking… seeking home, seeking comfort… that’s what such spaces offer, can offer’ [2006: 6]. The District Six Museum in this sense has become a space where people can not only relive District Six, but continue to live it. Even though ex-residents may return at night to the heartbreaking areas they were forcibly removed to there still exists a continual and unavoidable aspiration that is intertwined with the struggle for restitution and ‘is driven by dreams of returning to the home or community where they feel they belonged. But this struggle is also about wanting to be heard, wanting to be seen and wanting to be remembered’ [Field, 2001: 120]. While the Museum cannot provide the ex-residents of District Six with physical homes, it can provide them with a space in which they can be heard, seen and remembered. The space also acts as a kind of limbo, an in-between space where District Six has lived since it was bulldozed, and will live until it is fully rebuilt. In addition, Bennet claims, the institution ‘has also benefited from having been ’educated’ by the community it serves through ongoing engagements
with people. This continues to be a place of healing, and one which facilitates the many ways in which people return to a place: residentially, emotionally, as visitors, [Bennet, 2007: 5']. What I argue here is that redevelopment could not only have happened with out such facilitation but also without a physical space in which the facilitation could happen.

Field claims that ‘the most shining example of community regeneration is District Six. Many similar other projects have fallen apart’ [2006: 2]. Despite the issues and generational tensions involved in the process of re-developing the District Six site, both the District Six Beneficiary Trust and the District Six Museum have managed to facilitate the beginning of a project that will ultimately contribute to social cohesion in South Africa. Prosalendis claims, however, that ‘one of the big problems with social cohesion is that sometimes people cohere too much and then it becomes a case of us and them... and sometimes I felt that about the Museum; there are factions and they can exclude. And the challenge is to have someone so skilled so professional that they can keep it fluid’ (Prosalendis, 2006: 6). The justification of such exclusion, on the part of the Beneficiary Trust, is based on carrying out redevelopment in a specific way without the interference of a cacophony of discordant voices. And the current fluidity of the project is questionable but despite the slow nature of redevelopment thus far it is probable that the process would have been a great deal slower if other interested parties could have contributed to it and if the Beneficiary Trust had valued the contribution of the Museum more. Field feels that the initiative to re-develop District Six has ‘certainly achieved something’ but ‘whether it’s going to do it for another 10 years I don’t know’ (Field, 2006: 2). No-one, not even the Beneficiary Trust can begin to imagine what District Six will become in the next 10 years. As Layne claims with regard to redevelopment ‘we are taking the idea of District Six and applying it to a new set of circumstances’ (2004). District Six, much like South African identity, is ‘a work in progress’ and its meaning will certainly ‘repose in an archive that remains to be written’.
Whatever the outcome will be there is no denying that the idea of 'District Six' that is being applied to a new set of circumstances, is an idea that has been constructed by the District Six Museum since 1994 with the assistance of the ex-residents who bestowed their narratives and personal objects to the Museum’s collection. As I argued above, the intricacies of the relationship between the Museum and the ex-residents do in many ways verify Soudien’s claim that District Six is being redeveloped ‘on its own terms’. Yet at the same time one cannot avoid the level of interpretation (my emphasis) involved in the information received from the ex-residents. The museum in this sense becomes a mediator or a filter through which the ex-residents tell their stories and make their claims. The effect of such a filter is that the District Six that was, is and will be is ultimately a creation. This creation or idea is used, not only as the basis for the redevelopment of the District Six Site but also as a possible contribution to the interlacing of a successful cohesive social fabric on which other communities might model themselves; this is a model directly related to the concept of non-racialism. The next chapter will deal with the implications of redevelopment in light of the way in which the idea of District Six has been imagined through the Museum; how this idea is being used and implemented by the Beneficiary Trust; and what implications the reconstruction of this idea has for social cohesion in a broader context.
REBUILDING A COMMUNITY
IMAGINED THROUGH THE DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM

While no one can ultimately imagine what the new, re-developed District Six will be like when it is complete, it is being conceptualised by the Beneficiary Trust with a great deal of care and sensitivity. The various levels of consideration not only include demographics, memorial sites, urban structure and other architectural elements, but also how this site, in the centre of Cape Town, can ‘[recreate] an environment in which civility is possible’ [Soudien, 2006: 3]. Such a concept, as well as a consideration of who decides what civility is and how it is made possible will be investigated in this chapter. There are many voices that want to be heard when it comes to contributing not only to the way in which the District Six Museum is narrated but also to the process of redeveloping the District Six site. It seems that the ‘voice’ of the Beneficiary Trust will be the strongest as those involved in the Trust have worked hard to ensure, as dealt with in the previous chapter, that their vision of a non-racial Cape Town be implemented through the District Six site. Such independence on the part of the Beneficiary Trust, however, is perpetrated in order to create a space relevant to the past, present and future of District Six that will ‘establish itself on its own terms’ (2006: 7). Part of the process of establishing itself on its own terms, and not the Beneficiary Trust’s terms, is the Trust’s consideration of the diverse and numerous voices of ex-residents which have found a home in the District Six Museum (specifically the sound archive). The
Museum, since its inception, has focused on creating a space within the institution that captures the act of telling. Yet these voices, as Bonita Bennet points out, are and have been interpreted by the museum and it is this interpretation that is being used to direct the Beneficiary Trust in its endeavour to develop the site. In light of this interpretative element it becomes impossible to replicate an ultimately unknowable past especially under radically different contemporary circumstances.

The filtering effect of such interpretations along with the unreliability of memory and the often-distorting effect of nostalgia means that District Six cannot be genuinely rebuilt and replicated based on the oral testimonies that have been interpreted by the Museum. Both the Museum and Beneficiary Trust acknowledge this and accept that re-development will involve a balancing act that incorporates certain elements from the past but also acknowledges that these must be applied to a new set of circumstances. Valmont Layne claims that ‘we need to build a community that’s true to the idea of District Six. And I say the ‘idea’ deliberately because we are not rebuilding District Six. We are taking the idea of District Six and applying it to a new set of circumstances, so there has to be innovation as well as reflection on the past’ (2004). Yet who gets to decide how this ‘idea’ of District Six is implemented and what will it initially be based on? As argued in the previous chapter [p. 56] it would seem that the Beneficiary Trust ultimately gets to decide how this ‘idea’ is implemented yet what it seems to be implementing has been largely influenced by the previous and current work of the Museum. The ‘idea’ then, it could be argued, is based on the District Six that has been imagined through the District Six Museum. Nagia’s notion, for example, of District Six as a place ‘where pale face slept with black faces...[and] didn’t feel, sense and permeate that difference’ (2001: 177) is an example of an idea of District Six imagined through the Museum which has had an incredible influence on the way in which redevelopment has been conceptualised. Such an idea is in a sense nostalgic and this nostalgia has to some extent been cultivated through the Museum. But, as
will be argued in this chapter, nostalgia can be a powerful tool. Nagia describes an idea that the Beneficiary Trust is determined to physically generate by ‘rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town’. The following chapter analyses notions of nostalgia, deals with the process of District Six being imagined through the Museum and will show how the ‘idea’ of the District that was created through this process is influencing re-development.

The District Six Museum has at times been accused of contributing to the romantic vision of what District Six was like before the forced removals. This romantic vision has been challenged by various parties. Annie Coombes explains that there are ‘inevitably problems with any reminiscing that tends towards an idealistic nostalgia, reproducing the experience of living in District Six as an idyllic harmonious environment immune to political tensions and personal antagonisms’ (2003: 124). In the various oral history projects that have been carried out within and outside of the District Six Museum, researchers have been inclined to accept that the stories being told are not necessarily factual and they have to some extent been embellished. The fact is that the harmonious version of District Six where various races co-existed peacefully in a strong and passionate community excludes certain aspects of District Six that many researchers describe. Some of the aspects it excludes are poverty, violence and the proliferation of gang members. These were not all-encompassing aspects — Field claims that while ‘many outsiders regarded District Six as an overcrowded slum harbouring criminal elements and gang members the majority of people living there were law-abiding citizens with deeply rooted family and community ties and a strong sense of belonging’ (2003: 65) — but they are aspects that did exist. A more romantic vision than the one of District Six as a violent slum has been sustained through literature, through theatrical performances and in some cases, through the District Six Museum. Coombes states that this nostalgic ‘aspect of the representation of the District both within and beyond the museum has come under criticism from some ex-residents themselves’ (2003: 124). Yet such an
idealistic re-articulation of District Six has ultimately been constructed through the pained voices of ex-residents. Field, who has extensively conducted and written about oral history research surrounding forced removals in Cape Town, has written about the way in which the process of remembering has affected our current understanding of what District Six was like. Field acknowledges that there are certain skills needed to interpret that way in which interviewees ‘remember and narrate the past’ (2006: 11). Field asserts that ‘oral historians have learned to listen to how interviewees remember and narrate the past, whether or not it is factually accurate, to consider how memories and myths have influenced people’s actions and sense of agency’ (2006: 11). Field begins to illustrate this by providing interpretive analyses of ex-resident memories. One resident claims:

Oh! Don’t talk to me about that, please don’t talk to me. I will cry. I will cry all over again. There’s when the trouble started. When they chucked us out like that. When they chucked us out of Cape Town, my whole life became changed! There was change. Not just in me, but in all people. What they took away they can never give back to us again [weeps]. Oh I want to cry so much all over again …. [Mrs. GJ]. (Field, 2006: 9)

Field explains that the ‘interviewee fears feeling, her loss “all over again”’… In the midst of this emotional expression her sense of loss is echoed in the reflection that “what they took away they can never give back to us again”’ (2006: 9). The root of nostalgia lies in the loss of something that can never be regained. Field goes on to claim that while the restitution process may offer ‘the promise of return to District Six’, the displacement was not solely about the loss of physical spaces but also ‘about the loss of emotionally and symbolically meaningful places, particularly “home” and “community”’ (Field, 2006: 9). And, one must not underestimate the impact of such a loss. District Six was many things, but the way it is remembered similarly by ex-residents is as a ‘familiar landscape of home, neighbourhood and the city, [where] people felt connected’ (Field, 2006: 9). In the case of District Six the loss of “home” and “community” has had the painful effect of convincing ex-
residents they will never return and thus making them highly nostalgic. Field describes nostalgia as ‘an imaginative process of finding words to make sense of memories laden with uncomfortable images and feelings evoked in the present but linked to what has been lost from the past’ (2006: 10). It is in this light that the process of nostalgic remembrance is ultimately imaginative. The incredible absence or loss that the ex-residents feel as a result of being forcibly removed from their homes is complicated in that the void is filled with an ‘ongoing emotional presence’ (Field, 2006: 9). It is ‘this emotional presence’ that further influences the imagination. Field explains the effect “loss” has on the self and how this leads to imaginary constructions:

   The actual loss of home and community is felt as a loss of personal security, stability and autonomy. Most of all, when the social world people grew up in is destroyed it is experienced as if the inner-self is being fragmented or as if “all is lost”. In response, many protect themselves by psychologically splitting-off parts of the self to create imaginary places framed by nostalgic memories. For these trauma survivors, nostalgia protects the self from the pain, sadness, hatred and the losses inflicted by the apartheid system. This psychological manifestation is encountered in the interview, as myth-laden memories of “home” and “community”, which “hold together” an imagined “whole” self. (Field, 2006: 10)

   Thus the effect of trauma often dictates that sufferers will construct memories as a form of self-protection. Yet there is another reason such nostalgic constructions are protective in the case of District Six: they guard against other politically motivated and commonly accepted narratives. It is in this way that these nostalgic constructions, although they are not accurate, in some cases serve important functions. For example, Coombes says “a nostalgia that produces this image of District Six also serves to undermine the bureaucratic language of sanitation and public hygiene deployed by the apartheid demolition teams that so ruthlessly and effectively masked the more positive human aspects of the cheek-by-jowl existence that was the District Six experience of the poorer inhabitants. It seems,
then, that a certain kind of nostalgic memorializing may serve important and productive functions given the reconstructive and transformative South African context’ [2003: 124]. What Coombes suggests here is that although nostalgic remembrance may be inaccurate and at times imagined, in the case of District Six it serves as a weapon against the politically motivated perception of District Six that the apartheid government invented. It is in this way that ‘the idealized past is not the only construct oral historians confront in interviews with former District Six residents’ (Field, 2006: 12). The social fragmentation inflicted by forced removals was the result of an idea of District Six constructed by the apartheid government as an unhealthy slum. This idea of District Six imagined by the apartheid government both stands in heavy contrast to, and influences the nostalgic notion of the harmonious community imagined by ex-residents. In an essay on the Streets exhibition Soudien and Lalou Meltzer discuss this construction. In official announcements about the area the District was ‘portrayed as a blight on the social landscape- a festering sore in danger of infecting the moral core of the city’ (1995: 8). What is being presented is a narrative that is aimed at justifying immoral actions paradoxically in terms of morality. This is a racist narrative that ‘presents itself as a tale in search of a good ending, as in Sodom and Gomorrah- the erasure of District Six. A racist narrative that assumes the moral fibre of the area would be strengthened by proclaiming it for ‘whites only’’ [1995: 8].

Field claims that the painful effects of dislocation are only ‘exacerbated by racist discourses that justified and embodied apartheid’s forced removals’. He elaborates:

Far removed from District Six, most former residents lived in poverty-stricken racialised ghettos, circumstances that produced bleak worldviews. In this context, people weave together nostalgia and historical facts to create memories of solace, which help them, bear both their emotional losses from the past and socio-economic problems of the present. These reconstructed memories are evidence of people’s resilience, their will to survive. They also
reveal a resolve to imagine a better future, which results in popular memories that look backward and forward with ambiguity. [2006: 13]

Coombes discusses Susan Stewart’s psychoanalytic analysis of nostalgia. Stewart claims that ‘nostalgia for a sense of future – for an experience, however imaginary, of possessing the means of controlling the future- may function as a powerful force for social reconnection. In permitting creative lapses from dominant realities it is such a nostalgia that enables or recalls to practice more meaningful patterns of relationship and self-action’ [2003: 125]. Thus, although as Coombes asserts, even the ex-residents are at times critical of the romantic vision of District Six, nostalgia may be a powerful weapon that has ultimately undermined ‘the racist narrative’ that justified the brutal and indefensible forced removal of thousands from their homes.

But what happens once these nostalgic recollections of ex-residents are interpreted by others, portrayed in exhibitions and displays, and eventually used as the basis for re-development? Those who have conducted oral history interviews through the museum are trained to do so in a highly sensitive way. But how, since 1994, has the museum gone about interpreting and utilising the results of what they have discovered through their oral history endeavor?

The effect of nostalgia on recollection and the slippery nature of memory itself are not the only reason the oral testimonies of ex-residents are, in a sense imagined. The way in which these oral testimonies are presented to the public is through the filtered interpretation of the District Six Museum. This is not to suggest that District Six Museum interviewers have been or are being in any way disingenuous – my aim here is to explore the process of filtering that occurs as testimonies are relayed and recorded. Soudien and Meltzer were well aware of the complexities involved in attempting to portray the District as early as 1995. They claim that ‘the position with which we begin is that all portrayals, all stories, even
our own, are problematic’ (1995: 8). They ask questions such as ‘who has the right to tell [District Six’s] story?’ and ‘does it have only one true story?’ (1995: 8).

In an attempt to avoid gross misrepresentation in terms of the way the District Six story is told there has always been an environment of interactivity within the museum and an initiative to create a space of dialogue, of interplay between its visual framework, and of voices’ (Minty, 2006: 6). As museum trustee, Irwin Combrick comments: the District Six Museum ‘is not a place where you just come to view artifacts. It’s something you become involved in’. (Rassool, 2001: ix). This level of interactivity has meant that the ex-residents have been able to play a major part in the way their stories get told. According to Field former residents played a ‘central role in creating this museum and in materially and emotionally rebuilding the community’ (2006: 10). Field justifies this by referring to the kind of interactivity that has become the norm at the museum. The examples he gives include the fact that visitors are given opportunities to inscribe their names and stories on to memory cloths and diaries and when opportunities arise during visits, former residents are interviewed on site (Field, 2006: 10). The reason this level of interactivity within the museum is important is because ‘people’s sense of place frames an imaginative “holding together” of both themselves and their community’s identity’ (Field, 2006: 10). Field mentions the map on the floor of the museum as having a major impact on such ‘imaginative “holding together”’. The process of “holding together” also relates to the notion of nostalgia as a weapon against the idea of the “self” becoming fragmented. The street map in the centre of the Museum contributes to this process. The action of ex-residents writing their names on the location of their former homes onto a street map of the District begins to mnemonically represent a process of re-inscription:

From 1966 to 1995, former residents sustained a community-in-memory by imagining their community of the past, even when they had no or sporadic contact with each other. But since 1995, through the work of the Museum, epitomised in the mnemonic map, each individual’s
name and place in District Six is re-inscribed in the community’s history. This is an evocative space where, as a museum education officer said, “Every day at least one person cries here.” These tears are links to the past but are evoked within the safe museum space of the present, where former residents disconnected through removals and dispersed across the city have the opportunity to re-experience an emotional connection to District Six and to each other. Put differently, it rekindles a pre-removals connectedness, which over time was sustained through memory and imagination. [Field, 2006: 12]

In other words, since the removals the ex-residents have had little interaction with each other and through the Museum they experience a reconnection with one another. The manner of their separation has caused deep trauma. The Museum in this way acts as a mediator and a facilitator between ex-residents, offering them opportunities to interact with one another again that they would not normally have. What is important is that in between the forced removal and this reunion of sorts, District Six was remembered and imagined by individuals living different lives in different places. The implications of what happens when these memories come together through the Museum are interesting. The Museum is facilitating this and through such facilitation, District Six is once again being re-imagined. But what happens once ex-residents reconnect and stories begin to blend or clash?

The answer to such a question is not simple but ultimately the Museum began to analyse the kind of District Six narratives that were developing and accepted that the strongest narrative was one that embraced diversity. Merely embracing diversity, however, without ‘taking a position’ as dealt with above (p. 52), lands up, according to Soudien, ‘absolving people from responsibility’ [Soudien, 2006: 9]. While Soudien acknowledges that diversity creates discord, it is not the discordance that needs to be embraced but the way in which diversity can be equated with non-racialism. As mentioned above the aim of the Streets exhibition was to both ask and deal with questions such as ‘who has the right to tell [District Six’s] story?’ and ‘does it have only one true story?’ [1995: 8]. The way in which the District is dealt with in the Streets exhibition is through a distinction between
‘official narrative’ and ‘popular narrative’ (Soudien & Meltzer, 1995: 13). The “official narrative” Soudien and Meltzer explain is the narrative that called for the erasure of District Six. This narrative is ‘the bureaucratic language’ of the apartheid government. The popular narrative on the other hand is the narrative told by the ex-residents. Soudien and Meltzer claim that ‘embedded in the popular narrative... in its penchant for over-exaggeration...is the power of re-invention and renewal’ (1995: 10). “Popular narrative” is thus the nostalgic narrative of District Six that has been identified as exaggerated. This relates to the argument presented above (p.68) and the way in which the museum uses this narrative is to express its ‘susceptibility to difference and working with difference’ (Soudien & Meltzer, 1995: 10). What the Streets exhibition aimed to do was to ‘work with the reality of how narrative, visual, spoken or scripted, is about remembering and forgetting; how it works to exaggerate pleasure and horror, and how it even structures desires’ (1995: 10). The Museum was thus prepared to be fairly critical about how narratives are dealt with by the institution, yet it becomes more and more clear that the Museum was in fact in favor of a specific narrative. The Museum, since the Streets exhibition has used the popular narrative in the same way that the ex-residents have: to safeguard against the “official narrative”.

It seems that the Museum, in a sense, began by defining itself in terms of what it was not. It started as an institution that believed strongly, according to Soudien, in ‘rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town’. Even Soudien admits that ‘race did exist in District Six’, but in its diversity it resisted the brutal racialism that was dictated by the “official narrative”.

The reason for the Streets exhibition focusing on street life in District Six is ‘it is in the street that this diversity is most evident as everyday reality’ (Soudien & Meltzer, 1995: 10). The street was where people lived their lives in District Six, which sits in heavy contrast to the way in which many middle class South Africans currently live: in high security town houses and closed off suburban areas guarded by safety booms. Yet it was the closeness of the community through their
interaction on the street that made District Six a very different place to the Cape Flats. One ex-resident comments on the disconnection felt once she had relocated to the Flats: ‘I don’t know how my life continued. I couldn’t see my life in this raw township far away from family. All the neighbours were strangers. That was the hardest part of my life’ (Field, 2006: 12). The fragmentation caused by forced removal influenced many residents to “hold together” a powerful memory that is set on the streets of District Six. In the District people socialised on the street, ate on the street and in many ways established their identity on the street. Soudien and Meltzer claim:

The phenomenon of the street is...central in District Six identity narrative. It is the place where people’s identities are confirmed and where they affirm their belonging. It is a place where they show themselves as members of the community. Crucially, however, the street is also the place where one announces one’s new identity. The story of the “venstertjie”, a District Sixer who had become “white”, burying his or her head in the anonymity of a street-shop window in avoidance of an approaching relative, or that of the transvestite celebrating his/her coming out moment, suggests the street as a place where one signaled who one was or who one wanted to be. The street was a medium through which meaning was offered and negotiated. [1995: 11-12]

This description gives one a sense of the movement of people and identity in District Six; the way in which people negotiated public space in order to improve their lives through individual negotiation and ingenuity. Through this exploration of identity, which was often played out on the street, the ultimate goal of the Museum here is not attempting to pin down what exactly District Six was, but what exactly it was not. The way in which District Six began to be represented through the Museum was by negotiating identity in response to the narrow ones prescribed by the apartheid state. The Streets exhibition, which ultimately represents a number of narratives, was also 'precisely about working around the no-go zones of representation in District Six’ [Soudien & Meltzer, 1995: 13]. While it is difficult to
find an 'unambiguous meaning for the popular narrative', Soudien and Meltzer feel that 'one blinding fact has repeatedly asserted itself - the unequivocal rejection of the official narrative' [1995: 13].

In Chapter Three I dealt with the way in which the new generation has embraced the concept of dialogue creating a space that is open to the fluidity of various voices. Field also points out that the Museum:

...attracts vast numbers of foreign visitors and is a member of an international network of "Site Museums of Conscience". These audiences and dialogues have helped the Museum to produce vibrant results, which might not match everyone's remembered or imagined community, but nonetheless provide space for the memories of loss and resilience to be expressed, recorded, archived and represented. Most significantly, the museum provides an overarching framework to hold many viewpoints, memories, emotions and imaginings of District Six. [2006: 14]

Thus, the Museum has now developed into a space that facilitates diversity and acts as a 'framework' for a variety of different voices. There seemed to be a different approach, however, when the museum was in its beginning stages. The Museum acted as more of an activist, resistance-based institution that was concerned with 'the rejection of the official narrative' [Soudien & Meltzer, 1995: 13]. From the inception of the Museum it was initially comprised of people who were very politically motivated. Much of this political motivation comes from the fact that 'the “Hands-off-District-Six” campaign - a co-coalition of anti-apartheid groups, which stopped economic development on the District Six site during apartheid - was a significant forerunner to the formation of the Museum’ [Field, 2006: 14]. Soudien reinforces this by saying that the Museum’s vision 'came directly out of the antecedent organizations that gave birth to the Museum, particularly the Hands off District Six campaign...which was established around the principle of non-racialism' [2006].

The older generation that established the Museum, in a passionate attempt to defend the District and unyieldingly fight against the official narrative that Soudien
and Meltzer describe, ensured that the Museum *imagined* District Six in a way that is undeniably nostalgic. Coombes asserts that museum staff, acknowledge a “community” both diverse and fractured but that simultaneously lays claim to a version of the concept that has more to do with the “imagined” coherence... than with the diverse and sometimes antagonistic polity that it actually represents’ (Coombes, 2003: 142). Thus in its resistance of the official narrative, what is expressed about District Six, in the end is less about its diversity and more about the romanticism surrounding its diversity. And, when it comes to the redevelopment of the site there appears to be an initiative to use such quixotic representations as the foundation for reconstruction.

While the District Six that is being reconstructed is indeed being applied to a new set of circumstances it is ultimately being done with one string initiative in mind: rebuilding a non-racial Cape Town. This is of course the initiative of the Beneficiary Trust and it is one that they have fought to carry out in the exact way they have always imagined. The ‘idea’ of District Six that is being used in redevelopment is based on the District Six that was constructed through the Museum in defiance of the ‘official narrative’ of apartheid with aim of ‘rebuilding of a civil Cape Town’ (Soudien, 2996).

Soudien willingly admits that ‘District Six was not an unproblematic place... race was alive in District Six, it’s not as if it were an island separate from South Africa. It was deeply part of South Africa... but at the same time there were practices that we want to recuperate coming out of it and some of these practices... are important for the rebuilding of a civil Cape Town’ (2006: 3). Thus while the Beneficiary Trust does deny that there were problematic aspects of the way people lived in District Six, what is being recreated is obviously not going to attempt to recreate those issues, but rather include the more romantic, positive aspects of the area. In an interview conducted by the Museum with Mrs. Bam, part of the first group of returnees to the new District Six on Church Street, she describes the new development as being ‘very peaceful, very quiet’ (2006). She then
moves on to explain that it was decided in a meeting between the returnees and the Beneficiary Trust that the new District would have `no shebeens, no border houses’ [2006]. Soudien verifies this by saying that the Beneficiary Trust required returnees to sign social compact in which these people have to commit themselves to not starting shebeens, to not starting drug outlets and so on’. He says that this was ‘very much an organisational initiative’ [2006]. Mrs. Bam ends the interview by saying that she asks herself ‘how can you and others make a better District Six?’ [2006]. What Mrs. Bam is expressing is the fact that the new development has its differences from the original District in that those rebuilding it are trying to make it ‘better’. For Soudien, it seems, it is not about making it better but rather about ‘trying to hold people to a higher moral standard’ [2006: 4].

It is one thing to exclude the negative aspects of the old District Six; yet rebuilding a non-racial, civil Cape Town is obviously an ambitious initiative. There is a conscious effort on the part of the Beneficiary Trust to arrange the demographics of the new development in a way that reflects the diversity of the District. Soudien affirms that the most obvious way in which the site is being consciously developed is by inserting...

...into the public debate that District Six has many memories including the African memory, including the voices of African people right up to the late 1960’s. Up to the 1960’s the popular conception was that black people were removed by the bubonic plague in Cape Town in 1906 and that the area after that was primarily coloured and white. What the Beneficiary Trust does [through the] recovery of that particular memory that the museum invents, if you like, is a deliberate thing. [2006: 9]

The first two people to return to District Six were Dan Ndzabela and Ebrahim Murat and their families. Soudien stresses that this was deliberate on the part of the Beneficiary Trust and that ‘these two people are now neighbours having to deal with an apartheid interlude in their lives which made them African and made them coloured’ [2006: 10]. The African story of District Six, is one that has been a
deliberate focus on the part of the Museum. Moving from the main exhibition space, one instinctively begins to explore the smaller rooms of the Museum. One of the most prominent of these rooms is ‘Nomvuyo’s Room’. The display is based on the memoir of Nomvuyo Ngcelwane entitled Sale Kahle, District Six. Coombes states that ‘it is not insignificant that the one reconstructed domestic interior represented in the Museum is the family room of a Xhosa woman. This is another example of the museum’s deliberate engagement with some of the more controversial aspects of the “memory” of District Six and its effort to guard against a romantic nostalgia from within a certain constituency of former District Six residents themselves’ (2000: 141). What is interesting about Coombes’ explanation is that she regards the exclusion of the ‘African story’ as being part of the romantic nostalgia that is expressed by a certain constituency of ex-residents of other races. I would argue here that despite the Museum’s resistance towards one constituency’s nostalgia, it is still contributing to the nostalgic notion of District Six as a culturally diverse area, where various races lived peacefully until the “official narrative”, as Soudien states ‘made them African and made them coloured’ (2006). This reconstruction of such a nostalgic notion, however, exceeds being only about District Six. Nagia elaborates on this:

We want to reconstruct District Six so that it should take its place in the city, in South Africa and in the world. Because District Six might have been thought of as a so-called ‘coloured’ or potentially ‘coloured area, we are not going to reconstruct it that way. It should in fact, reflect the entire city, its population, and the way it thinks and how it responds to cities of the world. That is how we believe District Six will be. And the Museum I think is going to be the common denominator for all of this and the promise is so great (2001: 178).

Yet how can the Beneficiary Trust ensure that, just like the myth, these races (or non-races) will live peacefully? Lucien le Grange, according to Soudien, is the architect leading the way in which District Six is being re-designed. Soudien stresses that le Grange’s work is in keeping with the spirit of kanala or giving, and
his conceptualisation of the development is ‘about recreating an environment in which civility is possible’ [2006]. While le Grange’s architectural plans are not in the public domain yet ‘the plans are there and Lucien has been largely responsible for...thinking through these plans’ [Soudien, 2006]. Lucien le Grange in his article “District Six: urban place and public memory” in Recalling Community in Cape Town states that:

...within the middle-class suburban residential areas that make up the modern city people increasingly live private lives behind secure walls. These tendencies have been much the same in South African urban history, except that through the application of apartheid policies our cities have acquired their own peculiar character. With this erosion of public life and the quality of urban place there is likely subsequent loss of public memory (2001: 106).

Yet township life is still considered to be street life and what le Grange refers to is essentially a middle class existence. As mentioned above, in the case of District Six there was a process of fragmentation post forced removals that caused people living in townships to be divided and ensure that on the Flats ‘everybody’s for themselves...they don’t worry with nobody’ (Field, 2001: 79). Yet the importance of le Granges argument lies in the suggestion that the reason the concept of ‘community’ is difficult to grasp on a global level is that there has in some cases been a gradual loss of ‘public memory’ and social groups often exist in what are essentially segregated islands. Sites like District Six, compared to some of the desolate and harsh environments that now exist in South Africa, according to le Grange ‘somehow continues to stimulate public memory’ (2001: 108). The aspect of District Six that le Grange refers to as stimulating public memory is the way in which people lived in the streets which was influenced by the site’s urban structure. Le Grange describes some of the reasons behind how the physical urban environment of District Six is capable of stimulating public memory:
As an urban district it served more than one primary function, accommodating closely related places of residence, worship, education, entertainment and work. This mix of uses ensured the presence of people who were outdoors at different times and who were able to use many facilities in common... In addition it had a dense concentration of people, of different classes, resident in the area. Within this context, urban places assumed many different characters- the schoolyards were neighborhood playgrounds, school buildings, churches and mosques were the community centers and the streets were the space for public contact. (2001: 109)

While le Grange’s exact plans are not open to the public yet, Soudien asserts that he is interested in recreating a civil space similar to that of District Six. This is a civil space that has been imagined through the District Six Museum specifically through the conceptualisation of the Streets exhibition discussed above (p.73-4). Yet when it comes to openly proposing that the original grid of the district should be utilised in the new design it is, fascinatingly enough, a research unit housed in the much-despised Cape Tecknikon that has put this idea forward. An Exhibition in 1995 that was followed by a publication entitled “Texture and Memory- the Urbanism of District Six” put on by the Cape Tecknikon’s Urban Housing Research Unit ‘traced the urban development patterns of the district before its demolition so that future development could be informed by this history’ [Coombes, 2003: 143]. In the publication compiled by Marco Bezzoli, Rafael Marks and Martin Kruger it is proclaimed:

We do not have any concrete proposals for the area- that would be inappropriate and beyond our brief. But we do advocate the creation of a new urban space that recognizes the texture and memory of the District’s history and incorporates lessons learnt from its past. This is the memory, not only of the ex-residents, but also of the urbanity of the old District and its positive, and negative, urban qualities. Only by understanding this can the urban fabric be rebuilt sensibly and with sensitivity.[2002: 125].

The authors of the publication acknowledge it is not their place to make concrete proposals but they do happen to advocate an appreciation for the urban fabric of
District Six that it would seem is shared by le Grange. But the Museum, with which le Grange is associated, wanted nothing to do with the Urban Housing Research Unit and did not seem interested in their research. Bezzoli defended the unit by stating that it was merely housed in the Technikon (the probable reason for the Museum’s distance) and was independent from it [Coombes, 2003: 143]. Coombes asserts that Bezzoli’s ‘qualification fell on deaf ears…and the District Six Museum refused to lend support to the exhibition. Neither the museum nor the District Six Community Land Trust was represented, and the Trust’s chief executive officer, Basil Davidson, declined an invitation to deliver an address at the opening of the exhibition’ [2003: 143]. This was prior to the Beneficiary Trust being established but some of those that snubbed the research unit were the people that would eventually make up the Trust. This is quite a clear example of a group of people that attempted to contribute to the process in vain even though their line of thinking appears to be quite similar to those that are deeply involved. To return to an earlier point, the Beneficiary Trust, as Prosalendis points out, is determined to do it their own way. The Urban Housing Research Unit may not have had the grounds to contribute to the process of re-development, but they may have added something valuable to it.

Yet, one of the reasons that, as Field asserts, the re-development of District Six is ‘the most shining example of community regeneration’ is because of the determination of those involved. It is interesting that through trying to integrate the character of the District’s environment of non-racialism; those developing the site have been caught up in its spirit of *kanala*. One of the major romantic notions surrounding District Six is that of sharing (*kanala* is the term that describes this notion). Soudien asserts that the actual story of the process of re-development is an extraordinary one in itself:

> It’s another fascinating story all on its own what has happened in this process of rebuilding, its an enormously expensive process... nobody has been paid... and when people have been paid it
has been below what they would normally charge so there has a resurgence, a recovery and a
rebirth of this *kanala*, sharing, giving. And there’s been a lot of giving already in this initial
stage... not ungrudgingly... But its there and its being held up publicly by the Beneficiary Trust
and in some ways it might be coercing people into a state of goodness... its complicated
psychological stuff. But the way in which the Beneficiary Trust is doing this, there’s a lot of
debate about this, it is trying to hold people to a higher moral standard... And the complexity
here is that it’s this memory of the past that is shining on people’s involvement in this process.
(2006)

It in this light that redeveloping the District Six site is about more than District Six: it is about ‘trying to hold people to a higher moral standard’. What the Beneficiary Trust is achieving by considering the diverse stories of District Six when it comes to re-development is attempting to achieve social cohesion through community regeneration that does not discriminate and includes various races; such social cohesion is meant to be, as the symbol of District Six often is, metonymic. It is a part representing what the whole of Cape Town and effectively South Africa should be striving for according to the Beneficiary Trust: rebuilding a non-racial environment where civility is possible. And while, this vision is based on a nostalgic ‘idea’ of a place imagined through the District Six Museum, it remains a necessary and powerful one.
District Six has exceeded being purely one of the many sites of forced removal as dictated by the apartheid government’s Group Areas Act. It has become a symbol and a metonymic icon that has deep implications for how South African identity is forming and how social cohesion can materialise in this country. It is a part representing a whole country that still needs to negotiate how to make civility possible. The District Six Museum has played an enormous role in, not only facilitating the beginning of the long journey of making civility possible in South Africa, but also defining what ‘civility’ actually is.

For those who were there since the inception of the Museum the initiative to open an institution that dealt with District Six was based on the political incentive to ‘rebuild a non-racial Cape Town’. Thus while the vital aspect of ‘memory work’ was part of that initiative, the ultimate vision and desire was ‘to see the community of District Six restored and called back to resettle, redevelop and heal the scarred landscape at the foot of the mountain’ [Rassool, 2001: xi]. And the way in which this scarred landscape was imagined to be rebuilt, redeveloped and ultimately healed was through ‘recreating an environment in which civility is possible’ [Soudien, 2006: 3]. For Soudien, Nagia and many of the dedicated people who have been involved since the beginning this notion of ‘civility’ can be defined in terms of non-racialism, in terms of not only a tolerance of difference but a need, in contrast to the racist narrative of apartheid, not to perpetuate difference. The District Six that is being rebuilt, rather than recreated, is doing so according to a new set of circumstances, as Layne states, but is also incorporating an ‘idea’ of what District Six once was. This idea has been created and nurtured through the work of District Six Museum through its interactive elements; through its close interactions with ex-residents; through its provision of a safe space where District
Six has lived since it was brutally destroyed; through its consultation with claimants and facilitation of land claims and through its dedication to not only nurturing the District’s memory but to redeveloping the scarred slopes of the empty wasteland the District has become. At the heart of this ‘idea’ is the concept of District Six described by Nagia as a place where ‘pale faces slept with black faces’ and ‘they didn’t feel, sense and permeate that difference, or the idea that they were different’ (2001: 177). At times nostalgic and in many ways a construction of the District Six imagined through the Museum, this idea is what many involved in redevelopment feel will assist in recreating an environment in which civility is possible. There are various narratives that have come out of District Six and the diversity of these narratives has been explored by the Museum; but ultimately there is one narrative that is always resisted and struggled against and that is the ‘primary’ or racist narrative of apartheid. By striving to rebuild a non-racial Cape Town, the Museum is fighting the physical and conceptual affects of this harmful narrative.

The Museum is not a perfect institution; there are many tensions and complications, specifically the generational tension between those who have been involved since the beginning and those who are new to the Museum staff. Many of the older generation are trustees and many of those trustees are part of the Beneficiary Trust. The different responsibilities of both organisations reflect the different generational approaches. While the Beneficiary Trust is involved in the more practical aspects of redevelopment, the Museum is involved in the conceptual aspects. This reflects that the older generation is more politicised and is interested in mobilising change in a very specific way while the younger generation is more analytical and open to the fluidity of narratives. In the end, despite this tension, both parties serve a vital purpose in redevelopment but what becomes clear through such an analysis is that redevelopment could not have materialised without the District Museum as a heritage institution guiding it. My justification for arguing this is that District Six has physically and symbolically lived
in the Museum since it was destroyed. The ‘idea’ of it that is being used in redevelopment could not exist without a space for it to be nurtured and to grow in. The reason why the Museum has been so successful at nurturing this idea is because it challenged, from the beginning the notion of what Museums were expected to be. It created a ‘living’ space open to interactivity, debate and growth and it is in this way that the notion of District Six has not remained static but has developed in a way that can contribute remarkably not only to rebuilding the District Six site, but also rebuilding a national identity.

District Six, much like South African identity, is ‘a work in progress’ and its meaning will certainly ‘repose in an archive that remains to be written’. But what has been achieved so far, through the dedication of those involved, has ensured that we are following a path towards recreating an environment in which civility is possible and a place where pale faces sleep with black faces without feeling, sensing and permeating that difference, or the idea that they are different.
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According to the 2002 ICOMOS report: ‘The Mapungubwe site is magnificent in landscape terms, with superb views in all directions, but the excavated remains are not very impressive. The significance of the landscape and of the individual sites within it are thus not readily apparent, even to an archaeologist who does not have local knowledge’ (92).

For, example, in what James Young refers to as a `horribly magnificent site’ (1994: 26) Polish sculptor Duszenko and architect Haupt have attempted in their own words ‘to suggest iconographically the greatest of all genocidal cemeteries’ (Young, 1994: 26). Upon arriving at Treblinka, where 850, 000 Jews were murdered by the Nazi’s between 1942 and 1944, visitors walk for 200m through dense woods ‘along a path of concrete railroad ties laid to symbolize the tracks that fed this death camp’ (Young, 1994: 26). These tracks ‘once led to barracks, mass graves, and gas chambers, but all traces of the camp itself were destroyed, plowed under and planted over by the Germans. At the end of the line now, visitors step onto a huge expanse of open land enclosed by trees. A great obelisk stands in its center, surrounded by a symbolic graveyard of over 17, 000 jagged, granite stones set in concrete, several hundred of them bearing the names of Jewish communities in Poland destroyed during the Holocaust (Young, 1994: 26)

From an interview with Crain Soudien by Lara Simone Koseff conducted on the 31st of August 2006 at the University of Cape Town.

This statement is from an interview conducted by Collin Miller with Anwah Nagia and features in the publication Recalling community in Cape Town: creating and curating the District Six Museum. (2003). Cape Town, South Africa: District Six Museum by Sandra Prosalendis and Ciraj Rassool (pg. 166-178). Nagia’s use of the word “permeate” is grammatically questionable but in this case is has been accepted to mean perpetuate.

From an interview with Sandra Prosalendis by Lara Simone Koseff conducted on the 29th of August 2006 at the Human Sciences Research Council Office, Cape Town.

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From Minty’s Paper “District Six: putting the heart back into Cape Town Central City. Methodologies for re-imagining, remembering and re-making” (2006) which was initially presented at the INHA SAH conference “Changing Boundaries: Architectural History in Transition” in Paris, September 2005. The paper cited is a substantially new draft for presentation and comment at CUBES (Wits) and the Centre for African Studies (UCT) April 2006.

From a speech given by Professor Kwame Abohony Appiah at a Public Lecture Series Hosted by Dr. Xolela Mangcu In collaboration with The Public Intellectual Life Research Project University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa 19. July 2006

Interview conducted by the District Six Museum Research Department, 2006. Accessed by Lara Simone Koseff through Sound Archive.

From an interview with Utando Baduza by Lara Simone Koseff conducted on the 30th of August 2006 at the Human Sciences Research Council Office, Cape Town.
When I began my process of research I initially planned to interview the ex-residents that have relocated back to the District Six site. The District Six Museum did not assist me in my endeavor, nor did they encourage me. On a telephone call to Bonita Bennet she explained that the process of interviewing ex-residents requires much more than an ethics form certified by the University of the Witwatersrand. People need to spend years training with the Museum’s research department in order to gain the ability to conduct such a complex level of oral history.