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# Enabling a wellbeing economy in the eastern neighbourhoods of inner city Johannesburg

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**2021**
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# ENABLING A WELLBEING ECONOMY IN THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOODS OF INNER CITY JOHANNESBURG

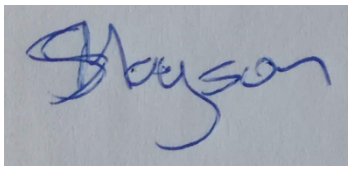
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Simon Sizwe Mayson

October 2021

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other University.



Rooiels, 04 October 2021

## ABSTRACT

There is growing concern over the growing inequalities and environmental destruction at a global level. With South Africa possessing the highest income inequality and youth unemployment, this thesis explores the potential of changemakers in its largest city, Johannesburg, to collaborate toward a more just future. The action research PhD was located in a diverse but stigmatised set of neighbourhoods to the east of Johannesburg's central business district, facing competing forces of regeneration and deterioration. The purpose of the action research was to support transformative social innovation towards a wellbeing economy, in which social and environmental goals are prioritised over profit, enhancing collective wellbeing. A pragmatic, flexible partnership approach underpinned the action research initiatives. Various 'hybrid infrastructures' were set up, including a sustainable intermediary organisation focusing on building a new identity for the area, informally named 'Makers Valley'. New co-living and co-working spaces supporting a changemaker culture were initiated.

Some characteristics of wellbeing economies were achieved in the area through the enablement of changemakers and thus transformative social innovation. Changemakers were motivated by a sense of agency and life purpose, affirmation from kin and public reputation, rather than the acquisition of positional goods. The research found that enablement of changemakers occurred through building communities around physical spaces and enhancing social capital, sharing, and intermediaries. Further enablement was found to occur from a learning by doing approach involving flexibility with accountability, and responsiveness to changing needs of changemakers and broader systems. Nevertheless, tangible action relied on a 'politics of hybridity' involving challenging compromises that had the potential to reinforce existing systems. Critical reflexivity assisted in reducing these dangers. Recommendations from this study include maximising the changemaker potential of action research in universities and supporting critical alliances within hybrid infrastructures through a 'living lab' approach. Lastly, a 'beyond GDP' social economy policy for South Africa could challenge current macroeconomic policy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I was about to embark on the write-up phase of this thesis, a cynical academic told me, “Oh don’t worry about it. The only person that reads a thesis aside from one’s supervisors and examiners is one’s mom”. So far, this is true – thank you mom for stepping in as proof reader and reading my thesis cover to cover! I am grateful also to my father for the many reflection times and brother for putting up with my ramblings and associated strife. Thank you to friends who supported me when I needed to physically break from the action and write-up.

My supervisors, Prof Marie Huchzermeyer and Prof Sarah Charlton, deserve the most acknowledgement for this thesis, however. I am in awe of their level of commitment to this academic project, and patience as I explored ‘less conventional’ ways of presentation. Their thorough feedback on a sequence of drafts was essential in pushing me to resolve the complexities of the action, and finalise a narrative that I hope is understandable to someone that had not necessarily been involved.

Scholarships from the National Research Foundation’s Collaborative Postgraduate Training Project Urban Resilience and Spatial Justice Programme facilitated by Prof Huchzermeyer, the Wits School of Governance’s Life in the City programme and the Canon Collins Trust’s Scholar of Scholars Award enabled me resources for the action and the time to write it up. The Urban Resilience and Spatial Justice Programme also located my thesis work within a cohort across three South African universities and provided a further support base from among the students and staff team involved.

Thank you to the people, and especially the changemakers, of ‘Makers Valley’, Johannesburg, without whom there would be nothing to write about.

And lastly, if the cynical academic is proven wrong, and there are indeed future readers aside from my mom, thank you to you!

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| CEC | Community Economies Collective |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GNH | Gross National Happiness |
| JDA | Johannesburg Development Agency |
| MVP | Makers Valley Partnership |
| ND | No date |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NPN | No page number |
| NPO | Non-profit organisation |
| TCC | The Coloured Cube |
| USD | United States dollars |
| WEAll | Wellbeing Economy Alliance |
| ZAR | South African Rands |

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Like many, I am deeply troubled by growing social inequalities and environmental destruction at a global level, epitomised by everyday life in my home country of South Africa. As we strive for 'a good life' as individuals, collectively we are creating a future "no one wants" (Scharmer, 2016: 38). The current economic system is not working for most people, for future generations, or for the non-human species and the environment (Coscieme et al., 2019; Fioramonti, 2017; Jackson, 2016; Schmid, 2020). Yet the alternatives are not clear, and even where they seem to be, as individuals we often feel helpless to make any tangible changes to realise them (Severns-Guntzel & Murphy-Johnson, 2020; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2019). It is this frustration that motivated my PhD studies, and indeed my life work as an aspiring 'changemaker' in government and non-government organisations. I am inspired by those individuals who have managed to overcome the sense of overwhelm and use their potential to be changemakers.

Midway through this PhD project, in 2019, my family was sorting through the papers of my deceased grandfather, anti-apartheid activist Cedric Mayson. We came across an article on 'Change Makers' that he had written in 1976 before being put on trial for treason and exiled for his work in the anti-apartheid movement. Interestingly, no one in the family remembers him talking about the concept of changemakers, but he has been an inspiration to me, due to the tangible contributions he made as a changemaker himself, and the recognition he receives for these even after death (Constitution Hill, 2020; The New Radicals, 2017). He wrote,

> In every circumstance deep consideration should be given to ways in which change can actually be enacted. Some people talk about 'wanting to know people better', others invite them home for supper. Some say:

> ‘something ought to be done about it’, others do something (Mayson, 1976: 7).

This is at the core of what I explored through the PhD: individuals translating intentions into action, despite inevitable constraints.

Through a cyclical process, action research methodology “seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (Reason and Bradbury, 2008: 4). Inspired by Marshall’s (1999) approach of ‘living life as inquiry’, I conceptualised life before the start of my action research PhD as ‘Cycle Zero’. This cycle ended in Europe in 2017 with participant observation and experiential learning in intentional communities striving to live economic alternatives.

Upon my return to South Africa, I commenced the reflection and planning stages of ‘Cycle One’. Here, I identified alternative economies that prioritise social and environmental goals, and practices that may enable changemakers and their initiatives towards these alternatives. This led me to the nascent wellbeing economy paradigm, within the ‘beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP)’ literature (Fioramonti, 2017). The Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) works to build strength by networking wellbeing or ‘happiness’-oriented alternative economy literature and organisations (Coscieme et al., 2019).

In early 2018, I began the action of the first formal cycle. Initially still on a trial basis, I immersed myself in a diverse, multi-faceted and stigmatised set of neighbourhoods in the east of Johannesburg’s inner city where I had briefly lived and worked before. As presented in Section 1.2, I found the area to be a ‘microcosm’ of South Africa, with stark inequalities. Neighbourhood partnerships and a new development called Victoria Yards were underway when I visited in 2017, holding potential for wellbeing economies but also further exclusion.

My aim was to maximise my potential as a changemaker while maintaining my own wellbeing through playing an 'enabler' role. The approach generally involved working towards increasing *other* changemakers' agency in order to realise a wellbeing economy vision through separate but linked initiatives. I joined an emerging local collective that evolved into the Makers Valley Partnership (MVP), an intermediary organisation building a loose, place-based community of changemakers. This support came through the mobilisation of significant resources and knowledge towards enabling the agency of changemakers to develop (start, grow or stabilise) initiatives aligned with wellbeing economy principles. Over the action research cycles, I also started co-working and co-living spaces with partner changemakers, which became social enterprises loosely connected by MVP.

The Covid-19 lockdowns from early 2020 shifted me into the last cycles of this PhD project, in which I have documented the findings in the form of this thesis. The figures in this chapter are presented as points of reference. Figure 1.1 depicts the findings and analysis from this process as discussed in Chapters Five to Seven and is presented as a possibility for exploration in other contexts. Figure 1.3 in Section 1.5 represents 'Makers Valley community', a term I use as shorthand for the diverse stakeholders linked to MVP's activities. Figure 1.2 (Section 1.3) is a map of the location of action research, and MVP's focus area. In lieu of another place name, I use the shorthand 'Makers Valley' also to refer to this section of multiple neighbourhoods. However, only a small proportion of research participants identified the area as such or saw themselves part of a community called 'Makers Valley'. I reflect on this in Chapter Five as part of my findings.

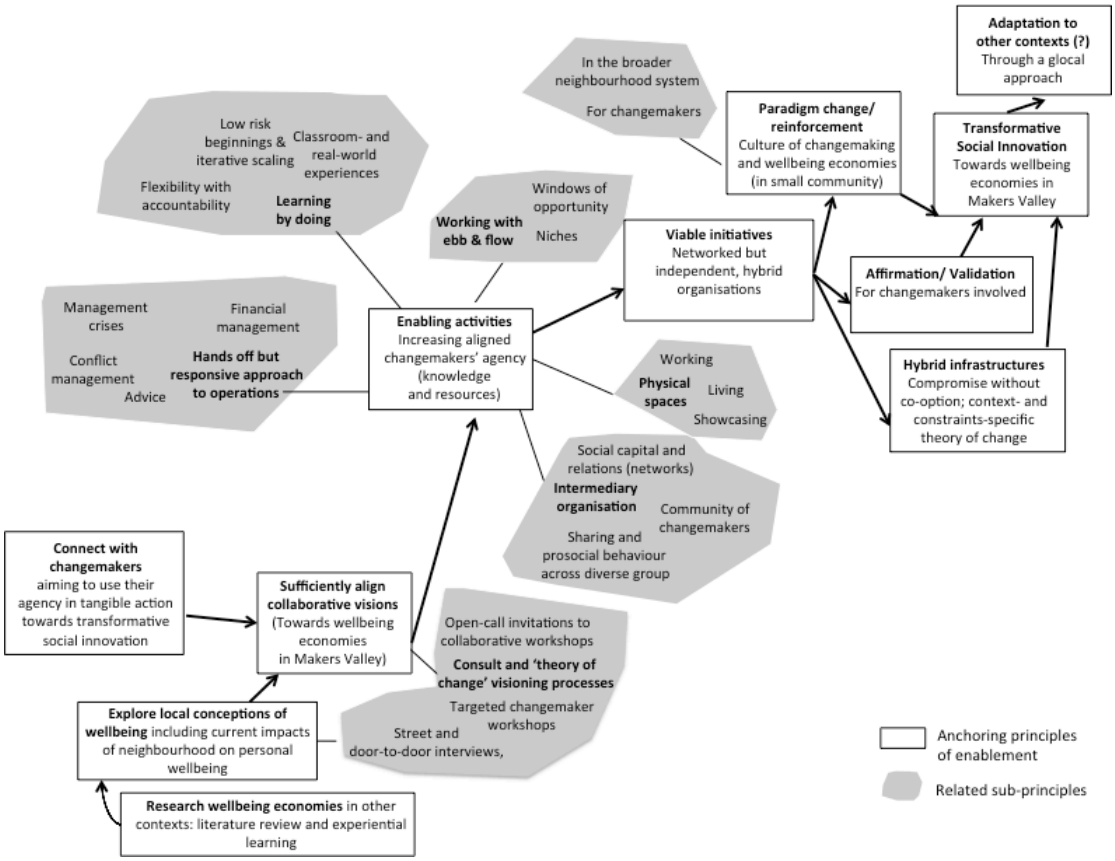



**Figure 1.1:** Diagram showing the process that evolved in enabling changemakers in Makers Valley towards a wellbeing economy. (Source: author).

As identified by Schmid (2021: 2), "while drilling down thoroughly into the unsustainability of capitalist relations and proposing more just and sustainable alternatives, the literature often remains inchoate as to the practicalities of social change and its actual realization". My hope was that this PhD may make a step in this direction, contributing empirical findings on enabling a wellbeing economy in a specific context, the role of an intermediary organisation, the concepts of wellbeing, changemakers and enablement, and advancing and extending the possibilities of action research. And yet, my experience in the action research was that tangible action relied on making challenging compromises, and ultimately the systemic impact remained ambiguous.

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I provide more detail about my thesis overall, with the final section outlining the structure.

## 1.2 Background and Key Concepts

The key concepts I drew on in enabling a wellbeing economy were changemaking, wellbeing economies and action research (as represented as a conceptual framework in Figure 2.1 and discussed in Chapter Two). I introduce the first two concepts in this section, starting with an overview of wellbeing, and then turning to conceptualisations of economy before moving to the concept of changemaking. I provide an overview of action research with reference to my methods in Section 1.5.

While the concept of wellbeing is complex, at this point in the thesis I draw on White (2010, 2017) to identify three co-constitutive dimensions of my conceptualisation: material (up to a certain point), subjective (life satisfaction and 'feeling good'), and relational (culture, social relations and status, and sense of respect). GDP growth has gained prominence as the overriding economic policy objective in most countries, particularly since the rise in neoliberalism in the 1980s (D'Alisa, Demaria & Kallis, 2015). Despite the founder of GDP accounting, Simon Kuznets, warning against this, GDP is commonly assumed to correlate with wellbeing and 'progress' (Coscieme et al., 2019; Costanza et al., 2020; Hoekstra, 2019). Yet, although average per capita incomes have risen exponentially in the global North since the 1970s, there does not appear to have been an associated rise in wellbeing. Instead, increasing inequalities have resulted in a negative impact on wellbeing in a diversity of contexts, including for the rich (Kesebir, 2016; Neve & Powdthavee, 2016; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

Furthermore, consensus is growing that GDP-growth, profit-centred economic models are resulting in an overstepping of 'planetary boundaries' (Rockström et al., 2009), with climate change, biodiversity loss, and negative impacts on collective wellbeing for current and future generations (Jackson 2016; Wilkinson & Pickett 2010; Raworth, 2017). 'Decoupling' economic growth from increases in resource use and emissions through paradigms like 'green growth' have thus far

proven unsuccessful (D'Alisa et al., 2014; Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017; Jackson, 2016). GDP growth inevitably means movement towards or beyond planetary boundaries. Thus 'green growth' and conventional conceptualisations of sustainable development, where social and environmental goals are considered *alongside* financial profit or GDP growth goals, have been found to be unattainable (ibid).

In South Africa, despite economic growth holding centre stage in the 2012 National Development Plan (NPC, 2012), real GDP per capita has declined, and there have been several recessionary periods, since adoption of the Plan (World Bank, 2020). Even periods of higher growth have not assisted in achieving core goals of poverty reduction and employment within what the NDP refers to as the 'Cycle of Development' (NPC, 2012: 16). For example, at the time of writing, youth unemployment is highest in the world at 56%, and rising (Africa Check, 2020). Inequalities also continue to rise, with South Africa having the highest income inequality in the world (Feketha, 2018). Furthermore, the Johannesburg region, where my study is based, has the highest inequalities relative to other regions in the country (CoJ, 2016a). In light of the findings on inequality and wellbeing mentioned above (Kesebir, 2016; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), between 2017 and 2020, South Africa, despite its relative affluence as a 'middle-income country', dropped seven places to 108 of the 153 countries measured in the World Happiness Report (SDSN, 2020). Therborn (2012) argues inequalities result in increased violence and fear, and reduced life expectancy.

Economic frameworks prioritising objectives 'beyond GDP' have been posited in the literature, as I will show in Chapter Two, and some paradigms have also been put into practice at national scale in several countries. For instance *Buen Vivir*, 'living well together', has been adopted in Ecuador's constitution (Escobar, 2015). Instead of GDP, Bhutan measures Gross National Happiness (GNH), comprising of a representative sample of the population's self-reported satisfaction regarding 33 determinants. Other 'beyond GDP' paradigms speak to transition across a range of scales (challenging profit-centrism in place of GDP-growth) and are more commonly realised at sub-national scale. 'Degrowth'

advocates the need to democratically and redistributively downscale production and consumption to achieve greater environmental sustainability and human wellbeing (Demaria et al., 2013). However, in the course of my research, I came to share Van den Bergh's (2011) concerns that the 'negative' degrowth messaging would not succeed in recruiting advocates to its cause and did not make sufficiently clear the potential benefits to personal wellbeing that could result. Furthermore, though I strongly believed that, as Guillen-Royo (2018) argues at an international scale, the wealthy in South Africa could afford to reduce their consumption and at the same time experience an increase in wellbeing, I was less clear about what the macroeconomic implications of degrowth may be and thus did not feel comfortable promoting this narrative.

'Postcapitalist' diverse economies literature argues for reification of the economic diversity present in existing economies (Gibson-Graham & Dombroski, 2020). Furthermore, this literature puts forward the challenge for "a wider range of identities within community economies focused on the well-being of people and the planet" (Roelvink et al., 2015: 58). Community economies can be enacted at a variety of scales including transnationally linked neighbourhood economies. In line with diverse economies literature (Gibson-Graham, 2014), I conceptualise 'the economy' as self-reinforcing socio-political systems constituted of a complex range of social relations at various scales, encompassing informal lending, friends' favours, gifts, care work, volunteer and unpaid work, as well as the aspects more commonly understood to be part of the economy, such as paid labour and the sale of goods and services.

I came across *Wellbeing Economy: Success in a World without Growth* (Fioramonti, 2017) in 2017. Following a meeting with the author, I had the opportunity to attend a Wellbeing Economy international conference at the University of Pretoria. While still conceptually open, and without an explicit conceptual framework, the notion of a Wellbeing Economy had broad appeal with its clear positive framing of wellbeing as the goal for economies. It further held the potential of bridging academic literature and civil society 'changemakers' (GovInn, 2017). Lastly, its 'home' at the time was South Africa,

with networks across the continent (Braby et al., 2017). Thus, I selected it as the alternative economy paradigm I wished to build on in my action research. As per my conceptualisation of 'economy' mentioned above, the reference to 'economy' in the term means the goal is not simply to improve wellbeing, but facilitate the change in social relations that will do so.

Over the course of my PhD research period the notion of a wellbeing economy has grown in prominence, particularly in the global North, as a broad approach or set of principles that allows room for inclusive alliances to form around the idea (Costanza et al., 2020; Wallis et al., 2018). WEAll, established the year after the 2017 Wellbeing Economy conference as a United Kingdom Registered Charity, calls for the prototyping of practical alternatives (Costanza et al., 2020). WEAll seeks to "amplify" wellbeing economies at a range of scales from neighbourhood to national (Trebeck, 2019). Wellbeing economies advance three principles: "Live within planetary ecological boundaries, ensure equitable distribution of wealth and opportunity, and efficiently allocate resources … bringing wellbeing to the heart of economic policymaking" (Coscieme et al., 2019: 4374). A few governments such as New Zealand, who received applause in the media for shifting to an explicit prioritisation of wellbeing over GDP growth in their 2019 national budget, have joined WEAll as members (Magnus-Johnston, 2020). MVP is one of approximately 120 organisations operating at a range of scales that have also joined, with the idea that WEAll supports a 'scaling across' contexts (WEAll, 2021).

Systems are seen as interrelated entities, where the relationships between entities are often of more significance than the individual parts themselves (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). Thinking and networking globally and acting locally is often referred to as a 'glocal' or translocal approach (Avelino et al., 2020; Wallis et al., 2018). WEAll, 'glocalism', intermediary organisations (see below in this section), and diverse economies literature, therefore embrace plurality and a multi-scaled approach (Costanza et al., 2020; Gibson-Graham & Dombroski, 2020). Escobar (2015: 451) speaks of a 'pluriverse' of alternative economies discourse. The collaborative vision formulation processes that formed part of my

action research involved finding commonalities and compromises in multiple overlapping but not singular visions. Thus, I ultimately realised that the 'wellbeing economy' term lends itself to both single and plural form. It is powerful in singular form and yet it evades specificity and boundedness, whether in building a movement at international scale or enabling a wellbeing economy at local scale in Makers Valley. However, as I explore in Chapter Eight, the broadly inclusive nature of this conceptualisation of wellbeing economies can entail compromise. To prevent co-option as experienced with the terms 'green economy', 'corporate social responsibility' and 'sustainability' (Banerjee, 2008; Pillay, 2018), the 'beyond GDP' focus needs to be retained. This means ensuring collective wellbeing is retained as the primary goal, as opposed to being understood to be of equal importance as GDP growth on a macroeconomic level, or profit at the individual or organisational level. I understand a wellbeing economy from a process perspective: it is a state of becoming rather than an end point.

The second key concept is that of 'changemaking'. I understand an act of 'changemaking' as an expression of 'transformative agency' (Westley et al., 2013), or an act that has the potential to contribute to transformative social innovation. The concept of transformative social innovation refers to changes in social relations contributing to societal change by challenging, altering, or replacing dominant institutions in a specific social-material context (Avelino et al., 2015; Longhurst et al., 2016; Pel et al., 2020). The change can be, for example, towards new economic systems (Avelino et al., 2015).

Within the networked systems, the elements in which I was most interested in this action research were the individuals that carry out these acts of changemaking: the changemakers. Similar to understandings of the term in its common usage (Rahman et al., 2016), I found that 'changemaking' stems from a sense that current systems are unsuitable, and the desire to take tangible action to change these. However, changemakers experience significant variations in agency, which I see as tied to differences in access to knowledge and resources (Sewell, 1992). Thus, changemakers may not have the agency to generate visions

and act on them in ways that actually lead to system change. In some cases, intended acts of changemaking may unintentionally reinforce the very systems they wish to change, challenge or replace. Thus, for the purposes of the introductory chapter, my working definition of 'changemaker' is an individual who finds life meaning in using their agency (knowledge and resources) in tangible action towards *intended* transformative social innovation.

In 'Cycle Zero' I met Transition Network coordinators when staying in Totnes 'Transition Town' and attended an international Global Ecovillage Network conference before staying in various ecovillages. Members of these networks form some of the most well-known transformative social innovation initiatives (Pel et al., 2020). Some communities align themselves with wellbeing economy paradigms such as the circular economy and solidarity economy (Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013), though neither network specifically refers to 'a wellbeing economy' (Dias et al., 2017; Peters et al., 2010). Ecovillages are intentional or traditional communities, where inhabitants have chosen to live according to the underlying vision of social and ecological regeneration (Hong & Vicdan, 2016). Transition Towns, part of the Transition Network, are more commonly a collaboration of various citizen-led projects within existing neighbourhoods and towns (MacKenzie & Lewis-Hunstiger, 2017). Some authors have suggested these movements can offer insight into enabling wellbeing economies at broader scales, with Hall (2015: 31) arguing there is "a rich half-century of 'policy implementation' experience where wellbeing has been used as the ultimate goal in smaller communities or ecovillages" within the given resources (see also Xue, 2014). However, Hall (2015) highlights that this evidence base has only been marginally researched.

In their action research on improving community wellbeing, Cheuy et al. (2017: 138) identify an intermediary or 'backbone' organisation playing a central coordination role as being particularly important in achieving collective impact at a neighbourhood scale. Cheuy et al. (2017) found that in initiatives working with cross-sector groups of partners, the backbone organisation requires a dedicated staff, serving the goals of the collective. Turner et al. (2012) argue that

backbone organisations have the potential to enable wider scale systemic change (as above, Avelino et al. (2015) frame this as transformative social innovation). Building on the approaches of wellbeing economies, the practical examples at local level such as Ecovillages and Transition Towns, and the literature regarding action research with backbone organisations, I set out to research enabling a wellbeing economy in a specific locality: a section of the eastern neighbourhoods of Johannesburg's inner city, to which I turn in the next section.

### 1.3 Location of the Action Research

Johannesburg is the largest Southern African city in terms of population and economy, and it forms part of the Gauteng City Region, an urban agglomeration housing over 13 million people (GCRO, 2021). The vestiges of apartheid spatial planning are in many areas reinforced by economic inequalities, with stark differences between wealthy and often "fortified enclaves" of the North, and previously black township areas of the South (Bahman & Frankel, 2012). The inner city has seen rapid changes since the 1970s, with most companies and white residents moving to the North, and a significant increase in the black residential population, including foreign African migrants (Beavon, 2005).

I carried out my action research in adjacent suburbs on the outskirts of eastern inner city Johannesburg, namely Troyeville, New Doornfontein, Bertrams, Lorentzville, Judith's Paarl and Bezuidenhout Valley (see Figure 3.2). Based on the initial 'identity' workshops convened by partners within the MVP, partners grew to call an area cutting across these suburbs 'Makers Valley', and it is this term that I will use to refer to my fieldwork site, as it is made up of sections of the suburbs mentioned above (although, as described in Chapter Five, Makers Valley grew more to be a place-based community than a place, with minimal uptake beyond the partners). In Figure 1.2 I show the placement of the broader Makers Valley area in relation to central Johannesburg.

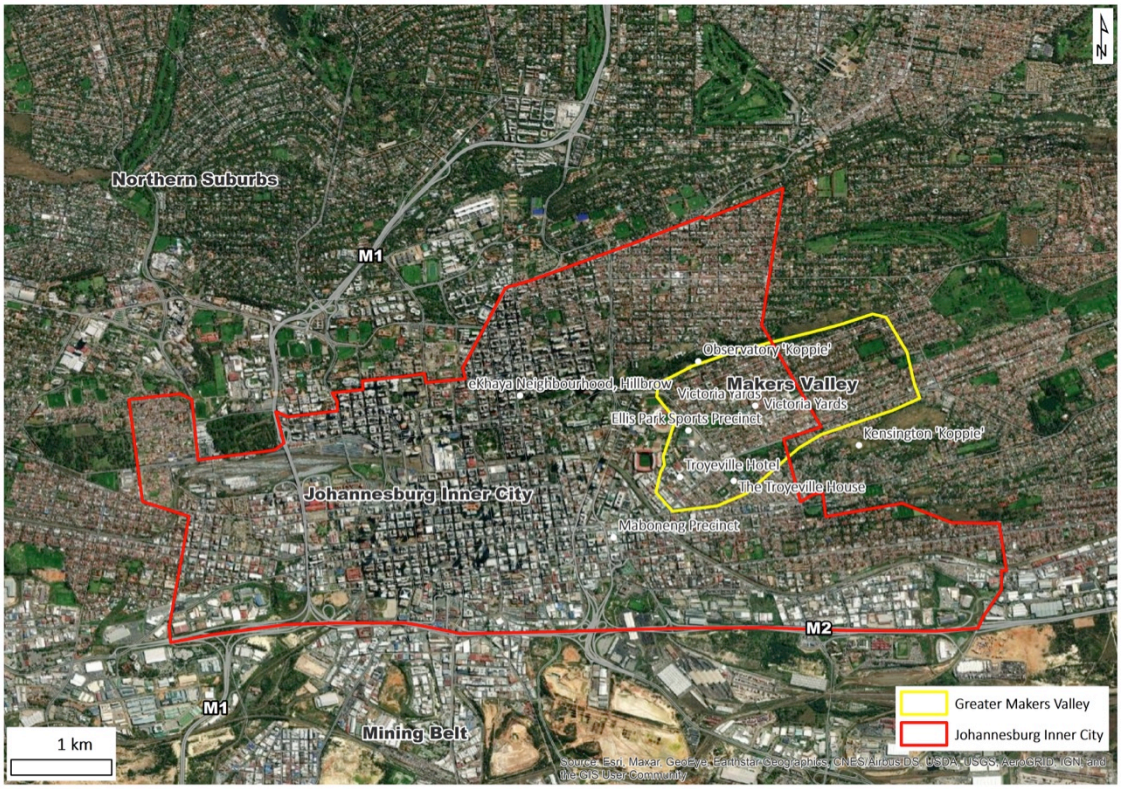



**Figure 1.2:** The official boundaries of the Johannesburg inner city, and the placement of the broader Makers Valley area within central Johannesburg. The wealthier and greener northern suburbs contrast with the central and southern suburbs. (Source: prepared by Miriam Maina, 2021).[1]

Though not necessarily in exact proportion, the diversity particularly of sub-Saharan Africa, and global economic trends like deindustrialisation can be found within the research site (Ballard et al., 2019; CoJ, 2016b; StatsSA, 2011). It is for this reason I saw the neighbourhood as an interesting and useful microcosm to explore the enablement of alternative economies. On the same street exist council and middle-class housing, several small informal settlements and illegally occupied houses, the headquarters of the multi-billion Rand international restaurant chain Nando's, a floundering steel engineering works and a national stage and lights company called Gearhouse. People who live and work in the neighbourhood hail from across Africa and the world. Walking down

[1] Maps in Figures 1.2, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 were prepared by Miriam Maina, using the following sources: Provincial and Municipal Boundaries from Municipal Demarcation Board (2018); Roads from Open Street Map (2021); Johannesburg Inner city UDZ and Township Boundaries from City of Johannesburg Corporate Geoinformatics Department (2020); Points of Interest and study area – Simon Mayson & Miriam Maina (2021).

Victoria Road where I lived for most of the fieldwork period, I would catch snippets of kiSwahili, Arabic, Lingala, French, Portuguese and more, though urbanised isiZulu and English are the lingua franca. Teenage drug dealers make a quick and sometimes violent transaction around Fuller Park, and wealthy tourists stop at a boutique artisan's studio in the Victoria Yards development.

In January 2018 when I moved to Makers Valley, I wanted to settle in an area where I thought I could be accepted quickly as an insider, to integrate with and contribute to a diversity of people exploring alternatives. I hoped to work with people interested in living and working alongside others from different socioeconomic groups and cultures. Vanderhoven (2009: 128), who studied informal political representation in Troyeville a decade earlier, documents that desires to create a heterogeneous yet inclusive and supportive community predated the MVP initiatives in the neighbourhood. There was no formal organisational form that arose from these desires, though, and many of the residents have since moved elsewhere. MVP neighbourhood workshops and consultations revealed that various informal initiatives had arisen in the following years in what is now the broader Makers Valley area, though none lasting more than a few months in any specific form (I5, 15/04/2020).[2]

I first visited what became the Makers Valley area in late 2017 with the idea that it may be the fieldwork site for my action research. The Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), a state-owned entity of the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality had asked me to join a review panel[3] for a proposal (The Coloured Cube, 2017) submitted by what looked to be a burgeoning neighbourhood partnership. It was this proposal that further attracted me to the potential of undertaking action research in the area. I was interested in the way the chair of the initiative, Mariapaola McGurk (one of the changemakers I came to work with and further introduce in Chapter Three), had argued in the

[2] I5 refers to Interviewee 5. See Appendix B for a list of interviewees.
[3] Between 2014 and 2016 I worked for the City of Johannesburg's Housing Department and the Office of the City Manager. In this capacity I worked with the JDA in developing and managing implementation of inner city policy, including for the eastern neighbourhoods.

proposal using tenets of what I would come to see as 'enablement'. I was also drawn to the Victoria Yards vision after reviewing its website (Victoria Yards, 2018), and met with the managing partner a few days later.

Given its potential for change according to wellbeing economy principles, and my existing social capital, knowledge and resources, I chose the research location and scale based on where I gauged that I could be most effective as a changemaker. However, I set out, through the action research approach, to be non-prescriptive about the specifics of the interventions, being responsive to the existing context, and enabling existing changemakers where I could see their aims aligning with the fundamentals of a wellbeing economy. The shift in vision beyond profit was directed primarily at individuals and organisations on the upper end of the income and wealth inequality spectrums. These facets reflected in the main research question and sub-questions, to which I turn next.

## 1.4 Key Research Questions

My action research was motivated by formal research questions, as well as more personal ones. My main research question was:

> How can a wellbeing economy be enabled at neighbourhood level (in 'Makers Valley', Johannesburg inner city) as an approach to inform other contexts?

Sub-questions were:

> 1) What currently constitutes a 'good life' (wellbeing) according to local residents and stakeholders,
> 2) How can people be enabled as changemakers, and how do these processes work?
> 3) How does this process speak to broader discourses regarding transformation and alternative economies?

My key 'personal' research question aligned within sub-question 2, and formed the personal driver in my aspirations as an enabler:

> How can I maximise my changemaker potential, while maintaining my own wellbeing?

And lastly, I used a 'layperson's' research question to guide informal discussions, presentations and tours, as well as formal interviews:

> What is a good life really (to you), and how do we get there (as collectives)?

In answering the second part of the layperson's research question, I was interested in what transformative social innovation would be effective, and in enabling the action that would result in this, through projects. It is this systemic approach that leant itself to transforming the economy as per the understanding expressed above. I deployed an action research approach, which I aimed to be responsive to the constraints and opportunities of the context and partners. The next section briefly presents how the action research approach manifested, and the projects involved.

## 1.5 Initial Notes on the Action Research Method and Projects

Action research cycles, as set out by Reason and Bradbury (2008) involve the stages of planning, acting, observing, reflecting (including analysis of findings using literature), and repeating. I found myself intuitively following these stages, though not in a linear fashion. The action research naturally split into larger cycles, each made up of smaller cycles. I found that periods physically away from the action (the fieldwork site of Makers Valley), periods in which reading and reflection were easier, defined the breaks between the larger cycles. In action research, one is 'designing the plane while flying it' (Herr & Anderson, 2005: 69), learning by doing in relationship with the context and partners. Furthermore, action research's iterative, cyclical format fits well with changemaking (TRANSIT, 2017) or 'social entrepreneurship' (Drayton, 2019), as well as with

the joint emphasis of these two approaches on the dynamics of 'ebb and flow' (Tasker et al., 2010), which I discuss in Chapter Seven.

To extend the enabler role various changemakers were playing and which I too adopted, and to seek a collaborative vision that was responsive to both wellbeing economy principles and the local context, including the aims of individual changemakers, I set out to enable MVP as an intermediary organisation. MVP became both an informal set of partners, and an organisation capable of operations itself – the MVP Team. I represent this graphically in Figure 1.3, below. As part of the partnership and identity-building processes between 2018 and 2020, MVP played an enabler role in six workshop processes, and four door-to-door and street interview processes carried out by different MVP Team members. However, it is the tangible action in the form of enabling separate but interconnected initiatives that gives me some confidence in my claim that there was some transformation toward a wellbeing economy. Put differently, there are more elements of a wellbeing economy within Makers Valley now than if the action research project had not been undertaken, and these projects are the reason for this. Most projects required me to be relatively hands on in the beginning, but, exploring an enabler role, I was able to step back as soon as others in the MVP Team or other changemakers were able to lead operations. In line with my conceptualisation of agency, MVP enabled changemakers and the projects they led primarily through the transfer of knowledge and resources. The largest proportion of resources came from two formal donor-funded projects, with the US Consulate and the British Council.

Figure 1.3 shows the development of the Makers Valley 'community' through the different initiatives, linked but separate. Social relations existed between changemakers across the different initiatives and to other Makers Valley participants (see Chapter Five).

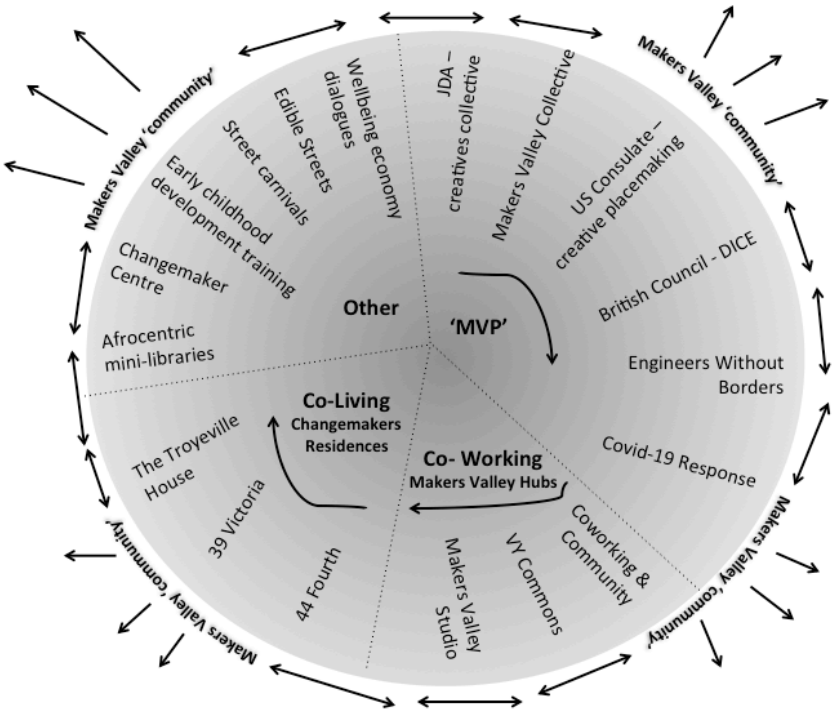



**Figure 1.3:** Makers Valley 'community', showing initiatives included in this thesis. Arrows in the centre indicate direction of iterations through action research cycles. (Source: author).

## 1.6 Chapter Outline

Following this introductory chapter, Chapters Two to Four expand on the above, with Chapter Two exploring the three cornerstones of the conceptual framework. These are 'wellbeing economy', with reference to the diverse conceptualisations of wellbeing and other 'beyond GDP' alternative economy paradigms, 'changemakers' and social entrepreneurs, and transformative social innovation, including social capital and trust, the multi-level perspective, and 'urban living labs'. I review precedent studies within this chapter, focusing on their theoretical contributions.

Chapter Three describes my research methods, including the action research cycles the initiatives formed, the key Makers Valley changemakers that led or co-led them, and how I worked with the data. I complemented the data generated by MVP with semi-structured interviews with the changemakers and participant observation. Finally, I reflect on aspects of ethics and my positionality specific to

this study, where I took on both 'insider' and 'outsider' roles, living and working in the action research site.

In Chapter Four I present the context, starting with a brief overview of Johannesburg, the history of Makers Valley area, and the physical characteristics, with relevance to enabling a wellbeing economy. I then identify the socioeconomic characteristics, focusing on the different stakeholder groups in turn: property developers, residents, non-profit organisations and municipal governance. Finally, I identify the potential of neighbourhood partnerships, as a background to the formation of MVP.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present my findings and analysis, with more in-depth analysis as the narrative progresses. In Chapter Five I cover the impact of neighbourhood factors on research participants' wellbeing, and link a 'beyond GDP' approach to a local level by exploring the relationship between material affluence and wellbeing. I then turn to the link between wellbeing and changemaking, including how affirmation motivated Makers Valley changemakers and how MVP worked with this.

In Chapter Six I present factors I found important in enabling changemakers. MVP as an intermediary organisation navigated building a collaborative vision and community, including around the physical co-living and co-working spaces we set up using Victoria Yards as a neighbourhood asset. Social capital, underpinned by trust, supported sharing and enhanced changemaking potential.

Chapter Seven provides further findings on the enablement of changemakers, with a focus on the role of enablers. Learning by doing, supported by flexibility and low risk possibilities was important. An enabling approach was enhanced by responsiveness at different levels – to changing needs of changemakers, the ebb and flow that arose due to collective dynamics, and to broader systems. This led to other enablers and I following a politics of hybridity in setting up the hybrid infrastructures that facilitated changemaking. I provide the cases of The

Troyeville House and 39 Victoria Changemakers Residences as empirical illustrations.

In Chapter Eight I conclude by summarising the action research towards enabling a wellbeing economy, and the contrasts between my original vision, the collaborative vision, and the changemaking achieved. The concept of hybrid infrastructures assists me in framing this discussion. I present possible ways forward, including potentials of achieving greater impact, partnerships with universities through 'urban living labs', and the South African social economy policy process.

# 2. LITERATURE: WELLBEING ECONOMIES AND CHANGEMAKING

## 2.1 Introduction

The concepts of 'changemaking' and 'wellbeing economies' suffer theoretical ambiguity, for different reasons. While changemaking and the related concept of 'changemakers' have become common in popular media and intersectoral practice over the last thirty years (Bandinelli & Arvidsson, 2013), there is comparatively little academic literature that uses it. The concept of a wellbeing economy is much newer (Fioramonti, 2017), and though there is already a diversity of academic literature on the topic it is yet to achieve conceptual clarity (Coscieme et al., 2019). Given that these concepts form cornerstones of my conceptual framework (see Section 2.8), Chapter Two attempts to provide greater clarity.

First, I discuss the 'beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP)' lens, within which the wellbeing economies literature is located. Underpinning this is theory contributing towards an understanding of wellbeing and a 'good life'. I rely on community economy theory, which forms part of diverse economies literature, to provide more depth to my understanding of economies. In line with the wellbeing economies movement and therefore keeping the understanding purposefully broad, in this thesis I do not aim to construct a defined framework for a wellbeing economy. I return to defining a wellbeing economy regarding my findings within the specific context of Makers Valley in Chapter Five.

The second key concept is 'changemakers', with 'changemaking' taking the form of transformative social innovation, in the case of this action research, towards a wellbeing economy. The concept of transformative social innovation is supported by a systems approach, and often borrows from concepts related to the multi-level perspective. Succeeding in transformative social innovation relies on strategy and compromise, to achieve tangible change in social relations and

practices: I explore this in the section on 'hybrid infrastructures'. Other contributors to transformative social innovation include social entrepreneurship (itself a form of hybrid infrastructure), social capital, intermediary organisations and urban living labs.

## 2.2 The Foundation of Wellbeing Economies: Understanding Wellbeing

The pursuit of happiness and what makes a good life has fascinated humankind for millennia, with Aristotle's work being one of the earliest recorded Western discussions on the topic, focussing on the concept of 'eudemonia' (Kraut, 2018), which I discuss below. In contemporary research and practice, there are several ways of understanding and thus measuring wellbeing.

### 2.2.1 Three ways of making sense of wellbeing

White (2017), a British academic writing from an international development perspective, identifies three main approaches to individual wellbeing in policy. Firstly, as White (2017) points out, comprehensive wellbeing indicators have come about as part of the 'beyond GDP' literature (see below) and comprise of three key elements: breadth in indicators measuring societal 'progress'; relevance – measuring what matters to the people being measured; and subjectivity – alongside the 'objective' measures like life expectancy and years in a western-style school. The report by Stiglitz et al. (2009) provides one of the most prominent examples of a set of comprehensive wellbeing indicators in the global North, and has been implemented by the OECD, as discussed below. Sen's Capability Approach (1993) was a significant conceptual contribution influencing development policy. According to Sen (1996: 59, as cited in Brayford, 2015: 8), "the 'good life' is regarded as one that is partly a life of genuine choice, and not one in which the person is forced into a particular life – however rich it might be in other respects". Therefore 'development' is not about achieving universal standards in relation to components of wellbeing, but rather expanding people's' freedoms to live the life they value (Brayford, 2015).

Secondly, subjective wellbeing is generally measured as life satisfaction and/ or affect (emotional experience)(White, 2017). Surveys often consist of a single question or scale, such as the UN's annual World Happiness Reports (see, for example, SSDS, 2020) where respondents evaluate their lives from 1 to 10, where 1 is 'worst possible' and 10 is 'best possible'. More comprehensive measures also exist, such as the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993). While there are various indices available, some authors (Cloninger, 2008; Pavot & Diener, 1993; Sandvik et al., 2009) argue there is convergence in subjective wellbeing measures: that no matter the approach or associated measure used, the same individuals are identified as enjoying a high sense of wellbeing.

Thirdly, personal wellbeing expands on the life satisfaction measure of subjective wellbeing to an understanding of psychological wellbeing that includes 'doing well', which I explain in more detail below. The New Economics Foundation in partnership with the United Kingdom government released 'five ways to wellbeing', for example: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give (NEF, 2011). However, Quick (2019) problematises the framework for leaving the onus on individuals to change their behaviour, rather than interrogating systemic issues behind low wellbeing. A key contributor to the field of positive psychology, Seligman (2011) writes of 'flourishing', where personal wellbeing includes positive emotion, engagement and meaning, as well as relationships and accomplishment.

### 2.2.2 Flourishing: eudemonia or 'well-doing'

Psychologists increasingly define wellbeing as comprising more than the passive, momentary experiences of pleasure associated with hedonic wellbeing (Ryan et al., 2008). The Aristotelian concept of eudemonia or 'a life well-lived' is rising in prominence (ibid). Eudemonia involves a more active process of 'well-doing', where one has a sense of engagement, resilience and functioning effectively in everyday life (Anderson & Baldwin, 2017: 316). Thus Cloninger (2008: 3) argues

that “a person cannot feel good (as measured by positive emotions and life satisfaction) without doing good (as measured by maturity of character and virtuous conduct)”. A sense of purpose or meaning in life often features as a key attribute of feeling good (Stiglitz et al., 2009).

This combination of feeling good (hedonic wellbeing) and ‘well-doing’ (eudemonia) is becoming more commonly known as ‘flourishing’ (Seligman, 2011). Authors such as Huppert and So (2013) have provided a summary measure of flourishing, aiming for objectivity through their statistics-based technique where they have identified ten features of flourishing. Features include ‘competence’ (with an example statement being, “Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do”), and ‘meaning’ (“I generally feel that what I do in my life is valuable and worthwhile”) (Huppert & So, 2013: 843). However, only one feature relates to flourishing beyond the individual: ‘positive relationships’ (“There are people in my life who really care about me”)(ibid).

A key criticism of these understandings of wellbeing is this focus on the individual, without consideration of the relational component of wellbeing (see, for example, White, 2017). Moreover, as I will show below, in some of these conceptualisations of wellbeing the agency and thus responsibility of living a good life is assumed to fall entirely on the individual, without the recognition of the role of structure. Community wellbeing can provide a more nuanced understanding of wellbeing that takes into account the significance of interpersonal relationships.

### 2.2.3 Relational and community wellbeing

The current research explored wellbeing at a neighbourhood scale. This section discusses a social or relational perspective to wellbeing, before arguing for building understandings of wellbeing that are specific to context. Keyes et al. (2007) highlight that social wellbeing is an independent concept to individual wellbeing. Anderson and Baldwin (2017) build on this argument and advocate that a life well lived includes meaningful interactions with family, community

and wider society, including subjective comparisons individuals make of their own lot in life with their perceptions of another's (see Section 2.3.3 on 'inequality and wellbeing'). With relevance to the 'flourishing' perspective discussed above, wellbeing involves the presence of both social feelings, such as a sense of being close to one's community and social ways of living, like being supported by one's community in challenging times (Anderson & Baldwin 2017). These aspects reach beyond perceptions of one's self. Thus, a neighbourhood that may have high levels of individual flourishing may not enjoy the same levels of social flourishing (ibid). Similarly, Thin (2012) explores 'social happiness', identifying how wellbeing is culturally and socially produced through everyday interactions in families, schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces. He highlights that the built environment also plays a role in the facilitation or inhibition of wellbeing, in part through the facilitation of these interactions. Neighbourhood amenities, including parks, public transport, community gardens, affordable housing and cultural sites support wellbeing (ibid). In addition, people who live where there are more local volunteer opportunities and join local organisations tend to be happier (Cloutier & Pfeiffer, 2017). In this way, individual and community wellbeing are mutually reinforcing, and community wellbeing can be a useful paradigm for community development interventions. Nevertheless, interventions such as simply building neighbourhood amenities generally accepted to be part of 'good planning' do not automatically lead to increases in community wellbeing (Thin, 2012).

White (2017: 121) takes a more radical approach and argues that the individualistic notions of wellbeing commonly found in burgeoning wellbeing policy reflect the "erosion of the social in late capitalist modernity". These understandings of wellbeing can serve to worsen the underlying issue of individualism. She advocates for 'relational wellbeing' as an alternative approach, which "places central the generative quality of relationality which is critical to societal change" (ibid). This links to the core structure/ agency debates identified below.

### 2.2.4 Wellbeing and place

In addition to wellbeing being defined according to the relations between humans, within human geography there has been a push to define wellbeing in relation to place. Bambra (2012: vi) highlights that

> Wellbeing and place are inextricably interconnected. Our economic and educational opportunities, our social and political relationships, our environment, and our imaginative, cognitive and creative worlds are all profoundly impacted by where we live and who we live alongside.

In the last two decades, more qualitative geographical studies have arisen that focus on how local communities understand wellbeing on their own terms. An example is Panellie and Tipa's (2007) report on understandings of wellbeing held by Maori people in Aotearoa New Zealand. They argue for a culturally appropriate approach to wellbeing, which integrates key sociocultural and environmental dimensions specific to the context. Scott's (2012) study of Blyth Valley, a low-income area in the northeast of England, identifies how the framings of wellbeing mobilised by policymakers are conflicted with local residents' perceptions of their own wellbeing.

Lastly, Camfield, Crivello and Woodhead (2009) use participatory approaches to study understandings of wellbeing in different developing countries. They highlight that understandings of wellbeing differ according to life phase, gender and socio-economic status among individuals within a single community. Instead of development policies prescribing universal standards assumed to promote wellbeing, qualitative methods can help ascertain local solutions using existing assets and appropriate technology. They can assist in ascertaining whether an intervention is needed at all. The authors ask

> How do people pursue what they see as wellbeing or a good life and what trade-offs are they required to make to attain or preserve it? What resources can people draw on in their pursuit of a good life for themselves, their families, and communities, and what are the political and social barriers? (ibid: 6).

Studies like these show that psychological models developed in certain cultural settings are not universally applicable: wellbeing is always experienced in relation to particular places and environments (Atkinson, Fuller & Painter 2012). It is for this reason my first sub-question sought to understand what 'a good life' was to residents and stakeholders in Makers Valley.

Localised studies on wellbeing can also highlight the spatial inequalities in people's access to resources that can enable wellbeing: inequalities that are prevalent from a local to a global level (Therborn 2013; Wilkinson & Pickett 2010), as I discuss in Section 2.3.3. Moreover, 'modern culture' and the market economy affect people in the same space differently. For example, Carlisle et al. (2012) show in a local case study in Scotland that despite a shared acknowledgement of the forces of individualism and materialism and the driving force of the market economy, the elites of the area engaged with the challenges at a more abstract and impersonal way compared to more marginalised groups. Though the latter group did not express the hardships experienced using the same conceptual terms, people were more personally affected (ibid). The elites appeared to be more resilient to these hardships by virtue of their more advantaged socioeconomic position. Section 2.3 explores the relationship between community resilience and community wellbeing.

In conclusion, there are different conceptions of wellbeing that are key to wellbeing economies. I identify three main approaches, namely comprehensive wellbeing, subjective wellbeing and personal wellbeing. The concept of flourishing has resurfaced in recent decades within the sphere of personal wellbeing. The more active process of 'well-doing' is a key part of flourishing, and is a significant theme in the literature supporting my current research. Moreover, much of the wellbeing literature measures and conceives of wellbeing with the individual as the ultimate unit, without full recognition of the role of the complex array of interpersonal relationships that impact on this. In fact, White (2017) argues that relational wellbeing should come first in an understanding of wellbeing. The concept of community wellbeing is key to this study in that it links to this relational understanding of wellbeing, as well as looking at

wellbeing at a neighbourhood scale, in line with my research question. Place is also central to the locally specific understanding that can be found in some more recent studies of community wellbeing.

## 2.3 Beyond GDP

Having provided an overview of wellbeing literature of relevance to my research, I now review the critiques of GDP as the overriding government policy that much of the wellbeing literature is in response to. By means of explanation, the concept of wellbeing has been built upon in recent decades mainly as presentations of alternative ways of understanding and measuring human existence, success and progress at different scales, from the individual to the nation-state (Coscieme et al., 2019; Fioramonti, 2017). It is for this reason that much of the wellbeing literature exists within the field of literature known as 'beyond GDP'. Before exploring the facets of the 'beyond GDP' discourse, I briefly unpack my understanding of economy mentioned in Chapter One.

### 2.3.1 Understanding 'economy'

Building on a 'diverse economies' conceptualisation (see Section 2.4), economies are "not only something 'out there' subsumed under the dictate of neoliberal markets, but … socio-political constructions which are both constituting and constituted of a complex range of social relations at various scales" (Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013: 13). The Community Economies Collective (CEC) is grounded in an economic geography approach and promotes diverse economies at local scales, interlinked globally, for example in Australia (Cameron & Gibson, 2005), the Philippines (CEC, n.d.) and Germany (Schmid, 2020). They define 'economy' as all the practices that "allow us to survive and care for each other and the earth", and thus prefers to talk of 'economies' rather than 'the economy' or "the economic system" (CEC, n.d., n.p.n.; also see Gibson-Graham (2016)). Gibson-Graham and Dombroski (2020) propose the Diverse Economies Framework, categorising the activities and modes of coordination that make up these

economies, as summarised in Table 2.1, below. However, they consider the boundaries to be fluid and dynamic. In other iterations (CEC, n.d.) these activities are depicted less rigidly as an iceberg, with only the second row of Table 2.1 being visible as the tip. These are the categories many people understand to make up 'the economy', and indeed GDP: the mainstream market, wage labour, and capitalist enterprise and finance (Gibson-Graham & Dombroski, 2020).

**Table 2.1: A diverse economies framework**

| LABOUR | TRANSACTIONS | PROPERTY | ENTERPRISE | FINANCE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wage | Market | Private | Capitalist | Mainstream markets |
| ALTERNATIVE PAID<br>Self-employed<br>Reciprocal labour<br>In-kind<br>Work for welfare | ALTERNATIVE MARKET<br>Fair trade<br>Alternative currencies<br>Underground market<br>Barter | ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE | ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST | ALTERNARIVE MARKET |
| UNPAID<br>Housework<br>Volunteer<br>Self-provisioning<br>Slave labour | NON-MARKET<br>Household sharing<br>Gift giving<br>Hunting, fishing, gathering<br>Theft, piracy, poaching | OPEN ACCESS<br>Atmosphere<br>International waters<br>Open-source intellectual property<br>Outer space | NON-CAPITALIST<br>Worker cooperatives<br>Sole proprietorships<br>Community enterprise<br>Feudal<br>Slave | NON-MARKET<br>Sweat equity<br>Family lending<br>Donations<br>Interest-free loans |

Source: reproduced by author from Gibson-Graham (2006).

From a governance perspective, the economy is a decision-making system, and the rules of the system define incentives, shape behaviours, and define collective action (Fioramonti, 2020). I provide more depth to the systems approach in Section 2.7.

### 2.3.2 Criticisms of GDP growth as overriding government policy

The contemporary concept of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was developed by Simon Kuznets for a US Congress report in 1934 and started gaining prominence in national policy following the 1944 Bretton Woods conference (Schmelzer, 2015). It has since spread globally, and particularly since the rise of neoliberalism in the last two decades, the promotion of GDP growth generally overrides other policy objectives, such as environmental sustainability and equality (D'Alisa et al., 2014). With relevance to my study, the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality highlights economic growth as being essential to an increase in the standard of living, though more recent plans do also highlight the need for ecological sustainability (CoJ, 2011). A growing body of literature blames the focus on GDP for the deterioration of the natural environment at a global level, and rife intra- and international inequality (Escobar, 2015; Fioramonti, 2020; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

Some argue that economic growth can be 'decoupled' from environmental degradation through, for example, technological advancement. However, historically this has not proven possible (Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017; Jackson, 2016; Pillay, 2019b). Claims of successful decoupling usually exclude the emissions and resource exploitation 'embedded' in imports: there has been a significant shift of the global North's negative ecological impact to the global South in the last decades (D'Alisa, Demaria & Kallis, 2015; Jackson, 2016;). Even initiatives packaged as 'green growth' have not been successful at decoupling. This is due in part to the 'Jevons paradox' phenomenon, where increased efficiency as a result of technological change does not result in a reduced rate of consumption (D'Alisa, Demaria & Kallis, 2015).

Though Kuznets warned against GDP ever being used as a measure of social welfare, it is this assumed correlation between income and 'progress' or wellbeing that continues to inform government policy internationally (Kuznets, 1934, as cited in Fioramonti, 2013). However, Jackson (2016) argues that decades of research exists pointing to this being a fallacy. Top economists

including Nobel laureates Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz highlight that GDP growth often does not lead to broader improvements in average quality of life (Stiglitz et al., 2009). The failure of South Africa's 'trickle down' policy, advocated by ex-President Thabo Mbeki, is one example of this (Smith, 2017).

At an international level, many 'poorer' countries rank higher even in 'objective' measures of quality of life such as life expectancy, where Costa Rica and Cuba fare better than the much wealthier United States. Regarding infant mortality, Armenia's under-5 mortality rate is lower than that in the United States, despite an average income in Armenia of only about 3 200 USD as compared to 57 500 USD in the United States (Jackson 2016). Much research around what is known as the Easterlin Paradox shows that subjective measures such as life satisfaction also correlate badly with economic growth, particularly for wealthier nations (Cummins et al., 2012). For example, despite a tripling in real income per capita in the United States since the 1970s, some indices show a decrease in wellbeing over the same period (Jackson, 2016; Van den Bergh, 2011). Countries of the global South have demonstrated similar paradoxes. For instance, a study featured in the Harvard Business Review of 18 Latin American countries showed a negative correlation between economic growth and subjective wellbeing (Kesebir, 2016).

As even a Bloomberg article (Mosendz, 2017: n.p.n.) highlights, "money doesn't buy happiness". Or, more accurately, and relevant to the argument below regarding a-growth, "money may buy happiness, but often so little that it doesn't matter" (Boyce et al., 2017: 544). Furthermore, at a microeconomic scale, wellbeing research has shown with the concept of adaptation that people's wellbeing increases with greater material resources but only temporarily (Diener et al., 2006). The speed of adaptation to new circumstances differs with the changes and the person (with biological factors and temperament playing a role), but the phenomenon seems relatively universal regarding increasing income. It is what gives rise to terms such as the 'hedonic treadmill' (Barrington-Leigh, 2016), which refers to the observed tendency of humans to return to a

baseline level of happiness despite material gains, incentivising people to pursue greater and greater levels of material affluence.

An unwanted reduction in income or other life events, such as divorce or death of a spouse and unemployment can result in lasting negative changes on wellbeing (Diener et al, 2006; Lucas, 2007). A once-off cash injection of the likes of winning the lottery is generally understood to have a shorter-term increase in wellbeing before a return to their baseline level of happiness, occasionally with a negative impact in the long term (Barrington-Leigh, 2016). These findings correlate with those at national scales from the 2008 economic recessions in countries across the world (Buchs & Koch, 2018). Fanning (2016) examined the relationship between growth and change in life satisfaction scores in 116 countries between 2005 and 2015, and found the theory of hedonic adaptation to increases in income to hold true.

Supporting the wellbeing literature, Jackson (2016: 219) argues

> If we forget momentarily about the relentless pursuit of growth, we can concentrate on defining what an economy should look like. Surprisingly it boils down to a few obvious things. Capabilities for flourishing. The means to a livelihood. Participation in society. A degree of security. A sense of belonging. The ability to share in a common endeavour and yet to pursue our potential as individual human beings.

The elements Jackson (2016) highlights here run throughout various conceptualisations of economies based on wellbeing. However, wellbeing economies are generally non-prescriptive. Further in this chapter and in my findings, I show that at a broad level, reprioritising the economy beyond GDP translates to a focus on social or ecological wellbeing, or both.

Fioramonti (2017, 2020) argues that the beyond GDP literature, while primarily about the experiences of countries in the global North, is informative for the development strategy followed in the global South. Given that the global North development strategy has not improved wellbeing, countries like South Africa may do well to devise their own strategies. Reducing inequalities would need to

be at the forefront of such a strategy if a rise in collective wellbeing is to be achieved.

### 2.3.3 Inequality and wellbeing

There is growing concern even between neoliberal economists about the global rise in inequalities (Avent, 2020). Moreover, it goes relatively unrefuted that inequality has a negative impact on wellbeing in a diversity of contexts (Therborn, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Scandinavian countries such as Norway and Denmark, with relatively low income inequality, consistently rank highest in the World Happiness Report (SDSN, 2020). In contrast, countries with higher inequality like the USA and UK rank significantly lower, with significant variations in wellbeing across their populations (ibid). Life expectancy between two neighbourhoods even within the same city can differ dramatically, such as in the case of Glasgow, Scotland (Therborn, 2012). Here, wealth inequality correlates with inequality in access to decent healthcare, food, and amenities.

Therborn (2012) identifies three types of inequality: vital (health and death), existential (freedom of action) and material (resources). While existential inequalities have been decreasing over the last half-century, vital inequalities remain and in many cases have increased. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) correlate inequality with a multitude of societal ills as diverse as school bullying, anxiety and violent crime, focusing on the world's wealthiest countries.

A key link Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) make between increased inequality and decreased wellbeing is that of social status, which they show to be a key driver of human behaviour. Higher income inequality means higher perceived disparities in status, with aspects like violent crime being driven by need for social status and recognition in society, particularly by younger men denied status through other means. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009; 2018) propose a reduction in economic inequality as the key enabler of increased aggregate wellbeing. Therborn (2012) also looks at the psychosomatic consequences of subtle hierarchies in social status, which he identifies as having a major impact on

existential and thus even vital inequality. Referencing famous studies such as the Whitehall study (Marmot, 2004) he identifies that these social status hierarchies are "literally lethal" (Therborn, 2012: 586). While Therborn (2012) and Wilkinson and Pickett (2009, 2019) write at an international level, they highlight the loss of a sense of community and community cohesion at a local level as being closely linked to inequality.

Sen (1998) argues that the basic material requirements for physiological functioning are similar in all societies, but differ with the relative wealth of other people in the society. Thus to "lead a life without shame" and, for instance, to be able to "visit and entertain one's friends" requires a more expensive bundle of goods where there are richer people, and associated higher incomes (Sen, 1998: 298). A useful metaphor here is the "case of everyone in [a] crowd standing on tiptoe and no-one getting a better view". At the start of the process, though, "some individuals gain a better view by standing on tiptoe, and others are forced to follow if they are to keep their position" (Hirsch, 1977: 49, cited in Jackson et al, 2004: 19).

Regarding redistribution to reduce inequality, and the relationship to wellbeing, I turn to the microeconomic scale. Research on 'prosocial behaviour', that is, people acting for the benefit of other people or society, shows that wellbeing can increase with increased sharing (Bolino & Grant, 2016). It appears that giving away money improves life satisfaction, measured through large-scale correlational quantitative studies (Choi & Kim, 2011) as well as more qualitative studies exploring causation (Surana & Lomas, 2014). Sharing one's time through volunteering also has the potential to improve wellbeing, as acknowledged as far back as Aristotle's writings on eudemonia (Dossey, 2018; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2019).

Nevertheless, it is important for the sharers to set boundaries and not overextend themselves, to reduce the likelihood of burnout or the formation of resentment (Severns-Guntzel & Murphy-Johnson, 2020). With relevance for Section 2.7.4, there appears to be a connection between sharing and social

capital, where greater social capital results in greater prosocial behaviour (Barton et al., 2020), as does trust. Furthermore, prosocial behaviour and social capital seem to be mutually reinforcing (Putnam, 2000). However, there are challenges in deploying systems of sharing or redistribution (to reduce inequality) in societies with high levels of social capital. For instance, McKean (1992) shows in her local-scale study that local elites in networks of social relations captured most of the resources.

While Sen (1998), Stiglitz et al. (2009), and other Beyond GDP authors emphasise the re-prioritisation of wellbeing as the focus of the economy, Jackson et al. (2004) find they offer little insight into how it is to be pursued. They "provide few clues how we might proceed in escaping from hedonic treadmills and creating sustainable societies" (ibid: 28; I discuss the 'hedonic treadmill' concept in Chapter Five). Yet, there have already been significant economic alternatives proposed and in some cases prototyped at different scales in the global North as well as the South. These alternatives promote the 'beyond GDP' approach at macroeconomic scale and 'beyond profit' at microeconomic scale. They instead hold wellbeing at the core: in essence, they all propose 'wellbeing economies', to which I turn next.

## 2.4 Alternative Economic Frameworks Prioritising Wellbeing

In the following section I aim to provide foundations for my research on enabling a wellbeing economy at a neighbourhood scale. A wide array of alternatives promoting social and ecological wellbeing as opposed to GDP-growth or profit have been advocated for in the literature. New indices that measure different aspects of wellbeing rather than average income or consumption have been developed (Fioramonti, 2020; Hoekstra, 2019). High profile government initiatives as well as various scientific agencies are working to standardise these measures and use them to drive new policy, for example the EU and OECD's Better Life Index (Justine Braby et al., 2016). Many of these measurement tools and understandings, such as the Better Life Index, do not distinguish between

different scales and can be applied at an individual level right through to aggregations at a regional level.

Three of the more prominent paradigms as alternative to GDP growth include 'doughnut economics' (Raworth 2017) the 'social solidarity economy' (Miller 2010) and 'degrowth' (Demaria et al., 2013). Raworth's (2017) notion of 'doughnut economics' originates from the recognition of ecological limits or planetary boundaries (and it is this circular visual framework that inspired the name). The 'solidarity economy' (Miller, 2010) originates primarily from social values arising from alliances of cooperatives. It seeks to link existing alternative economic initiatives in mutually supportive ways, working towards an economy that is more just, sustainable and democratic (ibid).

'Degrowth' advocates the need to democratically and redistributively downscale production and consumption to achieve both greater environmental sustainability and human wellbeing (Demaria et al., 2013). Proponents put forward evidence that a decrease in GDP can even lead to an increase in wellbeing in some cases (ibid). I had originally been attracted to degrowth, with its more explicit 'beyond GDP' critique. However, I grew to share the same fear as Van den Bergh (2011: 883), that "employing the term 'degrowth' really comes down to preaching to the choir, rather than enlarging the group of citizens who are genuinely concerned about the environment and critical about pleas for unconditional economic growth". In my initial reading and discussions, it seemed the 'wellbeing economy' framing would be more palatable (Lakoff, 2010). I hoped it would encourage more people to problematise mainstream assumptions that profit should be their or their organisation's core driver, and to voluntarily explore alternatives, as opposed to these alternatives being mandated through government policy and the tax system, for instance. Furthermore, in South Africa where much of the population is not able to service their basic needs, the degrowth messaging could be particularly complex, and I felt more comfortable with an a-growth approach, as advocated for by Van den Bergh (2011). With an a-growth approach, decision-makers are indifferent about

growth, and, for instance, information about GDP is removed from evaluations of economic change and development.

These alternative economic paradigms have been explored at various scales. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Transition Network and Global Ecovillage Network employ a 'glocal' approach, thinking and networking globally, and acting locally (Peck & Theodore, 2007). While the everyday action is carried out by communities on the ground, the transnational networks enable some achievements of scale (ibid). It is this approach taken in much community economies work, which holds "the vision of a place-based yet at the same time global movement" (Gibson-Graham, 2016: 287). System change through scaling across contexts is then produced through the conjoint effects of local actions, though mediated and constrained by macroeconomic practices at the national level (Peck & Theodore, 2007).

Some paradigms have also been put into practice at national scale, for instance *Buen Vivir*, or 'living well together' (White, 2017; Escobar, 2015), particularly in Latin America. *Buen Vivir* has been adopted in Ecuador's constitution and is linked to the indigenous concept of *Sumak Kawsay*. In this paradigm, the concept of a linear process of development, or of wealth and poverty associated with accumulation and lack of material goods, does not exist. However, the Ecuadorian government has been accused of co-option of the term, as it continues to follow extractivist policies (Escobar, 2015).

The 'circular economy' has also been gaining prominence in the literature in recent decades. It is defined as "an economic model wherein planning, resourcing, procurement, production and reprocessing are designed and managed, as both process and output, to maximize ecosystem functioning and human well-being" (Murray et al., 2017: 369). The circular economy promotes 'closed loop' systems through reuse and the extension of service life through repair, remanufacture, upgrades and retrofits; or where old goods are turned into as-new resources by recycling the materials (Stahel, 2016: 435):

> People – of all ages and skills – are central to the model. Ownership gives way to stewardship; consumers become users and creators. The remanufacturing and repair of old goods, buildings and infrastructure creates skilled jobs in local workshops.

The circular economy has been adopted at a national scale by national government in China as one of its core policies in its most recent 5-year plans (Murray et al., 2017). However, there have been criticisms of implementation due to the top-down structure of China's political economy and lack of civil society involvement (ibid). Various local examples provide experiences that are less top down, such as the Transition Towns mentioned previously.

Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) index recognises average wellbeing as multidimensional, with GDP being of less importance than other indicators such as life satisfaction. Moreover, indicators and messaging reflect the concept of 'sufficiency' (Ura et al., 2012). Using this measurement tool, material attainments above a sufficiency cut-off within a specific indicator do not further increase GNH (ibid). This is similar to conceptions of wellbeing found in many of the Buddhist countries of South East Asia, such as the Thai King's promotion of the 'sufficiency economy' (Fioramonti, 2017), which favours 'wellbeing over wealth'. In this programme, government funds are allocated locally and distributed through collectives, including savings groups and cooperative production activities, with the aim to reduce economic vulnerability and strengthen and empower local (poorer) communities. This developmental approach therefore focuses also on improving relational components of wellbeing by supporting certain forms of community development and cohesion. There are similarities here to community economies; an action-based manifestation of diverse economies.

The diverse economies literature reframes the 'alternative' economy conceptualisation, arguing instead for a situation where "images and enactments of economic diversity … might stop circulating around capitalism, stop being evaluated with respect to capitalism, and stop being seen as deviant or exotic or eccentric departures from the norm" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 56). Through diverse methods with a focus on action research, key authors such as Gibson-

Graham aim to foster heterogeneous everyday practices and local experimentation towards increased wellbeing and a 'postcapitalist politics' (Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013: 17). Diverse economies researchers build on feminist understandings, arguing that it is not necessary to form global institutions to challenge dominant institutions, but rather work with common ground: what we say, act and see may be able to constitute new realities (Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013).

Diverse economies researchers use the term 'community economy' not to refer to localised business activity, but to challenge the conventional definitions of both 'community' and 'economy' (Schmid, 2020). Community economy refers to the "explicit, democratic co-creation of the diverse ways in which we collectively make our livings, receive our livings from others, and provide for others" (CEC, n.d.: n.p.n.). Community economies researchers argue that

> The challenge is to initiate processes by which subjects are released from their allegiance to capitalist identities as individuated entrepreneurs/ workers, property owners/ renters … and encourage … a wider range of identities within community economies focused on the well-being of people and the planet (Roelvink et al., 2015: 58).

Some key ethical concerns in building community economies are around "what do we really need to survive well? How do we balance our own survival needs and well-being with the well-being of others and the planet?" and how surplus is redistributed to "enrich social and environmental health" (CEC, n.d.: n.p.n.). It is these "coordinates" around which community economies may be built (ibid).

In the *Handbook of Diverse Economies*, Gibson-Graham & Dombroski (2020: 5) highlight many "examples of action to build community economies" across various geographic scales. The handbook features activities that "seek well-being over profit", which will be "of use to millennials who are fed up with the TINA [there is no alternative] stance". Gibson-Graham et al. (2013: xxiii) write, "starting where we are, we are in a good position to begin taking back the economy. Are you ready?" This is similar to the 'everyone a changemaker' messaging of Ashoka and others, which I discuss in Section 2.6.1. Thus, the

diverse economies and associated community economies literature supports my action research on the role of changemakers in achieving wellbeing economies. The orientation of the literatures to wellbeing also provides a useful starting point conceptually for building a wellbeing economies movement, which I cover in the next section.

## 2.5 The Wellbeing Economy

Lorenzo Fioramonti's book *The Wellbeing Economy* was published in 2017, and comprises primarily of a set of principles and examples, arising out of Fioramonti's previous work that was written as a critique of the focus on GDP (Fioramonti, 2013). A wellbeing economy offers a "practical alternative" to an economy "dominated by force and competition rather than solidarity and collaboration" (Fioramonti 2017: 190). Fioramonti (2017: 193) advocates a "caring relationship with our natural wealth" and "human-to-human interaction" in order to achieve the "ultimate objective of development, that is, wellbeing": an economy that gives people a sense of purpose. Fioramonti (2017) does not put down the specifics of a wellbeing economy, but rather documents various initiatives and innovations from national to local project scale that are seen to be assisting with the enhancement of holistic wellbeing, such as those mentioned above, as well as South African paradigms such as *ubuntu*. Promoting human solidarity, *ubuntu* is usually translated to 'I am because you are' (Zondi, 2016). Since 2017, several papers and publications have been released referring to 'the wellbeing economy' (Anand, 2020; Coscieme et al., 2019; Costanza et al., 2020; Mebratu & Swilling, 2019). Moreover, the 'beyond GDP' and community economy alternatives described above share the characteristic of reprioritising social and ecological wellbeing as the primary goal as opposed to GDP growth, and thus could be seen as 'wellbeing economies'. As I discussed in Chapter One, many organisations and academics advocating for these beyond GDP paradigms have since joined the new Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll).

Some authors associated with WEAll provide conceptual detail to a wellbeing economy paradigm. For instance, Hoekstra (2019) argues for the need for a 'system of global and national accounts' towards a common language for the wellbeing and sustainability community. However, in general WEAll generally advocates not a rigid framework but rather contextual appropriateness, based on a core set of principles structured around the prioritisation of social and environmental above GDP or profit. One of the most recent iterations of a set of principles that a wellbeing economy needs to address comes from WEAll (2020: 12):

1) Dignity: Everyone has enough to live in comfort, safety and happiness
2) Nature: A restored and safe natural world for all life
3) Connection: A sense of belonging and institutions that serve the common good
4) Fairness: Justice in all its dimensions at the heart of economic systems, and the gap between the richest and poorest greatly reduced
5) Participation: Citizens are actively engaged in their communities and locally rooted economies.

This broad approach allows room for inclusive alliances to form around the idea, and it is here that intermediary organisations (like Makers Valley Partnership) find their place in facilitating system transformation, as explored in Section 2.7.4 on transformative social innovation. Some of my key findings related to this tension of applying a purposefully broad wellbeing economies framework to a local context, working with compromise and hybridity, and the risks involved. I explore this further in Chapter Seven.

A criticism of wellbeing economies relates to the localisation and small state models proposed in many alternative economy frameworks. For example, Fioramonti (2017) argues a smaller state and lower taxes will be possible in an economy focused on wellbeing. Two factors he touches on are lower resources needed for fixing the externalities of the current economy, and lower profits from wellbeing-focused as opposed to profit-chasing companies resulting in lower taxes. Critics of this approach (found in degrowth literature) argue this would in fact result in increased spatial inequalities, with wealthy areas having

greater resources at their disposal to even further enhance wellbeing (Schwartzman, 2012). A final critique is of Fioramonti's (2017) premise of GDP growth being a thing of the past. A vocal critic of environmentalism, Vegter (2017: n.p.n.) says, "from the outset, Professor Fioramonti is just plain wrong". Vegter (2017) highlights that at the time of writing the world's GDP was continuing to grow, relatively unabated. Though this holds true at a global scale, I maintain that Vegter (2017), ignores the South African context. As discussed in Chapter One, real GDP per capita in South Africa has seen an overall decline in the last decade (World Bank, 2020).

Fioramonti seemed to take his own advice to try out wellbeing economies in practice, but also faced challenges of compromise (as I present, regarding the Makers Valley research, in Chapter Eight). In March 2018 he was voted into the Italian Parliament as part of the Five Star Movement. The political alliance rapidly gained popularity since 2010 and held degrowth as a core economic policy, but also promoted sometimes violent right-wing political views (Mosca & Tronconi, 2019). Fioramonti, an Italian citizen, took unpaid leave from his professorship at the University of Pretoria, and aimed to use the platform to promote a wellbeing economy in practice at a national scale (Odendaal, 2018). While he introduced some reforms in line with a wellbeing economy, he stepped down from his position as National Minister of Higher Education in December 2019, citing debilitating budget constraints (Jones, 2019). In this PhD project, I also focused on the pragmatic application of the core wellbeing economies principles to a much more local context. I hoped that this would support transitions to a wellbeing economy and was also interested in the sense of purpose and associated links to wellbeing that the changemaker work may facilitate. I, too, faced challenging compromises as an aspiring changemaker at this smaller scale, which I discuss in Chapter Eight. In the following section, I turn in more detail to the concepts of 'changemakers' and 'changemaking'.

## 2.6 Changemakers and Changemaking

I was interested in the possibility of transformation toward a wellbeing economy through collaborating with aligned changemakers. The terms 'change agent', 'agent of change' (Wiggins et al., 2013), 'changemaker', 'social entrepreneur' (Drayton, 2006), 'active citizen' (Buijs et al., 2016), 'social activist' (Gorski & Chen, 2015), or even 'solutionary' (Weil, 2012) or 'revolutionist' (Boggs & Boggs, 2011: 1) are used by different authors and movements holding varied and overlapping meanings, and have a relatively short and ambiguous history in their current usage. For each term, there are a multitude of definitions, and many use the terms without defining them. In the following sub-section I trace some of these understandings, to arrive at a working definition for this thesis. The concept of 'changemaking' has remained largely outside of academic discourse. It generally appears in the popular press and strategy documents, and there does not appear to be a published critique. Thus, Section 2.6.1 provides a conceptual understanding of 'changemaking', that is, transformation, based on sociological understandings of structure and agency. The last sub-section discusses the field of social entrepreneurship, about which there is more academic discourse than 'changemaking'.

### 2.6.1 Defining a 'changemaker'

The organisation Ashoka was founded in 1980 and supports social entrepreneurship globally (Sen, 2007). Ashoka often uses the term 'changemaker' interchangeably with 'social entrepreneur', although even within the organisation, different authors use the terms differently. Ashoka founder Drayton distinguishes between social entrepreneurs and changemakers, with the latter working with multiple changemakers to enable systemic change (Drayton, 2019). The organisation says, "rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to move in different directions" (Sivathanu & Bhise, 2013: 3). I return to 'social entrepreneurship' in Section 2.6.3.

Boggs and Boggs' (2011) distinction between a revolutionary and a 'revolutionist' lends a specific lens to how I understand the 'making' and systems change components (which I present in Section 2.7) of the term 'changemakers' to be paramount in its definition.

> A lot of people are revolutionary, that is, they have radical views they think ought to be interjected into society and they believe that society should be motivated by these views. … However, a revolutionist not only is 'revolutionary' but also accepts the responsibility of leadership. This … involves projecting a philosophy of change, developing a method or form of struggle based on a new ideology, and organising to change society along the lines of this new ideology (Boggs & Boggs, 2011: 1).

Thus, a changemaker must work in tangible and likely innovative (or revolutionist) ways to realise their vision for a better system. This description also does not limit changemakers or revolutionists to the specific field of social entrepreneurship for changemaking, as Ashoka conceptualises.

With its 'everyone a changemaker' vision launched in 2005, Ashoka aimed to popularise the concept that anyone can create positive change and one needs to become a changemaker in order to thrive (Drayton, 2006). Ashoka Changemakers (2016: 2) explored how leading social entrepreneurs are driving a 'culture of wellbeing' where "individuals, communities, and institutions in society work together to create an environment where everyone is empowered and equipped to define and fulfil their own needs for wellbeing". This kind of messaging inspired me in my action research, while I learnt to be careful to remain cognisant of the realities of power differentials inherent in the interaction of structure and agency. Nevertheless, while agency is at the core of forming and reforming structures (as I cover next), one has to be realistic about the massive inequalities in agency that counteract a statement such as 'everyone a changemaker'. Moreover, the 'changemaker' rhetoric can be seen as advocating a neoliberal approach that downplays the role of a state in the redistribution of resources and enablement of more equality in agency and wellbeing (Bandinelli, 2017).

Furthermore, while the loose, common definition of a changemaker is someone who pursues positive social change, the analysis of whether this change is 'positive' or not depends on the lens or framing used. For instance, some social entrepreneurs are celebrated for work that incorporates marginalised communities into the mainstream economy and dependence on multinational corporations (Starbird et al., 2021). However, this is the economy that is responsible for increasing inequalities, and loss of cultural traditions (RiseAfricaRise, 2016). The fundamentals of a common vision for the change need to be defined, even on a context- or case-specific basis. Furthermore, the messaging around 'changemakers' does not often include careful consideration of the potential for harm that can arise due to unintended or unconsidered components of the changemaker's activity. "Effective changemaking must strive to do the most good and least harm to people, animals, and the environment" (Institute for Humane Education, 2019: 7). Essentially a cost-benefit analysis must be made of actions.

Taking in these comparative understandings of 'a changemaker' and related terms from popular media and strategy documents, I came to the working definition as identified in Chapter One: an individual who finds life meaning in using their agency (knowledge and resources) in tangible action towards transformative social innovation. I understand 'changemaking' to be shorthand for transformative social innovation. First, I cover the conceptualisation of transformation that arises from the relationship between structure and agency, from the sociology literature.

### 2.6.2 Understanding 'changemaking': structure, agency and enablement

The concepts of structure and agency are core to sociological understandings of the individual and society (Campbell, 2009). I focus here on aspects that allow for a theoretical grounding to 'changemaking'. Sewell (1992: 20) argues that a capacity for agency – "desiring", "forming intentions" and "acting creatively" – is "as much a given for humans as the capacity for respiration". Sen (2002: 10 as cited in Deneulin & McGregor, 2010: 503) identifies agency as "the ability to

pursue goals that one has reason to value: the freedom involved in the process itself". However, the specific forms agency will take vary considerably and are shaped by the schemas and resources that make up the structures a person finds themselves within: structures and the human agencies with which they interact are characterised by differences in power (Sewell, 1992). Moreover, like the conception of wellbeing espoused above, for the purposes of this study I conceive of agency as being collective as well as individual: acts of agency are always in interaction with others (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010; Giddens, 2013). Thus agency involves the ability to form collective projects, to persuade, and to monitor the effects of one's own and others' actions (Sewell, 1992). To be an agent implies a capability of exerting some control over the social relations within which one exists. Regarding structure, Anthony Giddens (2013: 20) writes, "while not made by any single person, society is created and recreated afresh … by the participants in every social encounter. The production of society is a skilled performance, sustained and 'made to happen' by human beings". In this way, agency is recognised by some authors as being core to the forming and reforming of structure, as opposed to structure being a fixed entity with a unidirectional impact on agency (Campbell, 2009; Giddens, 2013; Sewell, 1992).

Furthermore, structures can both constrain and 'enable' agents (Giddens, 2013: 169). Of particular relevance to the findings explored in Chapters Six and Seven, 'enabled' agents are those that are capacitated with the knowledge of the relevant social schemas and sufficient human and non-human resources (Sewell, 1992). Hamdi and Goethert (1997) identify the use of 'enabling' by development practitioners as part of the move away from the ethos of 'providing'. They based this on a new pragmatism in development planning, which accepts mutuality between local demands and city-level strategic needs, while recognising the limitations on both sides. They identify some of the factors of an 'enabling' paradigm (Hamdi & Goethert, 1997: 27) as that which empowers, encourages resourcefulness, and promotes self-sufficiency, where incremental projects and adaptive planning is important.

By enabling changemakers through access to relevant knowledge and resources which enhance their agency, a 'multiplier effect' can be unlocked in which changemakers 'enable' others to become changemakers (Ashoka Changemakers, 2016). Combined actions of enabled agents have the potential to transform the structures that enabled them to act in the first place, what Giddens (2013) calls the 'theory of structuration', where primacy is granted to neither agency nor structure. Furthermore, there can be unintended consequences here, where the combination of multiple structures and other agents mean the collective actions do not have the outcomes planned for by any one agent (Giddens, 2013; Scharmer, 2016). This Sewell (1992: 16) argues is in contrast to Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) "unrealistically unified and totalised concept of habitus, which he conceptualises as a vast series of strictly homologous structures encompassing all of social experience" (Sewell, 1992: 16). Sewell (1992) agrees with Bourdieu that there is a tendency for social relations to be reproduced in the form of repeated patterns resembling a rigid structure. However, he argues that it is these patterns that make it possible to explain the processes followed in periods of particular social change. In order to build a theory of change into a theory of structure (as I undertook through my action research), a far more "multiple, contingent, and fractured conception of society – and of structure" is needed (Sewell 1992: 16). Change arises from a 'multiplicity' of structures, unpredictability of resource-accumulation, and the intersection of structures (Sewell, 1992). This conception of structure and transformation supports the approaches of 'complex systems' and transformative social innovation, discussed below.

### 2.6.3 Social entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurship and social enterprise

As identified in Section 2.6.1, the concept of 'changemaker' is closely associated with that of 'social entrepreneur'. And as with the former, there is widespread recognition that understandings of social entrepreneurship are contextual and contestable (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012). Furthermore, the discourse is defined by the resource-holding actors rather than the reality of the field (ibid). This was true in the case of this action research, where MVP adopted the definition for

social enterprise from a main funder of activities, the British Council. We understood social enterprises to be

> Businesses whose primary purpose is addressing a social or environmental challenge rather than creating profit for owners or shareholders. They bring together the entrepreneurial skills of the private sector and the values of public service. They deliver positive social impact through their means (i.e. how they conduct their work) and ends (i.e. what they achieve)(British Council, 2020: n.p.n.).

The definition was also in alignment with the fundamentals of a wellbeing economy regarding the prioritisation of social and environmental goals before personal profit, and despite the diversity in definitions that abound in literature, this is where agreement across them can be found (Dalziel et al., 2018; Fioramonti, 2017). Furthermore, as Thorp (2020: n.p.n.) argues, "a new generation of social entrepreneurs, rooted in their own local communities, are the ones who can lead us in building the wellbeing economy".

The necessity of hybridity faced by social entrepreneurs and their entities also poses the same challenges as with the wellbeing economies operating within the broader system: social entrepreneurs "are the offspring of neoliberal capitalism, but at the same time they challenge some of its foundational pillars" (Bandinelli, 2017: 13). Hybridity is in fact core to social entrepreneurship, involving trade-offs between resource acquisition and social mission (Schmid, 2021). The tensions are found even in the name, social enterprise (or entrepreneurship): 'enterprise' or 'entrepreneurship' points at taking on financial risks for the maximisation of individual profit, while 'social' indicates responsibility towards the collective (Bandinelli, 2017). Lastly, a key danger of social entrepreneurship and the growth in popularity and support it has enjoyed in the last two decades is when it is presented as a replacement for public services in the context of austerity measures and budget cuts (Avelino et al., 2019). Similarly, turning to social entrepreneurship to solve rising unemployment can obscure the precarious nature of self-employment, and the added pressures and complexities of prioritising social and environmental goals (ibid; Sivathanu & Bhise, 2013).

It is important to acknowledge the unintended consequences social entrepreneurship can hold. Maintaining an authentic 'beyond profit' focus is key to maintaining the integrity of social entrepreneurship as opposed to, for instance, corporate social responsibility (Pillay, 2018). In the latter, profit remains the focus of the entity. Corporate social responsibility has been co-opted in many instances, with activities structured to support companies' marketing departments in boosting profits, rather than systemic change (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012; Schmid, 2020). Nevertheless, social entrepreneurship remains market-oriented in that it operates as a business, even when it relies on hybrid income generation tactics, including grant funding (Bandinelli, 2017).

## 2.7 Complex Systems and Transformative Social Innovation

A complex systems approach arose out of the study of ecological systems, but it has been applied to a variety of social sciences, and is interdisciplinary by nature (Bettencourt, 2014). Systems are seen as interrelated entities, where the relationships between the elements making up the system are often of more significance than the individual parts themselves. Examples of systems include the human brain, a city, or an organisation (Westley et al., 2013). Local systems are nested within systems at wider scales, in interaction with their environment, and are thus generally open and interdependent (Macy, 1991). Complex characteristics tend to be 'scale-invariant': they can apply at all scales from an individual to systems at different scales, from transactions between a few individuals to a national economy (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003).

A complexity approach frames phenomena based on a fundamental understanding of the universe that it is constantly becoming, characterised by flow and change (Boulton et al., 2015). 'Emergence' appears where a number of agents or single entities operate in an environment and form more complex behaviours as a collective, greater than, or different from the sum of their parts, due to the development of intricate relations between the entities (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). Goals can be reached in a variety of ways, and actions will

inevitably have unintended consequences (Boulton et al., 2015). Interdependence can lead to improvements in one entity or system unintentionally worsening conditions in others (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003)

Systemic change refers to change that is fundamental and affects how the whole system functions. While the amelioration of some effects of a system may be able to happen without systemic change, the path-dependent characteristics of the system will result in a return to its 'locked in' state if the external input is discontinued (Westley et al., 2011). Change cannot be planned in detail in complex systems, which most social systems are. Change requires innovation, experimentation and constant learning and adaptation (Bettencourt, 2014). The Great Transition, another movement effectively promoting wellbeing economies, argues for more 'systemic' activism, or changemaking (Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015). The movement questions activist approaches where energy is directed to treating symptoms of the existing global economic system, for instance campaigning for more fuel-efficient cars. Instead, the Great Transition argues for systemic activism promoting a significant shift in culture, in which wellbeing is the ultimate goal rather than GDP growth, and sufficiency rather than consumerism (ibid).

Transformative social innovation, like other 'transitions' perspectives, is grounded in systems theory. The understanding of social innovation differs across disciplines as well as geographic regions (Hamann et al., 2020; Pel et al., 2020). I build on Avelino et al. (2019) and Longhurst et al.'s (2016) understanding of transformative social innovation as being a change in social practice and social relations, involving ways of doing, organising, framing and knowing that challenge existing socioeconomic paradigms. According to the Transformative Social Innovation Manifesto (TRANSIT, 2017), "innovation is just as much about shaping the new as it is about reframing the old", through rediscovering lost or abandoned ways of the past. In the following sub-sections I discuss concepts related to transformative social innovation, which allow for the realisation of systemic change despite constraints on agency.

### 2.7.1 Multi-level perspective and niches

Grounded in systems theory and a cornerstone of the social innovation literature is the multi-level perspective. While criticised for artificially separating levers of change into levels and frames of reference by splitting 'in'-system and 'out'-system (Avelino et al., 2019; Schmid, 2020), it offers useful terms to understand the scales and relative locations of change. The 'landscape' refers to the macro-trends exogenous to the system under study, the 'regime' is the space of the dominant institutions and practices, and the 'niche' is the place the innovative practices are undertaken (ibid). Social entrepreneurs (and the organisations and networks of which they form part) are involved with a wide range of social innovations. While these are often context-specific, local initiatives, they connect to others on a global scale through the aforementioned glocal approach. The rise in social media and internet-based networking has allowed for the emergence of a new trans-niche localism (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012). Importantly, in the multi-level perspective, the boundaries of levels should not be conflated with territorial boundaries, that is, regime should not be understood to simply transpose to the nation state or niche to neighbourhood (Schmid, 2020).

Stable regimes can be difficult levels for which to realise tangible change, constraining the development of alternatives, and thus niches can play a key role in social innovation. Strategic niche management is where actors aim to establish sets of conditions, sometimes in specific locations, for social innovation to grow and break through existing regimes (Marvin et al., 2018). Experimentation is less directed, where protective environments for learning by doing are created. External shocks arising from landscape changes can create 'windows of opportunity', where new social relations and practices can flourish (Schmid, 2020). Intermediary organisations can be key to strategic niche management, supporting the development of hybrid infrastructures. I discuss Covid-19 'lockdown' as a 'window of opportunity' and the role MVP played in Chapters Three and Seven.

### 2.7.2 Intermediary organisations and hybrid infrastructures

An intermediary or backbone organisation "seeks to improve social outcomes by organising cross-sector groups of partners to transform an often inefficient, fragmented system" (Turner et al., 2012: n.p.n.). These organisations often lie between sectors, and connect government, market and community (Avelino et al., 2019). Intermediaries such as WEAll support a glocal approach through 'convergence networks' of changemakers (Tompt, 2018). They can provide a more strategic approach to transformative social innovation by identifying synergies and leverage points in line with a common vision (Schmid, 2021). Regarding community economies, intermediaries help establish the institutional forms often needed to facilitate continuity and longevity in community-based enterprises (Cameron & Gibson, 2005). However, there are some concerns in the literature regarding power and hegemony (Dey et al., 2016), which I consider regarding my action research with intermediaries, in Chapter Five.

As previously mentioned, many transformative organisations are hybrid in form and practice, combining a far-sighted vision of more radical change with immediate pragmatic decisions that must be made to realise any actions or change within the broader political economic systems (Avelino et al., 2019). For instance, social enterprises need to balance financial sustainability and income generation needs with their common-good orientation. An example Schmid (2020) uses is that of an 'open workshop' space that is both a resource for sustainability practices, as well as substantiating the behaviours of paying users that are potentially ecologically destructive. In a later work, Schmid (2021) develops the concept of 'hybrid infrastructures', where hybridity is used to build alternative, independent organisations in the current context. Through compromise, transformation is achieved at a smaller scale, rather than awaiting a change in regime (such as the national economic system), or simply fitting into the existing regime. Infrastructures, used in this way, refer to entities and practices that allow transformation to happen (Schmid, 2021). These transformation processes require agency for continuity, but also combine the

agency of various entities (including individuals) and thus enhance transformative potential.

Hybrid infrastructures can create patterns into which alternative practices can insert themselves or extend, and thus facilitate further transformation. "A strategy around a politics of hybridity deliberately accepts the ethical challenges of pragmatism in the hope that it contributes to building a more just future" (Schmid, 2021: 10). Intermediary organisations can be particularly useful in developing and managing hybrid infrastructures, supporting the formation of a more self-aware 'critical alliance' around a value- or ethics-based vision (Schmid, 2021). Furthermore, a vision- and values-led intermediary organisation can be key to limiting the risks of coordinating an urban living labs programme (Marvin et al., 2018).

### 2.7.3 Urban living labs, small change, tactical urbanism and creative placemaking

'Urban living labs' apply the transformative social innovation concepts described above in a defined urban geography, a physical niche. They can consist of sets of more strategically supported interlinked tactical urbanism projects. The concept of urban living labs is situated within the broader 'living lab' concept and linked to 'real-world laboratories', 'city labs' and 'social innovation labs' (Chatterton, 2018; Scholl et al., 2018). They are multi-actor innovation networks within a specific locale holding a common goal, where an accepted coordinator guides activities, and participant-driven experimentation and learning by doing methods are prioritised (Juujärvi & Pesso, 2013; Marvin et al., 2018). Action research thus ties in well, also regarding the orientation of the research to change that tangibly benefits research participants (Voytenko et al., 2016). With relevance to strategic niche management, Juujärvi & Pesso (2013) found that proactive networking, practice-based innovation, and strategic coordination with a long-term perspective are key success factors for urban living labs. Urban living labs have been most prominent in Europe, and have received support from national, European Union and university funding streams, and take place through partnerships primarily between not-for-profit actors (Bulkeley et al.,

2019). Through playing a coordination role, universities have found more active roles beyond the traditional disciplines of urban studies (Chatterton, 2018; Marvin et al., 2018). Capacity development, a form of enablement, is a key part, either in response to a single-issue one-off project, or to undertake a set of activities over a sustained period (Marvin et al., 2018). Lastly, similar to the concepts of wellbeing economy and social entrepreneurship, coordinators must be cautious of urban living labs displacing redistributive policies, such as social housing and progressive taxation that aim to reduce spatial inequalities (Chatterton, 2018). Furthermore, coordinators must be conscious of who is undertaking the experimentation. Experiments should be foregrounded in social justice and sustainability concerns rather than the free market (ibid).

The related concepts of 'tactical urbanism' and 'small change' share strategies of changemaking at neighbourhood level. Hamdi (2004) identifies various small-scale initiatives that were low budget and experimental in nature but some of which had a large impact, such as a bus stop that created a space to trade and socialise, and enhanced reciprocity and cohesion. Linking to the complexity concept of 'emergence', Hamdi and Goethert (1997) highlight that, while programmes may be broad in scope, their actual beginnings are small and exploit opportunities that are discovered as work proceeds. As the authors argue, stakeholder partnerships, like those supported by intermediaries, are key. Similarly, the tactical urbanism strategy describes a deliberate, phased approach to instigating long-term change through low-cost, smaller-scale initiatives (Lydon et al., 2015). These are often public space interventions, such as 'pop-up' parks or 'open streets' initiatives. Local stakeholders take personal responsibility in creating sustainable neighbourhoods, but suitable institutional support is provided (Lydon et al., 2015). 'Creative placemaking' processes often draw on tactical urbanism and related approaches, with a focus on arts and culture strategies to implement community-led change (American Planning Association, n.d.). However, as a result of creative placemaking becoming more common in regeneration attempts, it is also associated with displacement (Catungal et al., 2009). Intermediary organisations can play a valuable role in ensuring collective wellbeing benefits through, for instance, supporting a neighbourhood

partnership (Cheuy et al., 2017). Intermediaries can also support the formation of social innovation communities, through physical or online infrastructures, programming and social interaction (Toivonen, 2013).

### 2.7.4 Social innovation communities, social capital and trust

Literature exists on 'open innovation systems', 'ecosystems', 'networks' and 'clusters' (see, for example, Lis et al., 2020). However, Toivonen (2016) argues they do not provide an accurate understanding of the social relations and networks that develop around spaces for purpose-driven change. He builds instead on the concept of 'community', made up of complex relationships and associated dynamics. He coins the term 'social innovation community' to refer to "organisations" which have the characteristics of "changemaking cultures", "informal but productive interactions between relatively diverse actors" who engage in open collaboration in entrepreneurial projects (Toivonen, 2016: 63). Shared stories are featured of prominent changemakers and of individuals and organisations within the community. These stories assist in emphasising the values of changemaking around which the social innovation community is based (Toivonen, 2016). Social innovation communities occupy a combination of physical spaces (often coworking spaces), and online spaces (with social media being prominent). The intentional formation of social capital forms a cornerstone of building these communities, towards social innovation (Busch, 2014).

Purdue (2001) identifies three ways of understanding social capital. Social capital can reside in 1) the personal resources individuals derive from membership of a group, particularly a group with considerable stocks of economic or social capital, 2) relationships between individuals, and 3) the reciprocity networks involving outstanding favours, information and shared norms, particularly in a neighbourhood or community. Through the action research I came to understand all three to be important ways of seeing social capital, but the last two were particularly prevalent in Makers Valley (I discuss my findings on social capital in Chapter Six).

Social capital researchers generally distinguish between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Larsen et al., 2004; Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital is *within* social groups between people with a shared sense of identity and belonging. These relations are usually more horizontal. Bridging social capital describes relationships between people who often share interests or goals, but have contrasting social identities, and different levels of power and access to knowledge and resources, that is, it is characterised by more vertical links (Putnam, 2000). Community leaders must maintain and draw on both bonding social capital between community members, and bridging capital in the form of partnerships and relationships with resource-holders outside of the neighbourhood (Purdue, 2001). They accumulate social capital through gaining the trust of the resource holders, including trust that they are legitimate leaders of the community. Community economy projects such as those presented by Cameron and Gibson (2005) focus on building social capital by bringing people with diverse life experiences together to work with each other on community initiatives in a specific location. Nevertheless, in his study of regeneration partnerships, Purdue (2001) found social capital to be used by individuals not only for purposes of collaboration, but also in competition for power.

Trust is a key component of social capital, with 'competence trust' referring to trust that the other person or organisation will be able to control risk and meet their commitments, while 'goodwill trust' refers to the understanding that the other has a moral commitment not to exploit vulnerability (Lane & Bachmann, 2000). Some distinguish further between trust and reputation, with reputation being built on publicly available information, without necessitating a personal relationship between individuals (Bandinelli & Arvidsson, 2013). However, Purdue's (2001) identification of the relevance of reputation in building competence trust is useful.

## 2.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual cornerstones of this thesis are 'wellbeing economy' (Fioramonti, 2020) and 'changemaking', with the related concept of 'changemakers'. I depict this in Figure 2.1, below. Two fields support each cornerstone, with multiple associated concepts. The field of wellbeing has a well-developed literature, which I outlined in the current chapter, with a mix of objective and subjective measures. In the action research I worked with the concept of 'flourishing' (Seligman, 2011), based on personal wellbeing, but understand it from a collective or relational wellbeing point of view (White, 2017). Within 'economies', I borrowed on a range of 'beyond GDP' economies frameworks, prioritising wellbeing rather than GDP (Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013). The diverse economies emphasises the breadth of economic practices currently in existence (Gibson-Graham & Dombroski, 2020). Through focusing on supporting 'community economies', non-capitalist, wellbeing-focused economies can develop through practices like action research, within current macroeconomic systems. The impact of inequality was key to my understanding of wellbeing and thus a wellbeing economy.

The 'changemaking' cornerstone borrows from two different fields to understand the possibilities and processes of transformation. In the first, 'agency and structure', Giddens (2013) argues in 'structuration theory' that overarching structure is formed and reformed through the performance and dynamics of multiple agencies. Enablement involves a removal of constraints to agency through gaining knowledge of relevant social schemas, and the necessary resources (ibid). This links to a core of changemaking: the role of 'changemakers'. In the absence of sufficient academic literature on the topic, I use a common conception of changemakers to reach a broad definition, and conceive of a 'social entrepreneur' (Gupta et al., 2020) as a type of changemaker.

Complex systems (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003) provide an alternate framing for transformation, and I draw specifically on transformative social innovation

(Avelino et al., 2019; Pel et al., 2020). I link transformative social innovation with 'hybrid infrastructures' (Schmid, 2021), 'intermediaries' or 'backbone' organisations (Turner et al., 2012), 'social innovation communities' (Toivonen, 2016) and urban living labs (Marvin et al., 2018). These concepts intersect in the theoretical and empirical literature on the achievement of transformation, despite constraints imposed by overarching systems.

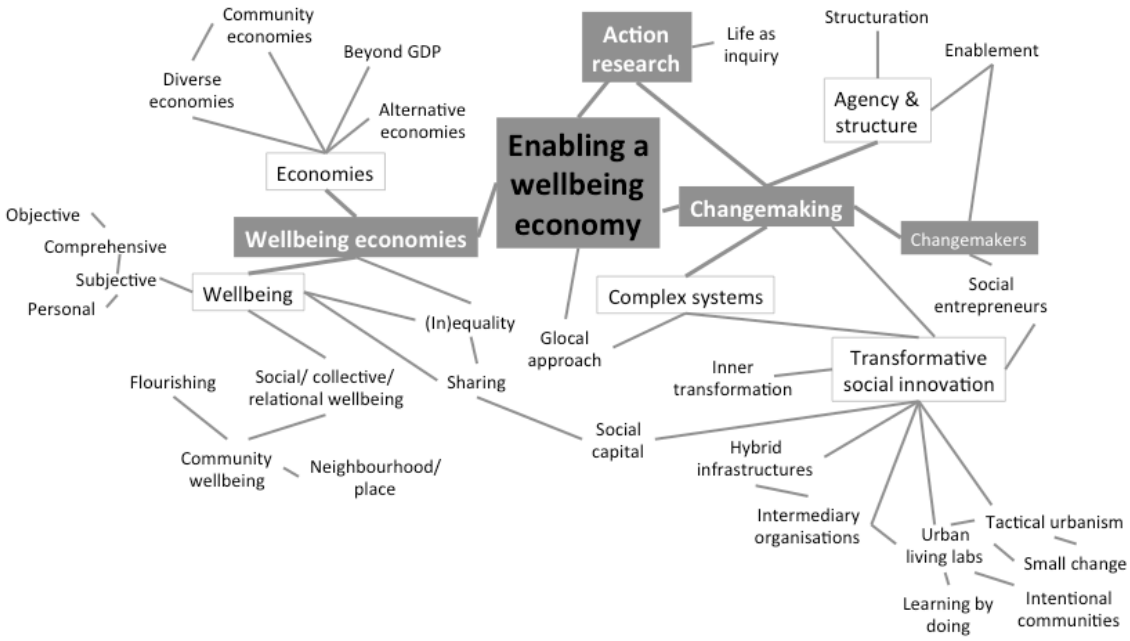



**Figure 2.1:** Conceptual framework showing the relationship between key concepts supporting the action research enabling a wellbeing economy. The grey shaded boxes indicate key concepts. (Source: author).

## 2.9 Conclusion

I frame the research with 'wellbeing economies' and 'changemaking', both of which are conceptually ambiguous. In this chapter I have attempted to provide greater conceptual clarity through building on and connecting relevant academic literature, resulting in the conceptual framework depicted in the previous section.

Wellbeing economies are underpinned by a prioritisation of a wellbeing goal. In the first half of the chapter, I explore different understandings of wellbeing, including understanding wellbeing to be about both being and doing well, and to be relational. Wellbeing economies are an alternative to conventional neoliberal practice, which focuses on GDP growth, and instead promote a 'beyond GDP' approach. High inequality is found to work against collective wellbeing goals, including for the wealthy in unequal societies. Various alternative economic frameworks have been put forward and tested at various scales, and wellbeing economies attempts an inclusive approach of amplifying these frameworks through looking to commonalities: the prioritisation of social and ecological goals rather than GDP or individual profit.

In the second half of the chapter, I turn to 'changemaking' and 'changemakers', deepening the conceptual understanding through a discussion on the established, though contested, concepts of structure and agency. Changemakers are enabled through increases in agency as a result of greater access to knowledge and resources relevant to the structures that constrain or enable them. While I acknowledge social entrepreneurs as one form of changemakers, I broaden the scope of changemakers' work to include other forms of changemaking than social enterprise. I then turn to the relatively nascent body of literature on transformative social innovation to provide further conceptual depth to the forms of changemaking I encountered and aimed to enable through the action research. I discuss related concepts of urban living labs, social innovation communities and niches. Intermediary organisations can support networks of changemakers, including connecting local communities at a global scale. In the current research, the conceptual framework evolved with the cycles of action research. In the next chapter, I provide more detail about the action research methodology and how I applied it in the context of Makers Valley.

# 3. 'MAKERS VALLEY', INNER CITY JOHANNESBURG: A MICROCOSM OF BROADER SYSTEMS, WITH WELLBEING ECONOMY POTENTIAL

## 3.1 Introduction

The location of my action research was the eastern suburbs of inner city Johannesburg, namely Troyeville, New Doornfontein, Bertrams, Lorentzville, Judith's Paarl and Bezuidenhout Valley (as shown on the map in Figure 3.2). In 2015, a friend asked me to move in with her for a few months to a house in Bertrams, because she was afraid to live alone in what was perceived to be a highly dangerous area. The area formed part of my work at the City of Johannesburg from 2014 to 2016, as well (CoJ, 2016b, 2017). While reflecting on Cycle Zero of my action research (see Chapter Four) and planning Cycle One, I identified the neighbourhood as one that held potential to explore the application of European 'intentional community' models in a South African intensely urban context. I saw potential for me as a changemaker, given my social networks, social capital and knowledge of structures already, due to my work and life in inner city Joburg. Upon hearing about a burgeoning neighbourhood partnership and visiting a new development in the area that purported to uphold a vision of 'social development' and 'community' (Victoria Yards, 2018), I saw potential for transformative social innovation towards a wellbeing economy.

This chapter provides a contextual overview of the broader 'Makers Valley' area, encompassing the neighbourhoods identified above. As mentioned in Chapter Two, through neighbourhood consultation and visioning processes over the action research cycles, Makers Valley Partnership (MVP) sought a collaborative identity and vision for a section of this set of neighbourhoods, under the name 'Makers Valley' (see Section 7.5.4 for a discussion on MVP). Figure 3.3, 'Makers Valley core' presents a map of the area that came about in later cycles as MVP's

core focus (however, I use the term 'Makers Valley' or 'the neighbourhood' as shorthand for the broader Makers Valley area). Section 3.2 provides an overview of the inequalities and possibilities of Johannesburg, and I turn after that to the history and physical characteristics of Makers Valley. Following this, I outline features of different neighbourhood stakeholders of relevance to this action research: residents and community, non-profit organisations, property developers and government. I write from the perspective of my decision to undertake action research there in late 2017, though I include a few findings from the action research where relevant.

## 3.2 Johannesburg: Inequalities and Possibilities

Johannesburg, or as commonly referred to, 'Joburg' or 'Jozi', is the largest Southern African city in terms of population and economy (Myambo, 2018). In turn, Johannesburg forms part of the 'Gauteng City Region', an urban agglomeration housing around 13 million people at the time of the last population census in 2011 (GCRO, 2021). The map in Figure 3.1, below, provides a broad overview of the Gauteng province and surrounds. Johannesburg is identified in popular media and scholarly work as the epitome of the current urban inequality conundrum, within the most unequal country in the world (Myambo, 2018; Pieterse & Owens, 2018; Scott, 2019). The vestiges of apartheid spatial planning are in many areas reinforced by economic inequalities, and there are stark differences between wealthy and often "fortified enclaves" of the Northern suburbs, and previously black township areas of the South (Bahmann & Frenkel, 2012: 14). However, Johannesburg displays a diversity in people, and more integration between races (and to a certain extent, socioeconomic groups) than elsewhere in the country at neighbourhood level (Ahmad et al., 2014). In fact, the desegregation of parts of Johannesburg means it has become an exception among 'world cities' (Crankshaw, 2008). This integration is linked in part to the growing proportion of affluent people of colour in Johannesburg compared to the rest of the country (Hosken, 2016). The townhouse developments and gated estates that continue to expand Johannesburg's urban

footprint and merge with Gauteng cities into a single city region attract a mix of races and sometimes incomes (Crankshaw, 2008).

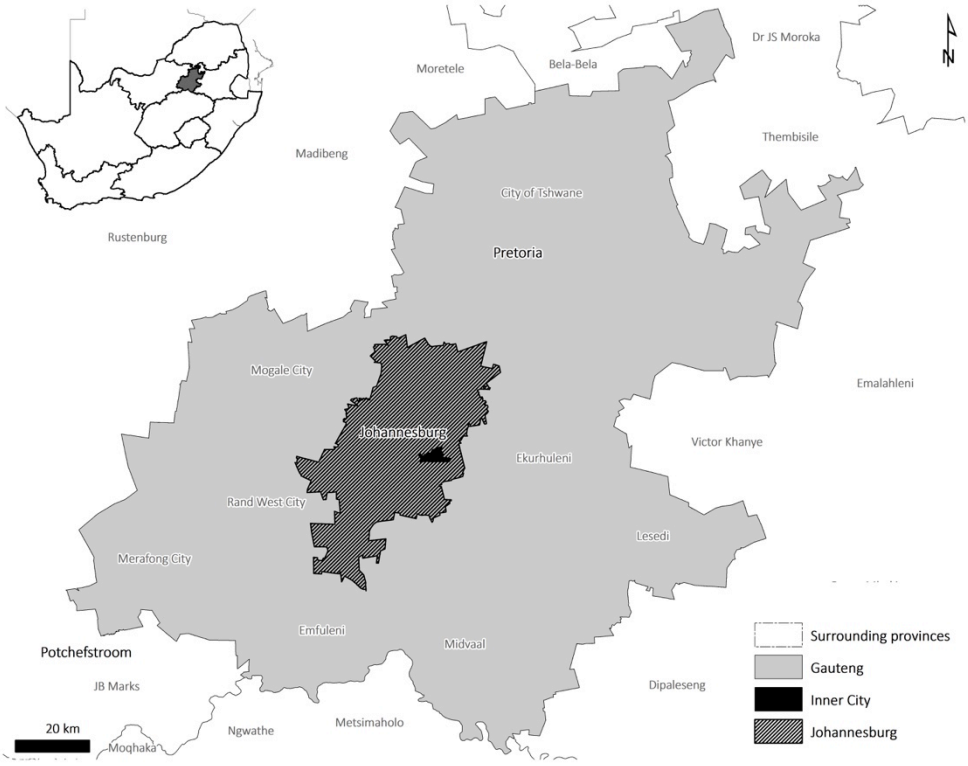



**Figure 3.1:** Johannesburg is situated within the Gauteng Province, with surrounding cities, including Pretoria, forming the Gauteng city region. (Source: prepared by Miriam Maina, 2021).

Johannesburg has been described as a place of 'edginess' (West-Pavlov, 2014), hybrid identities (Fu & Murray, 2007), pioneering, and progressiveness in lived realities (Kruger, 2013) that some people fall in love with, and the aesthetics too have a raw beauty to them (Hutton, 2015). These descriptions are particularly true of the inner city, of which 'Makers Valley' forms an official part (CoJ, 2016; see map in Figure 1.2), and the suburbs directly surrounding it (26'10 South, 2019). A century of boom and bust cycles in property and the broader economy has produced well-resourced neighbourhoods in terms of physical infrastructure. Unlike areas the apartheid regime designated as black townships, these inner city neighbourhoods were built for white residents and businesses, and received significant infrastructural investment from the state and white

capital (Fainsinger, 2019).[4] Though most of the wealthier residents and stakeholders have moved to the northern suburbs if not the global North, much of the infrastructure remains, though partly in a degraded state. Inner city Johannesburg is characterised by "competing forces of urban degeneration and gentrification" (Vejby, 2015: 113), and pockets of gentrification attract white and/ or affluent people, at least for periods (Gregory, 2016). Neighbourhoods such as Maboneng, neighbouring the broader Makers Valley area to the west, are recent examples of this (see location in Figure 1.2).

Johannesburg's development has been driven by private capital since its prospecting origins in the gold rush of 1886, and government's ability and sometimes willingness to direct change is limited (Beavon, 2005). In Appendix C, I present two models of urban regeneration led by the private sector in Johannesburg's inner city: the eKhaya initiative and Maboneng Precinct. Combined with the city's other attributes, if one has access to the necessary knowledge and resources, and a 'just-do-it' attitude, Johannesburg offers freedom to explore, experiment and co-create alternate spaces that coexist alongside or within the mainstream, and offers likeminded people to do this with. With regards to this action research, this was confirmed in my experience as I set out hoping that Joburg, and particularly the inner city, would hold the potential for me to find or co-create communities of people whose lives and work aligned with wellbeing economy principles. In the next section I explore in more depth the physical characteristics of Makers Valley, focusing on those that made my endeavour possible, before I turn to the historical and current population characteristics that provided the social setting for the research.

## 3.3 Makers Valley History

[4] Race-based 'population groups' put in place by the apartheid government are still in use in South Africa, as part of the effort to overcome the racist legacy. In this thesis I use the terms 'white', 'black', 'coloured' and 'Indian' which reflect the common usage of these groups and how people generally identify in term of race at the location of action research and nationally.

The Makers *Valley* name arose out of residents and stakeholders referring to the neighbourhood as 'The Valley', due to its topography. The ridges now known as Observatory *Koppie* (ridge) and Kensington *Koppie* run east to west and respectively form the north and south boundaries of the broader 'Makers Valley', which lies approximately 100m below the top of these ridges (see map in Figure 3.2). Observatory Ridge is the highest point in Johannesburg at 1 808m above sea level (Gauteng Tourism Authority, n.d.), and is part of the continental watershed, which crosses Gauteng Province in an east-west direction (Parker et al., 2017). Northern Johannesburg's main water course, the Jukskei River, flows at the bottom of the valley between these two ridge systems, from the Ellis Park sports precinct to the east (see Figure 3.2). Currently, its polluted water is channelled through Makers Valley in a concrete canal, which runs no more than a trickle on a normal day (Water for the Future, 2017). Proximity to one of the few water sources in the city was nevertheless a key reason for the development of light industry and the variety of workshops for artisans in the late 1890s (Fainsinger, 2019). It is this heritage of production, and the number of current 'makers' that lead to the *Makers* part of the name Makers Valley, referencing the global movement of makers and 'maker spaces' (see Dougherty, 2012).




**Figure 3.2:** The broader Makers Valley area, flanked by the Observatory and Kensington *koppies* or ridges, and including sections of New Doornfontein, Troyeville, Bertrams, Lorentzville, Judith's

Paarl and Bezuidenhout Valley. It is this area that I refer to as 'Makers Valley' or the 'Makers Valley neighbourhood'. The locations shown are of initiatives forming part of different iterations of Makers Valley Partnership. (Source: prepared by Miriam Maina, 2021).




**Figure 3.3:** The core of the Makers Valley area, which formed the focus of Makers Valley Partnership initiatives. (Source: prepared by Miriam Maina, 2021).

The neighbourhoods forming Makers Valley have a history of migration, conflict and contestation. More recent migration histories show the area to be a place of reception for diverse migrants (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2014). Many of these migrants moved on, individually or in waves, while others remained, leading to both transience and diversity in Makers Valley. The following section describes this history of human movement through the area, starting with pre-colonial times.

The Makers Valley area has a history of over six centuries of human occupation. The BaFokeng Sotho-Tswana people were likely the first non-nomadic people to settle in the Makers Valley area, from the early 15th Century. Following the conquering of the area by Mthwakazi King Mzilikazi Khumalo in 1823 after his split with Zulu King Shaka kaSenzangakhona, the area was 'depopulated' as a

buffer land to King Mzilikazi's stronghold near current-day Pretoria (South African History Online, 2019). The Dutch-descendent Voortrekkers forced Mzilikazi out of his stronghold with the help of the BaRolong and moved into the broad area now taken up by Pretoria and Johannesburg in 1838, setting up farms. Earliest written land ownership records show the land that today hosts Makers Valley changed hands a few times between the Dutch families Viljoen and Bezuidenhout between 1851 and the end of the 19th Century (ibid.). Both Viljoen and Bezuidenhout still appear as street and suburb names in the Makers Valley area, as can be seen on the map in Figure 3.3.

Bertrams takes its name from Robertson Fuller Bertram, who bought the land from the Bezuidenhout family in 1889, just three years after the start of the gold rush that birthed modern day Johannesburg (South African History Online, 2019). Bertram sold off plots to wealthy buyers involved in the new mining activities (Halligey, 2017), establishing the first suburb of Johannesburg. Lorentzville and Judith's Paarl remained market gardens supplying the expanding city, until proclaimed as residential townships in 1893 and 1896 respectively. Referencing London's fashionable and wealthy neighbourhood, the area was originally marketed as the 'West End of Johannesburg' (Fainsinger, 2019: 30), but by the 1920s the wealthiest had generally moved north, further from the dust of the mining belt just three kilometres to the south as the crow flies. Rising rentals in what is now the central business district pushed people into suburbs like those that form part of Makers Valley (Beavon, 2005). In the early 1900s the area was rezoned as affordable housing, and 70 sub-economic houses and 40 apartments were built by Johannesburg council for 'poor whites', generally white tenant farmers who had moved to the city (Beavon, 2005; Halligey, 2018). It became a mainly working class and lower-middle-class neighbourhood with some socio-economic outliers, and has retained these characteristics (Benit-Gbaffou, 2014; Halligey, 2017). The socioeconomic data I present in Section 3.6 illustrates that Makers Valley is a true microcosm of South Africa, where the white and the wealthy are relatively few, albeit powerful.

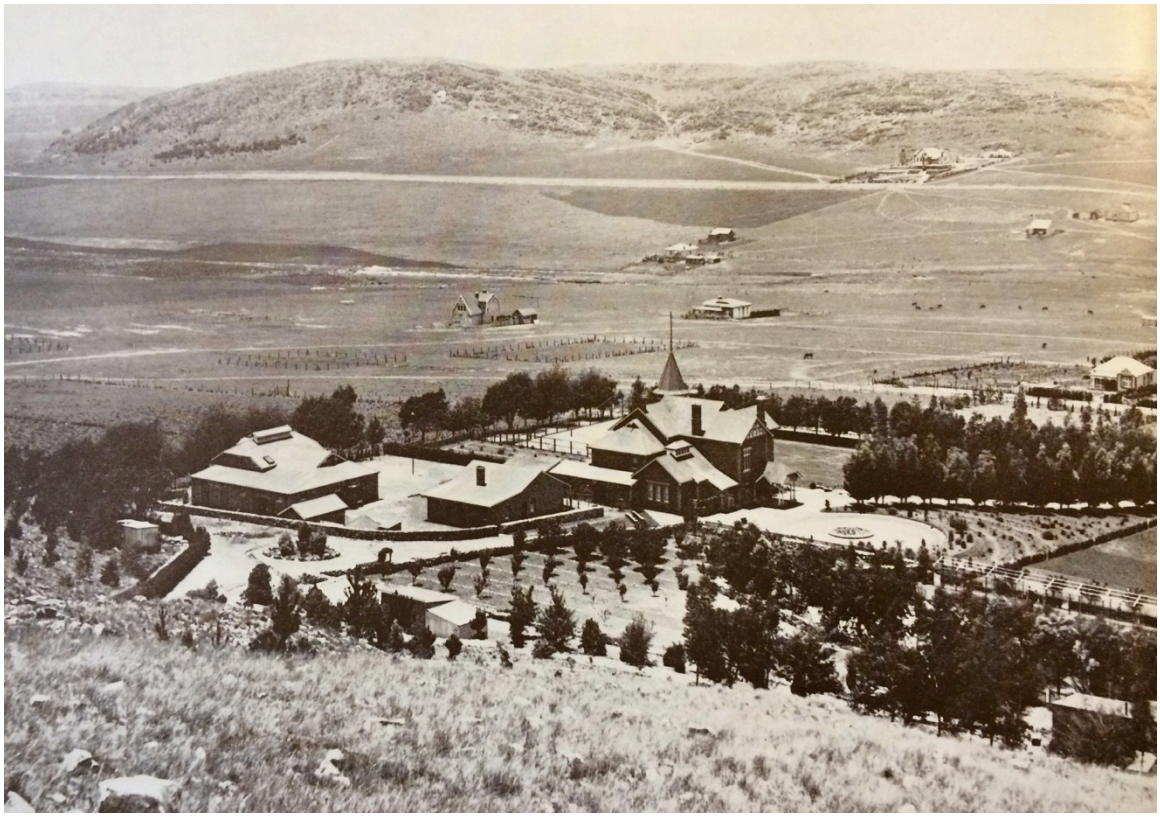


**Figure 3.4:** The Valley before proclamation of the Lorentzville and Judiths Paarl suburbs. Photograph taken circa 1910 from the Observatory *Koppie* looking south towards what is now Kensington. This is the 'Makers Valley core' area. (Source: Latilla, 2014).




**Figure 3.5:** A Google Earth (2021) rendition of The Valley from above Observatory *Koppie* facing south, a similar orientation to the photograph in Figure 3.4. The central transect between the ridges is what MVP Team refers to as 'Makers Valley core'.

Since establishment, Bertrams and the surrounding suburbs have seen various waves of migrants, with the first from 1889 to the early 1900s being predominantly Jewish working class artisans from Lithuania (Fainsinger, 2019; Halligey, 2017). The artisan characteristic has remained a feature in the neighbourhood, in both its people and light industrial characteristic, and as mentioned above, this heritage is upheld in the name and vision for Makers Valley. Coloured, Indian and some black families started moving into the area, until the declaration of the settlements as slums under the 1934 Slums Act, which was used to forcibly remove all non-whites (Beavon, 2005). Bertrams, Lorentzville and Judith's Paarl were some of the first suburbs targeted by the Act, pointing to the legacy of the area being racially mixed at the time (Fainsinger, 2019; Rule, 1988). Experiencing high flows of in- and out-migration and thus changing in composition – fluidity that remains the case today (Halligey, 2018) – the area remained mixed despite further efforts arising from the Group Areas Act of 1950 and its implementation (Rule, 1988). This co-existence of different apartheid-defined population groups was partly because landlords struggled to find white tenants (Beavon, 2005).

The next wave of settlers was people of Portuguese origin fleeing the Angolan and Mozambican wars in the 1960s and 70s (Halligey, 2017). The 'white flight' that started in the 1960s in the central business district and in the high-rise apartment area, Hillbrow, sped up from the late 1980s (Bahmann & Frenkel, 2012; Beavon, 2005). 'Push' factors of the inner city included parking shortages in the higher density areas, rising crime, and unmanaged multi-unit buildings. 'Pull' factors of the northern suburbs included cheaper property taxes, more space and large-scale developments, perceived to be safer and whiter (Beavon, 2005). The Group Areas legislation was repealed in 1990, and in the 1990s and early 2000s, most Portuguese businesses and residents that could afford to, left the core Makers Valley area as a continuation of the general 'white flight'. Nevertheless, some establishments such as the Troyeville Hotel still draw 'Portuguese' regulars and remaining Portuguese business owners in the area celebrate their origins. One such business is José Gents Hairdresser, where Ward

66 Councillor Carlos Da Rocha gets his hair cut (as celebrated by the photographs on its mirrors; Research Journal, 27/03/2018).

From the late 1990s, the main in-migration has been of Africans from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland and Ethiopia (Halligey, 2017). IsiZulu- and SeSotho-speaking people have also migrated from urban peripheries and rural areas in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and North West provinces of South Africa (Halligey, 2018). There is periodic xenophobic tension directed at the foreigners, who own or run many of the shops and 'maker spaces' of the Valley, like car and electrical repair shops. For instance, in the city-wide spate of xenophobic violence in August 2019 (Bornman, 2019), Zulu nationalists cordoned off Millbourne Road with burning tyres, preventing 'foreigner' residents from entering (Research Journal, 20/08/2019). Interestingly, in my observations, between these flare-ups, for the most part, people were not openly hostile in their day-to-day interactions, and children from different origins were particularly integrated.

### 3.4 Physical Characteristics with Relevance to Enabling a Wellbeing Economy

Makers Valley has similar social dynamics to the remainder of the inner city as explored below, but because of its lower-rise streetscapes, wider roads, green spaces and trees, the built environment has a more approachable feel (EWB, 2019). The built environment is diverse in typology and use. Three to four-storey commercial and industrial buildings lie along Derby Road and the industrial belt along the canalised Jukskei River in Lorentzville and Judith's Paarl (as depicted in the map in Figure 3.3). Some of the buildings on Derby Road are occupied as residential buildings, and a few are used as taverns or a mix of small-scale industry and residences. Except during the 'national lockdown' as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (see Chapter Four), there was significant street activity at the time of my action research. This was in the form of traders, various small shops, churches, salons and games centres opening onto the street, people socialising, drinking, or waiting for piecework, and children playing. The activity centred

around the Bertrams Spar shopping centre, the intersection of Derby Road and Lang Street, and smaller hubs along Derby Road, for instance around a major landmark in the area, the Rocha's hardware store. Furthermore, some residential properties had been converted to 'maker spaces' of some kind, such as workshops for fridge or automotive repairs, also spilling into the street.

Small blocks of flats, rising up to four stories, are scattered throughout the area, including a complex of City-owned and managed apartments in bad repair adjacent to Fuller Park. There are also purpose-built shops and what is commonly referred to as 'spaza' shops (informally repurposed structures that serve as small-scale convenience retail enterprises). Churches and mosques exist throughout the area. However, broader Makers Valley is mostly made up of single or double storey residential buildings, becoming lower-rise and more residential with tree-lined roads and larger gardens as one travels east into the middle-income suburb Bezuidenhout Valley. At the time of research, many properties were over 60 years old and therefore legally protected under the Provincial Heritage Authority legislation, though often not respected by owners. There remained some art deco and Victorian-era facades, such as the property now called Victoria Yards, which I introduce below. The Troyeville House, which became a Changemakers Residence through my action research, is pictured in Figure 3.6 (see Section 7.5.3 for more detail on Troyeville House). This mix of building types is partly due to the suburb's long history. When the suburbs that form Makers Valley were established, the "wealth hadn't [yet] percolated out. It hadn't separated out, into rich suburbs and poor suburbs" (Vanderhoven, 2009: 108).



**Figure 3.6:** The north face of the main building of The Troyeville House. (Source: author, 2019).

Even if they appear unaltered from the approved plans and in their facades as observed from the street, most residential properties have backyard rooms. These are out of view of the road, some built originally as servants' quarters, and some a labyrinth of shacks. At the time of my research, in the Makers Valley core area, houses were generally occupied as 'rooms and spaces for rent', with a household per room, as opposed to per house (see Mayson & Charlton, 2015 and Dörmann & Mkhabela, 2019). These properties offered more affordable accommodation than that which is formally leased, allowing people the opportunity to live in this well-located neighbourhood with access to amenities. Some of these properties were well maintained but there were also many that had deteriorated significantly and occupants sometimes lacked water and electricity on the premises (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2014). This was partly as a result of landlords who had abandoned their properties or left them to irresponsible managers, as well as challenges such as disputed ownership and long-term non-payment of municipal rates and service charges.



**Figure 3.7:** Doorway to a backyard room. (Source: MVP, 2020).

Partly because of the servitudes marking the flood zones of the original river, (Figure 3.2) almost 20% of the broader Makers Valley area is open space (CoJ, 2016b). A number of parks and open spaces lie along the Jukskei river canal, holding potential for a connected green belt as promoted by various plans over the last thirty years (CoJ, 2005, 2016b; Water for the Future, 2017). The *koppies* on either side of the Valley are also open to the public, though danger exists for people who actually access them, as there have been spates of attacks every few years (Bedfordview News, 2015). This notwithstanding, Shembe Church groups, occasional film crews, dog-walkers and runners do use the space. There are a variety of public facilities, including the Ellis Park sports complex, which hosted games during the 2010 Soccer World Cup and has Olympic-sized heated pools open to the public, and a tennis club that doubled up as a nightlife venue, pre-Covid-19. The Maurice Freeman Recreation Centre serves as a small community centre. The City of Johannesburg owns large amounts of housing, land, offices

and gardens in the area (CoJ, 2016). During the time of my action research, many of these facilities were underutilised, and in part run down due to lack of maintenance from the City; a persistent trend of littering and vandalism contributed to the degraded state (ibid). I was interested in wellbeing economy projects working with the potential of these public spaces and facilities, through the action research.

### 3.5 Property Developers

As with most of the inner city, at the start of my research the broader Makers Valley area was characterised by the tensions between regeneration efforts and increasing poverty (as Vejby (2015) highlights, above). Buildings converted into student housing were scattered throughout the area, but the regeneration hubs were found in two small areas. On Voorhout Street in New Doornfontein, Ellis House featured a high-end gallery and various creative entrepreneurs, and Morkel House featured a boutique leather manufacturer and black female-owned film studio, among others. Key MVP player The Coloured Cube was located just opposite.

Another main reason I was interested in exploring wellbeing economies in the neighbourhood was the other hub of regeneration in what became the Makers Valley 'core' area. Global restaurant chain Nando's, founded in Johannesburg in 1987, had used one of the light industrial properties along the Jukskei River as a processing plant for their meals and sauces since 1991 (Nando's, 2015). In 2014 they converted this 'Central Kitchen' into their global head office (Nando's, 2015) and demolished some neighbouring houses for additional parking. The Nando's co-founder was passionate about the neighbourhood and the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) was aligned to the Nando's regeneration vision and associated investments (Nando's, 2015). When I started my action research in 2018, Nando's was supporting research by a class of architecture master's students from the University of Johannesburg who were exploring context-responsive upgrades to the built environment with a focus on modular housing

(26'10 South, 2019). Nando's sought to offer employment opportunities to residents, and provided ad hoc support to non-profit organisations and early childhood development centres in the neighbourhood.

In 2017 Victoria Yards was established next door to Nando's, through a shareholder partnership that included the son of the Nando's co-founder. The managing partner had had success with a gated mixed-use development on the western side of the inner city. The developers of Victoria Yards converted Victorian-era buildings into artisan studios, restaurants, events spaces and gardens showcasing urban agriculture. The Victoria Yards vision was stated as "redefining the Joburg inner city landscape, through building an eco-system where tenants thrive as a community". The property was described by the developers as "a uniquely integrated urban complex that is as much about social development as it is commercial enterprise" (Victoria Yards, 2018: n.p.n.). It attracted wealthy customers and tourists, and great interest in the media (Watermeyer, 2017).

The lead developer was frank that Victoria Yards was a for-profit development (Ho, 2018). However, in Cycle One I also saw that it was already drawing together a mix of people and resources that could be aligned with a wellbeing economy. With the right support, Victoria Yards could be a 'gateway' to further enablement of a wellbeing economy in the neighbourhood. Elements of wellbeing economy that Victoria Yards showcased included: off-grid elements, such as all Phase 2 electricity being off-grid photovoltaic (solar) powering a filtered borehole water system; use of all available space to grow useful plants and seeds, arranged in a way that was still aesthetically pleasing; different initiatives trialling innovative farming practices such as hydroponics; and social and creative enterprises, such as Stitch, that trained and employed women recovering from domestic violence.

East along Frere Road, Skills Village 2030, as the name implies, was a set of interconnected buildings over two blocks. It was run essentially as a social enterprise using cross-subsidisation. Owed by a couple since the early 1990s, the

husband concentrated on property management while the wife used the UN Sustainable Development Goals to guide her work and promoted them at every opportunity. She focused on the development of skills through offering learnership programmes and opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurs from across Johannesburg, particularly around events. Their slogan was 'learn to earn' (Landey, 2019). Skills Village was of particular interest to me due to sustainable development aims, some of which aligned with a wellbeing economy paradigm. The property contained thousands of artefacts from the company's varied history. Props, including the dinosaur pictured below, were up-cycled and used for various MVP initiatives.



**Figure 3.8:** A Makers Valley tour led by an MVP changemaker on stilts passes a dinosaur on the Skills Village property. The dinosaur was later painted orange by a social enterprise working with recycling (Source: MVP, 2020).

These large-scale property owners had significant agency, had visions for the neighbourhood, and had started to form neighbourhood-based partnerships towards their realisation, hinting at possibilities of community-building around a collaborative vision. In initial conversations they were welcoming of my changemaker aims in the neighbourhood. However, I was sceptical about the impact from these developments on existing residents, given that the underlying priority of the property owners was to realise a profit (although Skills Village was more aligned with a 'beyond profit' vision, unofficially using a social enterprise model). The next section explores the socioeconomic profile of residents in Makers Valley neighbourhood.

### 3.6 Residents and Communities

While the properties presented above attracted higher income commuters and visitors, the neighbourhood was generally moving towards a lower income residential profile, though characterised by high levels of diversity and inequality. In contrast to less diverse, wealthier neighbourhoods of Johannesburg just five kilometres to the north, or poorer neighbourhoods to the south, there was significantly wider representation in most socioeconomic indicators (StatsSA, 2011). Because Makers Valley was not an official place, in the this section I use a combination of ward level data (greater Makers Valley area forms part of the municipal Ward 66) and sub-place data from Statistics South Africa (StatsSA).

Most recent census data (StatsSA, 2011), while not covering the last decade to date, shows the results of the waves of migration described above. Bertrams in terms of racial demographics reflected closely the national statistical average: 77% of the population was black, 11% white, 8% coloured, 3% Indian/ Asian, and 1% other (StatsSA, 2011). The national figures for the 2011 census were respectively 79%, 9%, 9%, 2.5% and 0.5%. It is unusual for South African neighbourhoods to be racially representative of the national population, due to the apartheid history of racial segregation, largely continuing due to market

factors (Parry & Eeden, 2015; see Haferburg & Huchzermeyer (2017) regarding the Johannesburg suburb of Brixton, another exception). There was also a mix of household types, from single-person households to those with multiple children (StatsSA, 2011).

In the greater Makers Valley area (see Figure 3.2), incomes were also representative of South Africa as a whole (CoJ, 2016; StatsSA, 2011). However, the mean annual household income in Ward 66 of 57 300 ZAR (4 000 USD)[5] was almost double that of the national average of 29 400 ZAR (2 050 USD), with more households skewed to the higher income bands than when analysed for South Africa. Thus, while a wide spectrum of income earners was found in Ward 66, they were not *proportionally* representative (StatsSA, 2016). This trend of diverse, but not necessarily proportional representation, is found in other indicators, as well. In Ward 66, 56% of residents aged 20 or older completed their secondary schooling compared to 39% nationally, and 8% had an undergraduate qualification compared to 4% nationally. The employment rate of 57% was higher than that of South Africa's of 38%, though 13% indicated that they were unemployed and 2% were identified as discouraged work seekers. Youth unemployment in the area was around 50% and rising, representative of the unemployment challenge faced in broader South Africa (CoJ, 2016), which I saw as an opportunity for enabling youth-led social and creative enterprise.

According to the 2011 census data, 56% of households had access to the internet, compared to the national average of 35%, and as the penetration of smart phones had rapidly increased over the last decade, access to the internet was likely to be far greater at the time of action research. The proportion of people who owned smartphones and were able to access WhatsApp grew over the research period (2018–21), as the devices became cheaper, and one could easily purchase a stolen phone. More than half of the youth participating in MVP programmes had their own smart phone. However, access to a smart phone did

[5] The exchange rate used here is 14,30 ZAR to 1 USD, as at 29 April 2021. All conversions are approximate.

not ensure access to the internet. Access remained limited due to the cost of data and the usability and functionality of the cheap smartphones, with limited processor speed and screen space.

Benit-Gbaffou (2014: 252) recognises the "diversity, mobility and competition" of Bertrams and surrounds. Some of this mobility is represented in the levels of home ownership of 26%, which, as with much of inner city Johannesburg and surrounding suburbs, is roughly half the national average of 51%. As with much of Johannesburg's inner city, Makers Valley area continues to function as a port of entry or "transit area" (Vanderhoven, 2009: 107) for inter- and intra-national migrants seeking work, and networks stretch between the neighbourhood and national and international origins (Benit-Gbaffou, 2014; Halligey, 2018). The most recent census (StatsSA, 2011) shows only 59% of Ward 66 residents being born in South Africa, compared to 93% nationally, meaning the number of South Africa-born Black Africans would be much lower than the national figures.

Many South African migrants also end up settling in Makers Valley, and rely on tenuous livelihoods and informal accommodation, with greater prevalence of multiple households sharing rooms and spaces for rent to facilitate affordability (CoJ, 2016). Residents were generally living in the neighbourhood because of the accessibility to livelihood opportunities (CoJ, 2016b), including meeting their basic needs through social capital and means other than employment or income generation (Mayson & Charlton, 2015). The higher level of informality in accommodation and income generation allows easier entry for new migrants: barriers to entry such as needing a bank account, proof of income or an identity document are less common than for formal housing (Mayson & Charlton, 2014).

It is the residents on the bottom end of the wide range of incomes in Makers Valley that would be most susceptible to the dangers of gentrification that developments like Victoria Yards potentially holds. These residents, particularly in the type of informal shared accommodation common in Makers Valley, would not be able to afford accommodation elsewhere in Johannesburg without a long, often costly commute. While property developers had significant agency to

realise their vision, residents did not. In other action research, agency was enabled among residents towards transformative social innovation through 'community partnering' (Cameron & Gibson, 2005), and I was interested in locating existing communities of residents in Makers Valley. I turn to this next.

Despite the broader Makers Valley having an unusually wide representation of South Africa within a local area, "living together does not automatically mean greater integration" (Vanderhoven, 2009: 129). Makers Valley residents generally did not identify with a single 'community' but rather several overlapping ones, defined by social relations, social networks and "belongings" (Benit-Gbaffou, 2014: 256). This is common for communities in urban neighbourhoods, which are "are typically fragmented rather than closed", where "a number of social networks may occur in a given neighbourhood, but are often only poorly connected to each other" (Purdue, 2001: 2215).

Geographic communities are defined not only by spatial boundaries but by common ties, social interactions or interdependencies (Poland & Maré, 2005). Resident communities in Makers Valley area were grounded both in place and shared interest. Because of the predominantly shared nature of housing, the street life and low car ownership levels, places of residence like an informal settlement, a shared house, block of flats or street formed hubs; though some residents preferred not to form social relations in their direct spatial proximity, in an effort to maintain their private life. Shared interests included religion, types of work, nationality or ethnic group. Some communities were based around the physical hubs and point of shared interest supported by many non-profit organisations operating in the area, as described below. Others were centred around organised community spaces, including soccer clubs operating at a field abandoned by a local school, a games shop featuring a pool table, a gym at the back of a spaza shop, formal art galleries, or crèches. Less organised spaces around which communities formed included bars, supermarkets catering to specific cultural cuisines and restaurants along the spectrum of informality.

I was interested in social networks or communities due to their potential in enabling transformative social innovation. However, the only residents' structure that worked systematically towards a place-based vision for the neighbourhood was the Bertrams Residents Movement. Its geographic focus was Bertrams and Lorentzville. While Bertrams Residents Movement's activities and social networks stretched beyond these suburbs, they experienced little interest from residents there. Two long-term residents of Bertrams led the organisation. The social networks of the first were strongest among black (particularly Zulu) people in the northern section of Bertrams, and those of the second were among coloured and white people in the municipal-owned housing.

Several area-based WhatsApp groups existed in the broader Makers Valley area, with varying levels of activity. These were focused on crime prevention and cleanliness, though some were more general 'chat groups'. Lastly, the first manager of Victoria Yards, a Bezuidenhout Valley resident at the time, had tried in 2016 to start a residents' association. However, after initial interest and creating a Facebook group she found very low attendance of meetings and little follow through by other residents on agreed actions. The initiative was therefore abandoned.

### 3.7 Non-Profit Organisations

Non-profit organisations (NPOs) in the neighbourhood also formed useful potential for enabling a wellbeing economy. By definition, and their organisational registration criteria, they prioritised a 'beyond profit' vision. Because many of them had activities and social networks within the neighbourhood where they were situated, they also added to the sense of Makers Valley being a microcosm of broader systems. These NPOs aimed to raise wellbeing in diverse ways, usually with a specific focus, including homes for pensioners, and a programme for people with mental disabilities. Others included a security firm using ex-prisoners, and free counselling services. Many catered to the needs of vulnerable women and children, from a shelter for 50

abused women and their children, to using the arts to support early childhood development. Some of these NPOs acted as hubs for place- and interest-based communities. However, again, communities did not always intersect, and there was no formal partnership between them.

Boys and Girls Clubs of South Africa, which launched independently of my involvement in Cycle One of the action research (January 2018), did use partnerships to enable its programmes. After two years of negotiations, the organisation secured a partnership with the municipality and opened an after-school programme in the underutilised community hall, the Maurice Freeman Recreation Centre. While Bertrams Residents Movement had been running a programme there already, they struggled with limited funding and structure. Boys and Girls Clubs was able to use funding from its base in the United States, and partner with corporates in South Africa such as Nando's, which provided equipment and meals from the Central Kitchen. Through the action research, Boys and Girls Clubs also played a role in several MVP partnerships.

Many NPOs were concerned about violence and neighbourhood, concerns that were also shared by property owner and residents (CoJ, 2005, 2016b), and often formed the rallying call that brought these stakeholders together. The next section features these concerns.

### 3.8 Safety, Cleanliness, and Municipal Governance

The largest 'threats' identified by neighbourhood stakeholders were around issues of governance and urban decay (CoJ, 2016b). These included crime, derelict buildings, and the lack of management and maintenance of municipality-owned residential properties and open spaces (ibid). Illegal electricity and water connections were rife, with various plumbers and electricians (some still employed by the City) available to bypass or unlock a meter for a fee. As a result, frequent electricity outages occurred due to overloaded substations, as well as stolen cables or aging bulk infrastructure. Drug sale and abuse was prevalent in

pockets of Makers Valley (Ho, 2019), and well-known drug dealers plied their trade around Fuller Park, as well as outside two recycling buy back centres in the area, targeting waste reclaimers that sold their recyclables there.

Other aspects of municipal governance in Makers Valley were also highly variable. Like the rest of Johannesburg, particularly less wealthy regions, some ratepayers battled for years to get actual electricity and water meter readings, rather than incorrect estimations (Cox, 2021). The local ward councillor was relatively well known by residents, and some considered him present and available. Though the ward committee structure was opaque, I found the councillor responsive on service delivery issues, possibly due to my association with Victoria Yards and MVP, which represented possible returns in favour and held significant agency in the neighbourhood. One got a quicker response by phoning the councillor with the reference number from the municipality's call centre than by waiting for standard municipal processes, for instance if there was an electricity outage.

Safety and security were top concerns of stakeholders, in part linked to the drug trade (CoJ, 2016). During the action research I was a joint victim of incidents of crime, for instance several break-ins occurred at The Troyeville House property and a phone I had given to VY Commons, the MVP coworking space (see Chapter Four) was stolen on a day we had lots of visitors. Though I was not personally the victim of violent crime, some colleagues and friends were. Indeed, the neighbourhood felt highly volatile. Most evenings were quiet, but one never knew, for example, if someone who possibly did not even live there would decide to have a party on the street using a large sound system from a car. I encountered car hijackings or armed muggings that would happen in what, to a casual observer, would seem a peaceful street.

The presence and responsiveness of law enforcement, including municipal and provincial police services, was minimal. Many people bemoaned this on area-based WhatsApp groups set up to try and reduce the crime, or in occasional public forums convened by representatives of the nearby South African Police

Service station. Private armed response services were responsive to incidents concerning paying customers, but infrequent in their neighbourhood patrols. The municipality's waste management entity, with its weekly street cleaning and refuse collection, was responsive but did not keep up with the scale of dumping. I saw the urban governance crisis as being symptomatic of broader systemic crises and inequalities. I discuss in this in Chapter Five within my findings on neighbourhood wellbeing.

Recognising the challenges, the municipality commissioned five plans after the first multiracial democratic elections of South Africa of 1994 that have some focus on the Makers Valley area (CoJ, 2005, 2009, 2016b, 2017; Zack et al., 1995). All the plans promote improvement in general urban management, with a 'safe and clean' focus, a focus on urban regeneration, and intention to enhance neighbourhood wellbeing, even if not explicitly mentioned as such. However, they prioritise economic growth to attain this. Aside from the Inner City Housing Implementation Plan (CoJ, 2017) and 'housing' component of the Inner City Eastern Gateway Urban Development Framework (CoJ, 2016b), the displacement of residents as a result of the proposed regeneration is a concern that is largely unaddressed.

Moreover, the plans go largely unrealised, and the only large-scale intervention that arose from them was the upgrade and extension of Ellis Park sports precinct for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. This intervention, instigated by national government, included evictions to make way for widened roads for the Rea Vaya Bus Rapid Transit system, for match attendees to be able to attend the games (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2014). Thus, I did not place much confidence in the changemaking potential of government, or its ability to protect or enhance the wellbeing of the most vulnerable.

## 3.9 Partnerships

The combination of underserviced needs and weak state governance meant greater incentive and freedom for changemakers to take initiative in solving the challenges raised above. Furthermore, I was interested by the potential of non-profit organisations to boost wellbeing, and the "seeds of possibility" (Soal, 2018: n.p.n.) associated with the regeneration initiatives in the private sector such as Morkel House and Victoria Yards. It was too early to tell when I visited Victoria Yards at the end of 2017 what its long-term impact would be (and, as I discuss in Chapter Five, it is still early to tell, at the time of writing). Most visitors to Victoria Yards came with an uncritical eye. However, there was extreme contrast between the influx of higher-end businesses in developments like Victoria Yards, and poorer residents in the surrounding single storey houses. The inequality could mean a local trajectory characterised by typical processes of gentrification and displacement, or one characterised by synergies and livelihood opportunities that could support current residents in living what they see as 'a good life' (Moosa, 2019). While I was wary of other inner city cases of privately-led regeneration such as Maboneng (Ah Goo, 2018), in Victoria Yards I saw the potential for 'community partnering' to work through these tensions and promote transformative social innovation, similar to the action research by Cameron & Gibson (2005). However, even here, I understood the risks of an uncritical 'clean and safe' agenda in enforcing a neoliberal agenda (Didier et al., 2012), or well-intentioned initiatives such as eKhaya (see Appendix C) leading to displacement of vulnerable residents (Gewer & Rubin, 2015).

Thus, I was excited to find out at the start of Cycle One in 2017 about a community partnership based in Makers Valley that had submitted a proposal to municipal-owned Johannesburg Development Agency. Though it included property owners such as those along Voorhout Street and Victoria Yards, it was driven by small creative businesses, mostly tenants in the area (The Coloured Cube, 2017). It proposed an approach that was "not about fixing one specific problem, but rather … creating a space where ideas are made" (ibid: 6). It described itself as "not a forced partnership but rather an organic relationship between creative businesses, NGOs, property developers and small businesses" (ibid: 7). Nevertheless, residents and non-profit organisations were missing from

the partnership list. I was curious about working with the potential of this partnership too, through broadening representation.

### 3.10 Conclusion

From its origin as a settlement of gold prospectors, to a large extent Johannesburg has been defined by private capital. Weak governance structures have led to possibilities of niches and partnerships, such as those that I wished to create in Makers Valley. The action research location seemed an area holding great potential for transformative social innovation, in part because of weak state governance, and nascent community partnerships. I saw wellbeing economy potential through connecting the unrealised potential of various physical infrastructures, socially oriented businesses and non-profit organisations, government and residents. In short, there seemed high potential for changemaking toward a wellbeing economy (in whatever form this paradigm took through the action research), and enabling existing and additional changemakers towards this.

I also saw greater potential for myself as a changemaker, given my pre-existing knowledge of structures, social capital and access to relevant resources. The location seemed a good fit for my personal research question – "How can I maximise my changemaker potential while maintaining my wellbeing?" Furthermore, I could see myself living in Makers Valley in the longer term, and thus being able to commit to any projects that came about as a result of the action research. It seemed a microcosm of broader economic and governance systems at city level or beyond, but at a more 'human' scale, at which individual changemakers could have demonstrable agency. While in later chapters I explore the local politics in the form of competing agency and conflict, I chose not to include in-depth research on the dynamics of party politics in the area. This is because, aside from internal tensions within the Bertrams Residents' Association, they did not play a role with the changemakers forming part of Makers Valley Community, and research participants had limited involvement

with political parties aside from some casting a vote in government elections. The inequalities, violence and ill-being brought about by the current 'growth'-focused macroeconomic system and highly variable competencies in government (highlighted in particular at a local level in the discussion on municipal governance in this section), given increasing complexities of large-scale governance, were blatantly visible in everyday life. Adding to this sense of a microcosm was the diversity in stakeholders.

Makers Valley's diversity intrigued me. It manifested in cuisine that ranged from Mozambican coconuts to Indian curries and activities that varied from 'lily-white' swimming galas at the Olympic-sized Ellis Park pool to pockets of Nigerian-dominated nightlife. Having decided to do away with taking flights and owning a car for environmental reasons, I saw the possibility of gaining the benefits of travel without needing to leave my neighbourhood. Halligey (2018) recognised the rich possibilities Makers Valley streets held for creating spontaneous interactions and connections. Truly knowing a place requires time and physical immersion, to experience the surprise moments of the urban everyday as identified by Lefebvre (see, for example, Huchzermeyer 2014, Purcell 2002). This is how the chance encounters occur that Jacobs (1992) wrote about with affection regarding her life in New York City. In the following chapter, I describe the methods I used to gain what became an intuitive understanding of the research location, through living, working, and immersing myself in the Valley.

# 4. ACTION RESEARCH METHODS AND CYCLES

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore action research in more depth as my core methodology, and identify some key characteristics in Section 4.2. In Section 4.3 I then describe how, although I did not have a name for it at that stage, I intuitively worked with action research cycles before formally starting the PhD. The methodology was therefore a natural fit with my worldview and the methods associated with it provided more rigour to improving my practice and my contribution to knowledge. I briefly present the overarching cycles of my research in Section 4.4. To reach my findings I conducted a thematic analysis of secondary data arising from the projects that came about, supported by formal interviews, participant observation and a research journal inspired by an autoethnographic approach (Section 4.5). In the final section of this chapter I explore my positionality and ethical concerns.

## 4.2 Relevant characteristics of action research

Action research is particular in its methods and approach. The following section covers three characteristics of action research applicable to my study. Firstly, action research demands some form of intervention, often at the local level (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In this way, action research almost always begins with the question, "How can we improve this situation?" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008: 11). Action research is identified as "one of the most effective methods of general problem solving at the local level" (Boyle, 2012: 1). The method aims to enhance knowledge and practice in a way that is directly useful to the people being researched (Currie & Sorensen, 2017). I set out to use action research to apply the broad principles of a wellbeing economy and related practical ideas, enabling changemakers within the local context of Makers Valley.

Secondly, the action, as opposed to the theory, is often the premise for the research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Established feminist action researcher Pat Maguire wrote, "I stay involved with action research because all the theorising in the world, feminist or otherwise, is of little use without the doing. And action researchers are doers" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003: 15). However, action researchers also argue that it is possible for the findings to hold value beyond the local context, inter alia for policymaking, testing in other contexts, and theory-practice feedback loops (Burns, 2007; Currie & Sorensen, 2017). Theory in action research is often sought as a way to help understand and add weight to an effective form of knowledge gained through experience, as opposed to being the centrepiece (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Tasker et al. (2010: 229) argue that action research is "a science of experiential qualities, moving away from the inadequate reductionism of an empirical-positivistic worldview". In the current research, I hoped for some of the findings to be useful for other contexts, and to contribute empirically to theory regarding changemaking and a wellbeing economy.

Thirdly, issues around the researcher's 'positionality' and their personal framework of beliefs and values are stark (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Herr and Anderson (2005: 77) define positionality as how the researcher positions vis-à-vis the setting under study: "Who is the researcher to the research process?" This changes how one thinks about power relations, ethics and validity of the findings, as discussed below. Many other forms of research strive to maintain some distance by limiting the impact of the researcher to achieve a more accurate understanding of the situation in its 'natural state' (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Tasker et al, 2010). Action research often stems from the researcher being a key actor. The researcher is a co-participant in and sometimes key organiser of projects and activities, living and working in the research context (Tasker et al., 2010), as I did in the current research. Indeed, Marshall (1999: 155) describes action research as "living life as inquiry". I found this to be true, and indeed came to understand the action research PhD itself as a set of cycles nested within the cycles of my broader life.

### 4.3 Life as an Action Research Project: Cycles within Cycles

First-person action researcher Marshall (1999) identifies the approach of 'living life as inquiry', which describes her approach as "a researcher and aspiring change agent in the world" (Gearty & Marshall, 2020: 2). Marshall (1999) relates how such an approach draws together professional and personal questions, which can be set within politically relevant frames. Action research's cyclical process of action and reflection is usually split into the following stages (Herr & Anderson, 2005):

1) Plan – collaboratively plan action to improve what is already happening
2) Act – implement the plan
3) Observe – reflect upon and document the effects of the action within the context
4) Reflect – analyse findings against the literature, and identify possible changes for future cycles
5) Repeat – this is an iterative, cyclical process.

Wadsworth (2015: 645) argues that "the 'full cycle' process not only feels naturally do-able but we experience it as genuinely able to [revitalise] lives and practices, policies … and economies". Hamdi (2004: 127) argues that this process is essential to improving practice, involving "a kind of 'activist pedagogy' which is systemic to becoming skilful and wise". I identify with Marshall's (1999) approach and certainly see my learning through the action research having the potential to enhance my abilities as an aspiring changemaker. Though I did not have a conceptual framework in 'Cycle Zero' of my action research, I actively explored many of the concepts that formed the core of the current research before formally committing to a PhD. My own values were defined by this exploration. Undertaking a PhD added a particular layer of reflection and analysis involving interdisciplinary academic literature and more rigour to the reflection stages.

I found that periods physically away from Makers Valley, the action research site, made writing and reflection easier and defined the breaks between the

overarching cycles. Shorter periods of seclusion (even as simple as spending a full day alone in the Wits PhD office) often marked breaks between smaller cycles. If I did not leave the fieldwork site, I found I could not disengage as easily from the action to be able to reflect extensively and allow for a possible change of direction that was not influenced by my emotions in the moment. Perhaps it was also due to the nature of the research context. A Makers Valley Partnership (MVP) project manager questioned, "In the heart of a city like Johannesburg is it actually possible to have a life that allows for these pauses?" (I6, 24/06/2019). I agreed with her that "you need the space and calm as well … the breathing spaces" (ibid). To support her point, I did find it very helpful to leave the city for reading and reflection "breathing spaces". As indicated in the table in Appendix A, these were made possible through a partnership I formed with a social enterprise outside of Johannesburg, as well as bus trips to my parents' home in Cape Town.

The iterative, cyclical format fits well with 'changemaking'. Indeed, my grandfather argued in a piece on 'Change Makers' that "change progresses through a constantly repeated process of evaluation – reflection – action" (Mayson, 1990: 12). As argued by Tasker et al. (2010), I found similarities between the action research and social entrepreneurship. Even with large donor-funded projects I used a prototyping approach and structured them as a set of low resource, low risk projects that could be tweaked as they progressed. In the following sections I provide the background to the thematic analysis of the findings from the action research, which I present in Chapters Five to Seven.

## 4.4 The Overarching Action Research Cycles

While it was not possible to separate the action research into neatly defined cycles, an overarching cyclical approach was strong (see table in Appendix A; when referencing events in the action research, where relevant I mention both the month in which the event took place, and the cycle within which it formed a part). Each of the projects took on a cyclical form as well, as a result of changes in

agency of partner changemakers, in relationship with other changemakers and broader systems. Figure 1.3 in the introductory chapter features a diagram of the iterations of the different initiatives. Here, I introduce the action in more detail, showing the cyclical nature of the projects. I show how I aimed to be responsive to other changemakers and contexts, as well as my own goals and needs. As is the nature of action research, these processes were not linear. For instance, some initiatives were already in existence at the start of my research, and boundaries between projects and partnerships were fuzzy.

To acknowledge how previous experiential learning informed the formal PhD process, I conceptualised the 'pre-PhD' period as Cycle Zero. The overarching Cycle One started in October 2017 with research and intensive reading and reflection on Cycle Zero. After a few site visits in November 2017, I planned my initial immersion in the research context and possible actions. In January 2018, I moved to the 'Makers Valley' neighbourhood for an intensive observation stage during which I observed existing activities and built networks with active changemakers. This allowed for more realistic planning of possibilities for action with others. The 'act' component of the first action research cycle began in April 2018. It involved accepting Mariapaola McGurk's offer to the position of co-chair within the Our City Our Block partnership, the first iteration of an intermediary organisation. I then co-founded Makers Valley Collective, forming the second iteration. Also in the 'act' stage of Cycle One, I prototyped the first iteration in Makers Valley of the co-working model (Coworking & Community, within the Victoria Yards development) and co-living model (44 Fourth Changemakers Residence) with partner changemakers, as described in Section 6.6.3. A PhD workshop for the inter-university funded programme[6] I was on provided a chance for me to undertake a bounded stage of reflection and planning, based on literature analysis and critical feedback from PhD peers and supervisors.

[6] The National Research Foundation-funded programme focused on the theme of 'urban resilience and spatial justice', working through collaborative PhD training for supervisors and students at three South African universities. It was housed by the Centre for Urbanism and Built Environment Studies within the Wits School of Architecture and Planning (see Wits, 2017).

Cycle Two began in July 2018 with the submission of my full PhD proposal to faculty, and ethics clearance. This allowed for the start of conventional interviews and participant observation. From a project perspective, I started work on the second iteration of the Changemakers Residence, second coworking space and Makers Valley Hub (VY Commons; see Figure 4.1) and reoriented my involvement in Makers Valley Collective. Under the banner of Makers Valley Partnership or MVP (the initially informal third iteration of intermediary organisation), I set up a partnership between a well-established non-profit organisation, the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership, local social enterprise, The Coloured Cube, and other organisations. A major US Consulate grant was secured by this partnership in August 2018, for a creative placemaking project. In December 2018 I created space for an intensive period of reading, reflection and planning away from Makers Valley, drawing Cycle Two to a close.




**Figure 4.1:** VY Commons coworking and makers space, founded as a Makers Valley 'hub' within Victoria Yards, supported social and creative entrepreneurs by offering retail space where they paid rent based on their revenue, thus minimising their risk and start-up costs. (Source: MVP, 2020).

January 2019 marked the start of Cycle Three with a further iteration of the intermediary organisation partnership, which secured a grant from the British Council for the project Developing Inclusive and Creative Economies (DICE). The DICE activities facilitated growth of the social innovation community, assisted by the establishment of the MVP Team as the operations core of MVP. Finding from the first cycles of the creative placemaking project a need for broader community input, I also set up a neighbourhood steering committee. A partnership with Engineers Without Borders supported further design research in the neighbourhood, managed independently, though connected to MVP. Lastly, Cycle Three involved the start-up of a second Changemakers Residence, 39 Victoria, opposite Victoria Yards, which went through several cycles of management options.

By April 2019, the major projects mentioned above were running without need for my day-to-day input. Thus, I was able to start a new cycle (Cycle Four), shifting my focus to early childhood development, a focus that I have largely left out of this thesis for conceptual clarity. I used another PhD workshop for the programme, held in July 2019 out of Johannesburg, to set out the first structure for this thesis and receive feedback. Demands within MVP and new opportunities in October 2019 brought me back to playing an operational management role in the action, and the start of Cycle Five. December 2019 again allowed for a reflection stage.

In Cycle Six, starting in January 2020, I was able to shift my role back to an advisory position for MVP, now in a more formal capacity as board chair of the newly registered non-profit company. The Makers Valley Steering Committee was relaunched, alongside regular Community Conversations, for the purpose of broader, open-invitation consultation and community-building. An extensive partnership had planned a Makers Valley Festival for the end of March 2020, with an estimated attendance of around 9 000 people. However, it was indefinitely postponed at the start of the national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. MVP efforts shifted to a Covid-19 response, focusing on food security and associated community economies. The combination of my shift to advisory

position and the lockdown meant I could intensify work on my thesis. This marked the most significant reflection stage of the PhD. Lastly, in September 2020 a new partnership opened the third iteration of Changemakers Residence in Makers Valley, The Troyeville House. This marked the start of Cycle Seven. After a few months of stabilisation of The Troyeville House management team, I was able to relocate to Cape Town to finalise my thesis, in February 2021.

In late 2020, Benedikt Schmid's book *Making Transformative Geographies: Lessons from Stuttgart's Community Economy* was published, based on his PhD on the strategies and agents of change towards degrowth (I discuss degrowth in Chapter Two). He had not followed as hands-on an action research approach as he had originally intended (Schmid, pers. comm., 2021), and I saw how my own research, which shared the same aims, though framed as wellbeing economies and contextualised in South Africa, could contribute to his findings. His later paper on 'hybrid infrastructures' (Schmid, 2021; defined in Chapter Two), also based on his PhD, led to me placing our studies in conversation with each other, and I present this in Chapters Seven and Eight. Given that Cycle Zero of my action research ended by looking at similar transformative social innovation in Europe as Schmid (2020) had done, including other German cities, this navigation of the global North/ South divide provided an interesting full circle to my work.

## 4.5 Data Sources

The action research relied on a number of data sources, with the bulk of the data arising from MVP and other projects' activities. A research journal documenting my participant observation, in line with urban ethnography and autoethnography approaches, supported this data, documented during reflection stages. Formal interviews, primarily with partner changemakers carried out in two phases, allowed to me to interrogate this data.

### 4.5.1 Secondary data arising from action: MVP and other projects

The projects described in the previous section generated significant secondary data for analysis; Herr and Anderson (2005) encourage researchers to identify data produced as part of the intervention, before conducting additional research. Data sources can include documents and records, such as minutes, reports, plans, evaluations, public relations materials and newsletters (Stringer, 2007). For example, MVP Team and partners held group interview processes for most job positions that arose in the projects. These processes acted in some ways as focus groups and generated data that included some insight as to the supports and limitations to people's agency to be 'changemakers'. This was useful secondary data to reflect upon for the findings and analysis on enabling changemakers covered in Chapters Six and Seven. Other research-oriented data generated by MVP included a door-to-door census of 2175 households in Makers Valley, carried out by 20 volunteers during the Covid-19 Response (Cycle Six), neighbourhood identity and community mapping surveys undertaken by MVP Team staff and interns, and reports from Community Conversations and the Makers Valley Theory of Change workshops.

### 4.5.2 Urban ethnography

In addition to the data being generated as part of the project work, I relied on urban ethnography methods (Venegas & Huerta, 2010). As identified by Anderson (2009), ethnography allows researchers a bottom-up accumulation of 'local knowledge'. It seeks to understand the nuances of how people are actually living and making decisions within their everyday lives. With relevance to my interest in both understanding existing communities and building communities, Chari and Gillespie (2014) highlight how urban ethnography can reveal how "lives are constituted around certain affinities and connections, certain modes of living together in urban space, even as that togetherness is sometimes also a process of alienation and division" (ibid: 145). I discuss this in my own findings in Chapter Five.

The primary research method I used here was participant observation, simply by living, working and socialising in the area. Some of my most valuable findings

came from the analysis of this immersion component of my research, where during the fieldwork period I lived a very communal life in the three Changemakers Residences with six to fifteen others. Within and outside of these co-living spaces I built sometimes very intimate relationships with a wide variety of changemakers, residents, business owners, other stakeholders and visitors. These people, both friends and participants, came from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, and I spent time reflecting on this as their and my own living conditions changed over time. For instance, through participating in informal conversations and observing household dynamics in the Changemakers Residences, I hoped to better understand residents' conceptualisations of wellbeing, and how changes in material circumstances affected them. Through working in the VY Commons coworking space, I listened in on and participated in various conversations between people from different socioeconomic groups; including conversations around sharing and justice, for example. My findings from these conversations contribute to the thematic analysis presented in Chapter Five, though I was not able to share participant details in the thesis due to ethical concerns.

In the thesis, I refer to someone with whom I have communicated through MVP activities, and who therefore has some knowledge of 'Makers Valley', as a 'participant', as a reference to their participation in the broader action research project. I use the term 'resident' to refer to an individual living in the broader Makers Valley area (see location in Figure 3.2). This person nevertheless likely does not view the area as being called 'Makers Valley', and may not know about MVP or linked initiatives (see Chapter Five). A 'stakeholder' is someone who holds a stake in the broader Makers Valley neighbourhood, simply by frequently using, or living in the space. They may be a resident (including a rough sleeper), a property owner, or employee who commutes into the neighbourhood. They may or may not know about MVP, that is, be a participant of my action research.

### 4.5.3 Autoethnography

While a traditional ethnographer tries to retain 'outsider' status and write as such (Anderson, 2006), my aim to also be a changemaker led me to an autoethnographic approach, as I tried to unpack the intuitive learning. In autoethnography, a researcher's gaze moves back and forth between an outward focus and looking inward as change agent (Ellis, 1997). Bunde-Birouste et al. (2019: 511) argue for the useful alignment of autoethnography with action research, as autoethnography

> Enables the researcher to maximise her (his) personal involvement with the action. The researcher's lived experience is an integral part of the learning; her engagement with the context, stakeholders, and processes, along with her reflections on that engagement, is paramount to the autoethnographic methodology.

The field of autoethnography has been dominated by 'evocative autoethnography', which seeks an emotive response from the reader in order to lead them to an empathetic understanding of the experiences of the author (Ellis, 1997). I borrowed instead from an analytic autoethnographic approach, which involves systematic data collection techniques of a diversity of data "going beyond the 'me'", such as interviews and document analysis, including of data such as meeting minutes and emails (Bunde-Birouste et al., 2018: 6). In addition, Anderson (2006: 373) proposes that in analytic autoethnography the researcher is "(1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings". These characteristics of the research can "empower" the practitioner to "become the researcher" (Bunde-Birouste et al., 2018: 17). It also holds potential for significant tension for the researcher, being both active participant and decision-maker, and managing documentation, observation and analysis (Anderson, 2006).

I treated myself as a research subject, where I considered the impact of my experiences and relationships on my own sense of agency and wellbeing. I applied the research questions to my own life, and this informed how I engaged with others on the topic. Nonetheless, I tried to avoid automatic assumptions

that what applied to me applied to others, as I discuss regarding positionalities in Section 4.6. Glenzer and Divecha, (2020: 410) highlight that "researcher identity – and the depth to which we have or have not become fully aware of our own forms of enacting dominant forms of action and power – matters profoundly". To intentionally include other voices in the analysis, I based my findings on the intersection of my self-observations and the data from others, in the form of more formal interviews (as I describe below).

### 4.5.4 Formal interviews

To support the ethnographic methods, I undertook semi-structured in-depth interviews, based around the questions in Appendix D and E. I conducted 38 interviews, in two main rounds, with the first mainly in September 2018 and June 2019 and the second in April and May 2020 (Appendix B shows those interviewees I reference in this thesis). In the thesis I refer to these interviewees as respondents. In the first round I tried to gain a diversity of worldviews through purposive sampling (Suen et al., 2014) of stakeholders, including residents uninvolved in Makers Valley initiatives, business owners, and partner changemakers. I selected interviewees based on those to whom I had access and who I thought might provide different viewpoints for me to explore. Having already lived and worked in the neighbourhood for seven months and during this time having made a point of seeking out different communities, I had sufficient connections to easily select people to interview. Nevertheless, I did not take the results as generalisable, and I was conscious of interviewer bias. Furthermore, some interviewees already knew me well enough to subconsciously modify their responses. In the second round of interviews, I selected a range of changemakers whom I assessed to have succeeded in transformative social innovation.

As suggested by Stringer (2007: 70) in the initial interviews I included mainly "grand tour" questions about their conception of a 'good life' that were "sufficiently global to enable participants to describe the situation in their own terms". Questions included, for example, "How does an average day go for you?

From when you wake up to when you go to sleep?" and "Are you living a good life right now?" I then asked "extension", "encouragement" and "example" questions to delve deeper into certain aspects of their response and help my understanding with relevance to the research questions (Stringer, 2007: 71). After the first set of interviews, I undertook a thematic analysis of the interview responses, drew out a second list of questions and identified interviewees in addition to those I interviewed in the first round. Thus I interviewed some respondents once and some twice. In this second set of interviews, I also followed up with questions based on the interviewee's previous responses where they had had a first interview, and asked for feedback on the 'enabling' role I played and the Makers Valley projects they had knowledge of. I recorded all formal interviews and made notes during the interview, though five interview recordings were not audible due to background noise, and I had to rely on my notes. I transcribed all but three of the interviews, for which I received funding to have professionally transcribed.

### 4.5.5 Reflection and analysis

A common technique in ethnography and autoethnography is to record field notes of participant observation: one's own experiences and interactions on an ongoing basis (Anderson, 2006; Stringer, 2007). Action researchers recommend the same (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Herr & Anderson, 2005). On an ongoing basis, I recorded my observations and reflections in the form of a research journal.

As noted above, on five occasions I took a week or more out of the research context to reflect more intensively by referring to the literature, writing short pieces documenting any findings or analysis that arose, and planning further action. I found that these reflection stages also allowed for the surfacing of aspects that should be discussed with critical friends or research partners, in order to plan further iterations of the action, or distinguish more clearly any ethical concerns (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Similar to what I found, Schmid (2019: 120) notes regarding his similar PhD research that the travel between the

city where he lived and where he undertook his research allowed him to "move not only in physical space but also in emotional and conceptual space". In my research journal, I generally recorded findings already in 'analysed' form, or I reflected on a situation that led me to understand something in a certain way, rather than recording the specific words that were said. This analysis happened as a natural process of comparing conversations and observations with the literature, and my previous experiences.

In the more consolidated reflection stages of Cycles Four and Seven, I performed a comprehensive thematic analysis. I read through the interview transcripts, research journal, and excerpts I had taken from literature and coded these into broad categories, then more distinct themes. Further analysis arose through the drafting and redrafting of the thesis. In striving for validity, I followed a 'member checking' process while writing, for observations that I felt the need for additional clarity on. This process involved asking partner changemakers (my key respondents) and residents for feedback on my findings, a process discussed by, for example, Slettebø (2020). The next section addresses ethical concerns relating to my research methods, starting with a continuation of the narrative above, concerning interviews.

## 4.6 Ethics and Positionality

The different methods I used required different approaches to addressing ethical concerns, with specific ethical concerns relevant to action research coming to the fore with participant observation and my level of involvement in the action. I had to be aware of my positionality on an ongoing basis, and acknowledge that there was limited opportunity to retain a neutral position.

### 4.6.1 Informed consent

Informed consent was straightforward to obtain for the formal interviews. I used a standardised signed consent form, and was clear about options of anonymity

and confidentiality. It was surprising how candid partner changemakers were. Some did not desire anonymity, with some expressing sentiments such as they "have nothing to hide" (I5, ). Nevertheless, I chose to use pseudonyms and remove identifiers where possible, though balancing this against my aim to contribute practical knowledge regarding enabling a wellbeing economy. I preferred anonymising identities because I found myself being overly self-conscious in my analysis of changemakers' words or actions, due to my awareness of the public availability of the final thesis.

While obtaining formal consent in the day-to-day action was generally not possible, in introductions I included that I was a PhD researcher from Wits, undertaking research in the neighbourhood. I tried to exchange phone numbers if there had been any significant exchange of information or potential for partnership. I kept data from these interactions completely anonymous, and have been cautious about including direct quotes. I stored all documentation on a password-protected computer and phone, both of which only I had access to. While I found these aspects of my research easier to navigate, the action presented specific challenges.

### 4.6.1 Specific ethical concerns for action researchers

The Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa's Code of Research Ethics (HSRC, n.d., n.p.n.) upholds the principles of "respect and protection", "transparency", "scientific and academic professionalism" and "accountability". The researcher is expected to protect the welfare of all participants, and to be particularly concerned about the rights of vulnerable groups (ibid). Even so, some action researchers argue that the 'othering' of human beings as research subjects that may occur in social science research, including more traditional forms of ethnography, produces a 'condescending ethics' unsuitable for action research (Eikeland, 2006: 37). For many action researchers, it is their ethics that drives them to undertake projects intended to directly benefit participants (Brydon-Miller et al., 2006). However, this involvement in the action and relationships with participants also poses specific ethical challenges, particularly

where there are large differences in power and agency between researchers and participants (ibid). Brydon-Miller (2008: 202) argues that "action researchers must remain mindful of the complex nature of balancing individual and collective action and the relationships of power and privilege which inevitably frame these processes of decision-making".

Action research necessitates a specific approach to ethics procedures. Maguire et al. (2001: 103, as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2005: 112) argue that "universities … have created a variety of conditions inimical to the practice of action research", largely as a result of the ethics review board processes. This is because action research is "a dynamic, evolving practice" and "there is no fool proof plan to avoid ethical dilemmas as the research develops", which can pose challenges in gaining permission from ethics committees that expect finalised research plans before the research begins (Herr & Anderson, 2005: 112). Crucially, beyond ethics board approval, the researcher must be able to recognise a potential ethical issue so it can be taken into consideration and addressed at the point it arises. Reason and Bradbury (2001: xxvii) suggest, "the primary 'rule' in Action Research practice is to be aware of the choices one is making [in the moment] and their consequences". This reflection and resultant planning should ideally be in discussion with research partners and critical friends (Stringer, 2007).

While I found the ethics committee's comments on my proposal to be helpful rather than obstructive, ethical conduct in my research indeed often came down to moment-to-moment interactions. I experienced this early in my research while note-taking during a meeting at Victoria Yards. A participant asked if I could show him my notes, as he was curious as to what I was writing, and in fact seemed suspicious. They were verbatim-style notes without analysis, so I 'checked in' with the employee he was meeting, through making eye contact, and decided in the moment that no harm would come from showing him. This simple sign of trust seemed to allay any suspicions he was holding. Nevertheless, the notes I was taking were documenting a discussion between him and his subordinate, and even if she did not object, if I had felt that what I had written in

the meeting could have caused any harm to her, I would have ideally declined to show him the notes.

### 4.6.2 Positionality and agency

Some of the ethics committee's most helpful concerns were regarding my positionality, considering my heavy investment in the project. Herr and Anderson (2005) list multiple ways a researcher can think about his/ her/ their positionality within an action research project. Firstly, as raised above regarding autoethnography, the 'insider/ outsider' relationship is key for the researcher to understand (ibid). I was both an integral part of the action and the diverse Makers Valley 'community' that came about. The high mobility of people living and working in the neighbourhood supported me to quickly achieve 'insider' status with wealthier stakeholders, for instance in the context of Victoria Yards. I also developed insider status with many residents, though my cultural background and socioeconomic status were different to most residents, as discussed below. Furthermore, my insider/ outsider status shifted with the research cycles and stages within the cycles. As I led or participated in different informal partnerships, and spent more time in public spaces, I experienced greater normalisation as a stakeholder and resident, and shifted toward an 'insider' position. However, my reflection stages meant I temporarily took on an 'outsider' status.

The level of informal power or actual hierarchical position within the community or organisation is a second lens for understanding positionality (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In projects for which I played the role of enabler or initiator, I was the de facto leader in the beginning, and often retained an advisory role, even when stepping back from operations. In some projects my hierarchical position was formalised within an organisation, for instance I was asked to be the board chair of the Makers Valley Partnership in Cycle Six.

A researcher's position regarding dominant groups in society (such as race, socioeconomic group, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability and

religion) is a third lens to understand positionality (Herr & Anderson, 2005). When living in the United Kingdom (part of research Cycle Zero) I was conscious of having to prove in everyday encounters that I was not actually working class, while working as a 'delivery boy', delivering takeaways on my bicycle in Liverpool. Even when not in my delivery uniform, I found myself dropping references to my education, work history, and places I had travelled. Yet I had not felt this living in Ghana, Kenya or South Africa. In the global South, my skin (combined with being a native English-speaking, cisgendered male) provided me with the status of an elite. In Johannesburg during the first year of the action research, I wrote in my research journal,

> I can choose to cycle rather than buy a car [a strong status symbol in many societies including in South Africa], and when I arrive at a dinner party as a white man people do not doubt that it is a matter of choice – I have the capability of buying and driving a car. My dignity remains intact and my social status is unaffected, or perhaps even boosted, as I am seen as someone with environmental concerns (Research Journal, 03/08/2018).

Through instances of reflection such as this, I tried to understand how I held greater status and power than most Makers Valley residents, including other white people (and how these experiences differed from those in the United Kingdom). In a further reflection in my journal, I asked, "Why can I walk in dirty stretched old clothes and it feels people still read me as being higher class than poor whites of the area like at the Bertrams flats?" (Research Journal, 19/08/2018). Bourdieu writes that class distinction and preferences are "most marked in the ordinary choices of everyday existence, such as furniture, clothing, or cooking" (Bourdieu, 1984: 77). Likes and dislikes mirror those of someone's associated class. He refers to this as 'habitus', which consists of both the tendency to hold and use one's body in a certain way, such as posture and accent, and more abstract mental habits, including schemes of perception, classification, appreciation, feeling, and action (Bourdieu, 1984).

My habitus afforded me a positionality that meant greater agency than most residents and some of the changemakers with whom I worked. Taking heed from

Brydon-Miller, et al. (2006), a core purpose of my action research was to use my positionality for the greater good, by playing an enabler role towards a wellbeing economy. Indeed, my positionality allowed for rapid entry into the more powerful structures at Victoria Yards, where the shareholders and management were all white, and the original neighbourhood partnership (which was largely made up of white people before my attempts to diversify it). The other representatives shared my predominantly Western English-speaking culture, although I consciously downplayed any personal differences that I perceived, for instance between my sexuality and theirs, and played up shared norms. I return to this in Section 6.5 on building trust and social capital, regarding the discomfort I felt regarding my authenticity.

My habitus, linked to my skin colour, and the agency I gained from this, also supported my ability to gain access other resource-holders, such as the funding organisations discussed in Chapter Six. The organisations were based in the global North, and the key decision-makers were also white and English-speaking. Part of my role as an enabler involved acting as a 'trust broker' between these funders and people and organisations based in Makers Valley, and grew into the formation of Makers Valley Partnership as an intermediary organisation (I return to this also in Section 6.5 and in Section 6.2 on building community in Makers Valley). Though I did not focus explicitly on race in my research, I developed the sense that being white helped me build the trust quickly, as with Victoria Yards and the original neighbourhood partnership. Nevertheless, my research did not focus on race, nor did I probe aspects of race with resource-holders, and thus I do not undertake comprehensive analysis on the matter for this thesis. What I did find is that my overall habitus conferred disproportionate power on me in relation to people from non-English, less-Westernised backgrounds. Furthermore, the assumed neutrality and prestige associated with me being a PhD candidate gave me greater agency than many other participants. Thus my positionality gave me significant agency, and allowed me to grow my agency further.

This agency, supported also by my previous work experience and existing bridging social capital, also conferred upon me greater ethical responsibility. Particularly in the cases of the initiatives I set up, my disproportionately greater agency meant I could sometimes unconsciously override others' decisions, or make decisions without any consultation. I recognised that ongoing consciousness and reflexivity was key here (Herr & Anderson, 2005), but when I was tired or stressed, I could be less mindful. This caused me significant internal tension, both in ascertaining what the most ethical decision would be in the moment, and when I realised after the time that I had switched to "autocratic autopilot mode" (Research Journal, 25/03/2019). The autoethnographic processes described above assisted me in critically observing my own behaviour, and I believe I learnt during the process, particularly to be sensitive to my need for more frequent stages of reflection. Regularly pausing and writing about more challenging experiences assisted me to make ethical decisions as the action progressed. By allowing time to speak frankly and informally to participants and reflect on social relations as the projects unfolded, I was more able to change course, so as to divert away from potentially harmful situations that were building up (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2006).

### 4.6.3 Objectivity, intention and action research

As is typical in action research (Brydon-Miller, 2006), there was limited possibility for me to strive for neutrality. I had a specific agenda to enable a wellbeing economy, and a skill-set based on previous experiences that encouraged me to explore a certain method towards this: the enablement of changemakers. I grappled with merging this facet of my action research with my previous more conventional research experience, such as in my master's degree, where I attempted to enter the fieldwork as neutrally as possible, without aiming to influence a situation. However, I was comforted by experienced action researchers such as Herr and Anderson (2005: 100) who identify that "a recurring question in the [action research] literature is whether the researcher needs to be requested as a resource by a community or group, or whether the researcher can determine that a problem exists and then decide to engage". The

research cycles above show that in my action research there was a mix, but I generally took the latter role.

Finally, as per standard ethics guidelines such as those of the HSRC (n.d.), research should put measures in place to identify and limit any harm to people or the environment. Because of the expectations the promise of interventions can generate, action research has the potential for greater harm than other methods, if these expectations are not met (Stringer, 2007). One way I tried to reduce this risk was to ensure transparency throughout and prevent false expectations arising among action partners. For instance, in MVP I strived to ensure that all partners had access to the same knowledge, such as information about budget limitations or delays in implementation.

## 4.7 Conclusion

Three relevant characteristics of action research include that it involves intervention, that this action forms the premise for the research rather than theory, and the involvement of the researcher means positionality comes to the fore. I found the cyclical approach of alternating stages of action and reflection fitted my approach to changemaking and developed my practice. There were seven overarching research cycles between the more formal start of my research in October 2017 and the submission of my thesis in May 2021. Within these cycles, the interconnected projects also took on a cyclical approach.

Data sources included secondary data arising from MVP and associated projects, participant observation through an urban ethnography approach, my autoethnographic research journal, and in-depth semi-structured interviews focusing on key changemakers in Makers Valley. Applying standard ethics procedures was relatively simple in the formal interviews, compared to the remainder of the research. While I, like other action researchers, initiated the project as a result of my ethical concerns, this involvement also posed specific ethical challenges. Constant mindfulness of my choices and their consequences

was essential, and was assisted by me being responsive to my need for reflection away from the action. Greater agency meant greater ethical responsibility. Therefore, this reflection needed to also involve the different angles of my positionality, including my insider/ outsider status, formal hierarchy or level of informal power, and membership of dominant societal groups. Finally, while complete objectivity is not possible in action research, I aimed to be transparent about my identities and participants' expectations regarding interventions. In the next chapters I present the findings and analysis arising from this action research, with Chapter Five discussing factors that contributed to enabling changemakers through building community.

# 5. WELLBEING, AFFLUENCE AND CHANGEMAKERS

## 5.1 Introduction

The vision at the heart of my action research arose from wellbeing economies literature advocating a 'beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP)' paradigm, which at a local scale translated to prioritising wellbeing rather than profit. However, as recognised by Gibson-Graham and Roelvink's (2009) work on community economies, Coscieme et al.'s (2019) work on wellbeing economies and Avelino et al.'s (2019) work on transformative social innovation, further definition of 'economies' and transformation goals should be locally defined. As shown in Figure 1.1, exploring local conceptions of wellbeing was a first step I carried out (after having moved to Makers Valley). In Section 5.2 I draw together the literature discussed in Chapter Two and the findings regarding the Makers Valley context (see Chapter Three) by honing in on factors of neighbourhood wellbeing. I briefly discuss examples of initiatives in my action research that aimed to address negative impacts on neighbourhood wellbeing.

Interestingly, Jackson's (2016) summary of research at a macroeconomic scale showing a delinking of wellbeing from material affluence above a certain level of income had relevance to the local scale of Makers Valley. However, I drew on Jackson et al.'s (2004) earlier work in applying a frame of basic material needs as opposed to income level (Section 5.3.1). Similar to White's (2017) understanding of the 'relationality' of wellbeing, I found participants' assessments of their own level of affluence, and the life satisfaction associated with these assessments, to be relational (Section 5.3.2). Furthermore, as shown by the phenomenon of hedonic adaptation (Diener et al., 2006), participants made sense of their lives in relation to previous circumstances. I found too that they made sense of current challenges regarding their expected life trajectories (Section 5.3.3).

The second half of the chapter forms the bridge between wellbeing in the context of Makers Valley and the enablement of changemakers, which I turn to in the following chapter. I cover the relationship between wellbeing and

changemaking, exploring how changemakers were motivated by the sense of agency and purpose they achieved through their work (Section 5.4). Lastly, I discuss how opinions of their kin, their communities and public figures impacted on changemakers' sense of wellbeing and thus their choices and motivation (Section 5.5).

## 5.2 Wellbeing and the Makers Valley Neighbourhood

My first research sub-question, which informed the bulk of my research in action research Cycles One and Two was, "What currently constitutes a 'good life' (wellbeing) according to local residents and stakeholders?" In the first half of this chapter, I present my findings regarding Makers Valley participants' reports of wellbeing. These findings build on those presented in Chapter Three regarding the research context.

### 5.2.1 Ascertaining an understanding of neighbourhood wellbeing

Regional group Wellbeing Economy Africa puts forward that before an action researcher can identify interventions to enable community-driven wellbeing economies, they first need to understand the "community definition of wellbeing" (GovInn, 2017). I understood 'communities' in Makers Valley as being defined by a combination of geography and interest, with many overlapping communities in the same area (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2014; Purdue, 2001). Makers Valley became one such collection of overlapping communities (as I discuss in Chapter Six). However, particularly in the first action research cycles, Makers Valley Partnership (MVP) strived to reach beyond these MVP communities. MVP carried out a number of studies assessing residents' and other stakeholders' perceptions of the Makers Valley neighbourhood and its impact on their wellbeing. These studies were structured in a way to support MVP and my work within Makers Valley towards enabling a wellbeing economy, through better understanding participants' experiences at the time. They also aimed to catalyse a sense of a common vision and community (see Chapter Six).

There was a contrast between the reports from interviewees involved in MVP projects and surveys that were undertaken prior to the start of MVP initiatives, or surveys with respondents that were not involved in MVP (see Chapter Four for details about my data sources). Respondents unaware of MVP or developments such as Victoria Yards spoke about the neighbourhood as a detractor to their desired 'good life'. Perceptions revolved around 'crime and grime' (safety concerns and litter and dumping on the streets), deteriorated built form, and poverty. Interviewers for MVP usually had to ask respondents explicitly what they liked about living there, to elicit somewhat positive responses, and even then, people sometimes simply responded "nothing!" (I19, 19/09/2018; Appendix B provides detail about interviewees I have quoted). The most commonly held positive perception (seen as a support to their wellbeing) was that of the neighbourhood's potential, especially among the changemakers of Makers Valley. Much of these changemakers' work involved realising the potential they saw in Makers Valley's built environment or its residents and stakeholders.

Respondents mostly perceived the neighbourhood as facilitating greater wellbeing than other inner city areas, particularly regarding violent crime. Yeoville, to the north of Observatory Ridge, was often used as a point of comparison. Sometimes this comparison was raised when expressing fear that the Makers Valley neighbourhoods would become more like Yeoville, with more 'Nigerians' dealing drugs, or more taverns, drug dens and gunshots.

### 5.2.2 Safety and violent crime

Respondents were nearly unanimous in their biggest concern being crime. The neighbourhood was seen as a "very dangerous place" (I16, 20/04/2020), and people feared being mugged in the street, especially after nightfall. These findings support Vanderhoven's from his 2009 study of Troyeville. His interviewees described "being fearful of violence, rape and murder" (Vanderhoven, 2009: 123). While Vanderhoven writes that the mostly middle- to

upper-class white residents he studied refused to "close themselves off from life because of that fear" (ibid), I found this not to be the case, perhaps as my study was undertaken 10 years later. Fear of crime and violence limited people's freedom of movement and ability to congregate, a fear that was prevalent across the diversity of Makers Valley but had a significantly greater impact on females. While up to a hundred men could be seen around the activity hubs such as those on Derby Road (see Chapter Three), and even young boys would be seen roaming around in groups in the earlier evening, I scarcely saw women or girls after dark. Women would generally go straight home after work, to arrive before dark.

Crime remained an issue throughout the action research, with some residents perceiving the situation to worsen over the period. Crime and violence is widely recognised to be a symptom of broader systemic issues, particularly inequality (Bhorat et al., 2020; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Broader inequality and joblessness worsened over the action research period, particularly as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown (Africa Check, 2020). As highlighted by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), higher inequality correlates with 'ill-being' in multiple dimensions, including violent crime. I was sometimes surprised that more violence did not occur, given the extreme inequalities, with the everyday scenario of some stakeholders driving cars worth over 1 million ZAR (70 000 USD) past others who were struggling to feed their children.

Through the enabling approach (as described in Chapter Six) MVP and partners tried to support the changemakers leading various neighbourhood-based groups in their efforts to enhance security. A local non-profit organisation showed the most promise, as it had a track record in significantly reducing crime around a main minibus taxi rank in the inner city. I secured an offer of support from Nando's head office, in the form of daily meals for patrollers and sponsorship of equipment, and the MVP Team assisted with developing a strategy and writing a funding proposal. We also held several conflict management sessions between the organisation and two other groups that also wanted to undertake neighbourhood patrols in the hope of securing an income from residents and

businesses in the area. However, the managers of the group found alternate, more secure forms of income, and the initiative dissipated within two months before impact on wellbeing in the neighbourhood could be properly assessed.

Several other crime prevention initiatives appeared over the course of the action research, and the MVP Team played a similar enabling approach where there was a need for this; however, we did not have capacity or desire to run a security initiative in the form of the eKhaya initiative (HDA, 2012) or 'community improvement districts', due to the potential of these 'embedding' neoliberalism at a local level (Didier et al., 2012; see discussion in Chapter Four of this thesis).

### 5.2.3 Cleanliness

The second most common aspect of the neighbourhood that participants spoke of as negatively impacting their wellbeing was the litter and dumping, as well as public urination by men. There was a general sense among long-term stakeholders that this had gotten worse over the last few decades (until some of the more successful Makers Valley initiatives began to impact this positively). Stakeholders (particularly the wealthier ones) bemoaned the built environment that suffered "neglect, abandon and decay" (I25, 19/05/2020).

While it was cathartic for many to find a scapegoat, and fingers were most often pointed at other groups or government, as with the issue of crime above, I found the prevalence of litter to be symptomatic of broader systemic crises and inequalities. Municipal 'wheely-bins' were useful to people collecting scrap to sell, or to store the belongings of those sleeping rough. They were thus frequently stolen when they were put out on rubbish collection day. While the municipality's waste management entity was able to supply more, it needed the ratepayer to report the theft, and an up-to-date municipal account. Due in part to the high level of negligent landlords that often lived in wealthier suburbs, many properties were left without. This led to tenants stealing each other's bins in desperation. It also led to tenants dumping waste in specific spots on street corners or under trees. While the waste management entity was one part of

government that was actually highly responsive, weekly municipal street sweeping rosters were not sufficient to keep up with litter and refuse disposal in public areas.

MVP and partners ran various once-off clean-up campaigns over the action cycles, for which groups came together in a park or to walk a specific route, picking up all litter. We had the support of the municipal waste management entity for cleaning materials and vehicles on a number of occasions. These efforts made a quick and tangible difference and instantly boosted participants' wellbeing but entailed only a short-term fix. These clean-up campaigns had a more systemic impact on wellbeing through catalysing community across socioeconomic lines (I discuss initiatives that built community in Chapter Six). However, learning from the earlier cycles, the initiative that made a tangible difference to the level of cleanliness in the streets over a long period, was part of the Makers Valley Covid-19 Response (Cycle Six, from April 2020). A 'swap shop' was started where members could swap recyclables for points (essentially a nascent community currency), and then exchange the points for food and essential items that had been donated. The neighbourhood became noticeably cleaner after this, with various stakeholders commenting on this fact (see Banda, 2021). As shown in Chapter Six, both these efforts were important for community-building, with the latter being most effective.

### 5.2.4 Noise

Neighbourhood rhythms played out in noise levels. On an annual scale, 'Dezemba' times, close to the end of the year, see an increase in music, parties, and drunken shouting at night. Weekly, noise levels peak on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in the late afternoon and during the night. A few people had problems with noise, although many described it as something they did not notice, having grown up with it. As Weinstein (1982) notes, noise 'norms' are set early in life (Weinstein, 1982). Loud music, cars and shouting is common in many urban neighbourhoods across South Africa and the continent. What did come up in many consultations, when people were asked about their desire to

live in Johannesburg's northern suburbs, is that they are 'quiet', here referring to a number of things including fewer people, less crime, and also less noise. I was not aware of any coordinated efforts to target noise pollution, though the neighbourhood WhatsApp groups often featured individuals complaining about noise, and the police were very occasionally called to stop particularly raucous parties, for instance at an illegal tavern adjacent to a car wash in Bertrams.

### 5.2.5 Diversity

Many older white residents subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) bemoaned the increasing diversity and Africanisation of the Makers Valley area. This was reminiscent of the fear that drove the 'white flight' to the North, as discussed by Beavon (2005), and is found by Peppetta (2017) to be the case in most white suburbs across South Africa today. In Makers Valley, however, there was also an aspect of class and xenophobia in these complaints, where middle class and elite people of colour (mostly South Africans) blamed nationalities, races and cultures other than their own (and generally other than white people) for increasing crime and grime, noise, drugs or general social deviance.

Nevertheless, in the workshops MVP held towards piecing together a common vision, diversity came up frequently as one of the neighbourhood's key assets and attractions, in support of collective wellbeing for residents; it was a place where people could "come and learn about different ways of life. For example a Christian coming to explore and learn about an Islamic way of life" (MVP Team, 2019: 2). Even so, "although there is diversity, it is not united" (I26, 20/05/2020), similar to what Vanderhoven (2009) found. Many of the initiatives I enabled, including the co-working spaces and co-living spaces, had policies of intentional diversity in terms of age, race and background, and the space managers and I tried to enable social capital formation between people. Working with this diversity and catalysing bridging social capital between changemakers enabled a great deal of the sharing that was one of MVP's successes in enabling a wellbeing economy in Makers Valley (as presented in Chapter Six). It also

allowed for an exploration of the literature on inequalities, at a local scale, which I turn to next.

## 5.3 Wellbeing and Material Affluence

The immense diversity in material affluence between Makers Valley stakeholders allowed for a selection of research participants that was to some extent representative of South African inequalities. Findings showed absolute material affluence to be important up to the point of being able to satisfy basic needs. Beyond this, wellbeing was affected by material affluence in relation to other people and to previous or expected levels of affluence.

### 5.3.1 Wellbeing and material needs

There were commonalities in what participants raised as factors defining their wellbeing, with trends aligning to livelihood stability. I would regularly ask, 'What is a good life *really*?', part of my 'layperson's' research question, as a conversation starter, in workshops, or while giving group tours as part of the immersion experiences for corporates that MVP co-facilitated. Wealthier people with a stable income would usually respond 'love', 'health', 'family', 'human connection', or 'new experiences'. Lower income people or those with a less stable income would commonly answer 'not to worry about rent', 'decent education for my children', or 'a job'.

A changemaker who was struggling to cover the rent for his flat said the good life for him was

> If I have a shelter and the person next to me [has] shelter, and I go to sleep with my stomach full and wake up with a purpose of what I'm going to do. … So we all have a home, and food. … It's about the basic things people need (I12, 17/07/2019).

Many other participants related times of significant stress and low wellbeing as being those when their shelter was not secure. For a resident of a backyard

room, a good life is "When you have everything, and [are] able to provide for the family, and working, you manage to put food on the table, manage to pay rent, don't have to beg people…" (I29, 17/09/2018). She expressed gratefulness as she felt she had managed to secure this. Creative placemaking project manager said about her experience, working with aspiring changemakers struggling to cover their material needs, that a good life has to have security against "being hungry, not having a home, and all of these issues. … So there are certain basics that need to be taken care of" (I6, 24/06/2019).

Social capital is crucial to foster resilience in vulnerable populations of cities of the global South (Mpanje et al., 2018). In Cycle One MVP found this to be the case in Makers Valley, with people relying on diverse networks to stabilise the ability to meet their needs. However, while most people were able to negotiate access to basic food, shelter, water, clothing and medicine, the quality varied immensely, with shelter being the most obviously unequal. One MVP programme participant lived in an informal settlement in a shack built around a tree. The roof leaked, and it had bed bugs and dangerous illegal electricity connections running through it to other shacks. She slept in the same bed with her daughter, friend and friend's son. Other Makers Valley residents had a three-bedroom house to themselves or shared with only their nuclear family. Shelter needs were also interrelated with other needs, due to the place-based nature of communities. A Changemakers Resident who had come to Johannesburg to start a career as rap artist spoke about the fear of "losing home" if he were not able to pay rent. It would mean that he would lose the "family" that had formed in the house: the social capital that had built up between residents (I20, 18/09/2018).

In Makers Valley a mobile phone and for many, access to the internet or WhatsApp Messenger, seemed to be a basic material need for participants across the socioeconomic spectrum. I saw this as one of the few additions to the material needs identified by historical accounts such as Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs or the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). The need for a mobile phone was intertwined with how information, for instance about livelihood opportunities, was generally distributed and

business was carried out, across all income groups. Participants could manage without it, but, depending on one's livelihood strategies, their ability to achieve stability in the basics was more limited. Even those who were part of an agricultural cooperative living on disused land, who rejected various aspects of contemporary life, chose to have a mobile phone if they could afford it. One 44 Fourth resident lived a minimalist life, with all his possessions aside from his desk fitting into a large suitcase. However, he said in an interview "No internet? That would impact severely. It would make life quite difficult…" (I21, 11/09/2018). My own social capital and my work (and therefore my sense of achievement and life meaning and thus wellbeing) would have significantly suffered if I did not have my own smart phone. Mobile phones and the internet have led to a systemic change in material needs due to their impact on communication norms (Pinchot et al., 2011).

My original conceptualisation of wellbeing economies (Cycle Zero) centred on degrowth, which advocates for reducing consumption and thus GDP (Alexander, 2013). A degrowth orientation remains relevant in contexts typical of the global North or South African elites, due to the higher material standards of living and levels of consumption. However, following these MVP studies on community wellbeing in Cycle One and following cycles, I found that in Makers Valley many residents would likely see an increase in wellbeing from increased stability in their levels of consumption satisfying their basic needs.

In contrast to participants struggling to cover their basic needs, wealthier participants identified non-material contributors to wellbeing in response to questions around their perception of a good life. Nevertheless, they still desired a higher income. The managing partner of Victoria Yards said in an interview,

> I want too much. … It could be a lot less. I'm still driven by comforts that are not necessary. … I always believe that [what I have is] not enough. … As I go further down the road I appreciate family and start appreciating what is important. … a lot more simple [life]. (I7, 20/03/2019).

This shows the relationship between wellbeing and material affluence to be convoluted. Wellbeing studies highlight that people across the income and

wealth spectrums generally indicate they would need two to three times their current amount to be truly content (Pinsker, 2018). One Changemakers Resident said that "peace is time and space, and money can give you that", however, he's "seen people from every background suffer. Rich people are sad. White people are sad. … The trouble will still be there" (I10, 18/09/2018). Alexander (2012: 42) argues that "once people have their basic material needs adequately met, the correlation between income and happiness quickly begins to fade".

Indeed, "from a eudemonic wellbeing perspective it has convincingly been argued that many 'real' needs such as meaningful relationships and work, identity, opportunities to shape community life and politics, can be achieved with low resource inputs" (Büchs & Koch, 2019: 158). This phenomenon has been well-documented and discussed at macroeconomic level, originating with Easterlin's (1974) studies of GDP growth and wellbeing in Japan (as argued in the discussion on 'beyond GDP' in Chapter 2). What was interesting to note from the action research is that macroeconomic findings seemed to hold true at a micro scale as well. Chancellor and Lyubomirsky (2011) explore materialism and 'over-consumption' at an individual level and show that a reprioritisation of non-material goals and factors of wellbeing supports heightened wellbeing. Guillen-Royo (2010; 2018) and Jackson et al. (2004) identify the "wellbeing dividend", where it is possible for well-resourced people to live lives of higher wellbeing by consuming less.

In my autoethnographic observations, I found that I could work and socialise with people who owned vastly more material goods, without feeling I was disadvantaged or excluded. If I needed independent transport, I cycled or used ride-hailing services on my smartphone when travelling further afield. Access to computers could be provided at MVP's co-working space, Victoria Yards (VY) Commons. In my line of work, people actually took interest in the fact that I lived in a less wealthy neighbourhood. Understanding my experiences in light of a capabilities approach (Sen, 1999), it is likely that I did not find my wellbeing to suffer because my lifestyle remained a choice: I had the freedom to consume and live differently from others, rather than my circumstances being a result of limits

to my agency or freedom. Advocates refer to this as voluntary simplicity and associate it with the degrowth movement, but at a micro-economic, grassroots level (Alexander, 2013). A key difference in Makers Valley to some wellbeing economies frameworks developed in the global North is that a degrowth message would not be applicable to many Makers Valley residents who struggled to cover their basic needs.

Combining the findings on the relationship between wellbeing and material affluence, and those on sharing in Chapter Six, I arrived at an interesting conclusion regarding wellbeing economies. It seems there is a possibility for wealthier individuals to re-orientate their goals from increasing their material affluence to enhancing the wellbeing of others, and so enhance their own wellbeing. The next sections build on this understanding, and I discuss my findings regarding personal wellbeing in relation to others, to the past, and to expectations of the future.

### 5.3.2 Wellbeing perceived in relation to the material affluence of others

Anderson et al. (2012: 764) argue that sociometric status, "the respect and admiration one has in face-to-face groups", is important to subjective wellbeing. Indeed, in my action research, participants evaluated their life circumstances in relation to their points of reference, often those they perceived as peers. A woman who moved into 39 Victoria with her baby said "Now? Life it is good. It's better [here for me] than [my siblings] … They are suffering…" (I18, 09/06/2019). People frequently compared their own life trajectory to those of other people they knew, and to what they saw as a current 'normal' standard of living. Long-term friends and family were people's most common reference points.

People greatly feared shame and loss of dignity or status as a result of the opinions of others. Another resident moving into 39 Victoria with her two daughters was concerned that her bed was "not right" and wanted to move it after dark, otherwise "the people they going to see my bed and [start to] gossip

too much" (pers. comm., 01/12/2018). The 39 Victoria manager spoke about the impact of the loss of income he experienced when his company completed the government tender that had supported it. "At some stage I had to lie about where I'm staying. To friends. And had to cut down quite a few friends, not by choice but because of the different lifestyle we were now living" (I16, 24/04/2019).

Higher income participants also feared a loss of dignity linked to a loss in income. A wealthier resident of the 44 Fourth Changemakers Residence described the negative impact on wellbeing he experienced when he did not get a freelance job he was expecting. He worried that he would have to ask someone for help, which would reveal or emphasise his relative material poverty. Reflecting, he said, "that anxiety was not about my survival – if I'm hungry I could phone somebody – it was more a dignity or a status thing (I22, 12/09/2018). Furthermore, Pillay, (2019) argues that someone may become materially better off in an absolute sense, but if they measure themselves against others whose material wealth is rising at a greater pace, the feeling of "relative deprivation" may negatively impact their wellbeing due to a sense of envy or dissatisfaction (Pillay, 2019: 385). Harrington (2016) argues that feeling wealthy is based on a comparison with others in one's reference group. Consumption is therefore informed by what individuals feel they must buy to keep up their status.

Considering that the findings above show research participants to understand their own level of material affluence in relation to others, it would make sense for there to be a relationship between inequalities and wellbeing, as highlighted by the discussion in Chapter Two (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). I found people to be particularly affected when there was significant inequality between them and their reference points, as identified by Harrington (2016). "Ultimately, the condition of our lives is intimately interconnected with that of others, what Martin Luther King called an 'inescapable network of mutuality'" (Ford Foundation, 2018: n.p.n.).

Anderson et al. (2012: 764) argue, "the pursuit of social status is a powerful motive that drives much of social behaviour". However, "achieving high status

has little impact on one's subjective wellbeing" (ibid). In fact, Jackson (2016: 219) argues "unequal societies drive unproductive status competition and undermine wellbeing". In line with wellbeing economy paradigms like degrowth, White, 2017 (132) argues for a refocus of policy from production to distribution, to ensure everyone gets "a rightful share". She identifies redistribution through a basic income grant as one option to enable this, which would be provided to all residents, regardless of employment status or otherwise. The basic income grant or universal basic income received increased positive attention in numerous countries as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Nettle et al., 2021). The South African government is at the time of writing in April 2021 in negotiations about providing a basic income to replace grants introduced as Covid-19 relief (The Citizen, 2021). This could impact the wellbeing of the most vulnerable by helping to satisfy basic material needs, given the findings presented in the previous section. If wealthy people have more realistic points of comparison within their face-to-face groups, their aspirations for material affluence may be lower. This could enhance possibilities for more voluntary simplicity and sharing. I certainly found that the broad spectrum of material affluence in Makers Valley provided me with a more accurate sense of where I fell on the national inequality spectrum than if I had only the people living in a northern suburb of Johannesburg as reference points. In Chapter Six, I return to this discussion regarding the need to intentionally facilitate integration and bonding social capital.

### 5.3.3 Wellbeing in relation to past experiences and future expectations, and the role of hope

Not only is wellbeing experienced in relation to other individuals as reference points, but also in relation to previous and future points in an individual's life (Büchs & Koch, 2019). Many participants expressed their sense of a good life in relation to other periods in their life, for instance a decrease in freedoms in relation to what they were used to (as discussed in the previous section), or they expressed hope that things would improve in future in their current life, or the 'afterlife'. This hope for the future buoyed their wellbeing in the present.

Respondents used phrases such as “where I’ve come from” (I7, 20/03/2019) or “my life, before” (I18, 09/06/2019). Building on the findings of the last two sections, it is evident that rather than there being an ‘absolute’ against which participants understood and rated their wellbeing, it seemed they compared their current life experience in relation to their hopes for the future, and their past life experiences.

As discussed in Chapter Two, hedonic adaptation is the phenomenon where people return to a baseline level of happiness despite gains in income or their level of material affluence (Diener et al., 2006). This phenomenon incentivises people to pursue ever greater levels of affluence, a condition commonly referred to as a ‘hedonic treadmill’ (Barrington-Leigh, 2016). Inspired to try a wellbeing economy paradigm in my everyday economic decisions, in my autoethnographic research I found that I was able to significantly reduce my expenditure and material goods I relied on without this impacting negatively on my own wellbeing. I gained in wellbeing when I was able to see tangible benefits from spending my income on other projects (I discuss sharing and prosocial behaviour in the next chapter). However, as described above, this was always a choice, i.e. I perceived the change to be a result of my own agency. Furthermore, the scholarship I received guaranteed the satisfaction of my basic material needs. An unwanted reduction in income can have a lasting negative effect on wellbeing (Lucas, 2007). Where people’s income reduced significantly without it being a choice, it seemed to impact on their wellbeing. Eight of the fifteen 39 Victoria residents experienced a loss of income during the first national lockdown, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and their wellbeing significantly declined compared to those whose income remained secure.

Respondents’ current level of life satisfaction also seemed to be affected by their hopes for the future, and whether what they were currently experiencing was contributing to them being able to achieve that vision. As long as there was security in being able to cover their basic needs, life challenges and tension within themselves and with others that differed in opinion could lead to greater overall fulfilment, particularly if there was a sense of growth that arose through

this process, which was often dependent on their personal vision. Indeed, Seligman (2011) argues that challenges that seem possible to overcome contribute a sense of flourishing. The CEO of MVP partner The Coloured Cube (TCC) was vehement about this point, and said,

> …To me the idea of having a good life meaning that there [are] no difficulties doesn't correlate. … It means thinking, questioning, philosophising about the purpose of life. Because to me a good life is a substantial life, it's not a life that is easy. … So a good life is the growth of an individual (I6, 24/06/2019).

Following a fireside discussion with housemates at the 44 Fourth Street Changemakers Residence, I recorded in my research journal (11/06/2018) my observation that to them "long-term wellbeing actually includes periods of feeling down, deep sadness, mourning". Similarly, a 39 Victoria resident spoke about challenging times in ways that allude to Maslow's (1987) argument that fulfilling the human need of 'self-actualisation' contributes to motivation and wellbeing. She said, "I get a better sense of myself through [a challenging] situation" which one is not required to "look at unless you go through certain things" (I14, 09/06/2019).

Importantly, these participants did not feel confined to a difficult situation, which they saw as temporary: they framed it in terms of growth and hope. 94 Colours co-founder said, "this time last year, I had a reality barrier. There were so many thoughts – am I cursed in life? Am I going to fail? Am I not going to be something in life?" (I3, 10/06/2019). But looking back on the period, he is glad he went through it, as he feels it helped build a deeper understanding of himself, and strength that he is grateful for. The 39 Victoria manager said of previous challenging times in his life that he "had to have that hope," that circumstances would get better, and this boosted his resilience and wellbeing (I16, 24/04/2019).

Grounding his observations in practical techniques of Stoic philosophy, Irvine (2008) argues that individuals need a vision to achieve a 'good life', and a strategy to achieve that vision. Having a vision of what they want to achieve with

their work, or even a strategy for their life, seemed in many cases to be the start to Makers Valley changemakers having a sense of agency. Furthermore, having hope that they will actually achieve this vision seemed to enable greater resilience in their sense of agency, and to sustain focus on their goals in more challenging times. Respondents spoke of the importance of a sense of progress, or building experience towards realising this vision, whether it be "levels" (I23, 18/09/2018) of achieving a good life, or successes in a specific project. Short-term challenges or setbacks in fact could enhance capabilities and thus agency, depending on the changemaker's resilience. If the changemaker was able to integrate the setback within the narrative of their long-term vision, it seemed to support greater resilience in their eudemonic wellbeing and agency. Moreover, some respondents spoke of the need for flexibility in this vision, with one changemaker highlighting that a vision will likely develop different "branches" (I2, 23/04/2020). The specifics of someone's life vision could then be allowed to change based on experiential learning along the way or different life stages, such as getting dependents or economic crises (I6, 26/06/2019). In this way, the vision could remain consistent and the changemaker's wellbeing resilient.

The sense of hope and potential was a common thread between Makers Valley changemakers, who, as one changemaker working with vulnerable children during the Covid-19 lockdown argued, were "refusing to give up" (I24, 19/05/2020). A Changemakers Resident who ran street yoga classes, among other things, said that despite the condition of the physical infrastructure, she experienced through the people of the neighbourhood a social infrastructure of "hope, potential [and] opportunity" (I25, 19/05/2020). The neighbourhood was seen by some of those within the Makers Valley community to be "improving and growing" (I27, 20/05/2020). Some changemakers were "really optimistic and hopeful about the area [because they were] now part of [the] change and designing it to what [they] want" (I16, 20/04/2020). Yet people also saw it as "a neighbourhood which is still trying to gather an identity" (MVP Team, 2019a). A project manager on the Makers Valley Partnership (MVP) Team said, "the work being done in the neighbourhood is that of a phoenix. In a heap of ashes it will

rise. ... This can only be done by … working together to make it a better place for all" (I26, 20/05/2020).

Identifying the importance of hope for residents of the neighbourhood, creative placemaking project partner Spaza Art Gallery chose to collect expressions of hope, and collaborated on producing a Book of Hope made up of messages like "hope lives here".




**Figure 5.1:** One of 225 messages of hope gathered in the Makers Valley neighbourhood as part of workshops and interventions of the creative placemaking project. (Source: MVP, 2020).

The discourse on community economies, which provides a 'postcapitalist' understanding of economies promoting human and non-human wellbeing, is founded on the hope that new framings and practices could become the norm. "A local project can be replicated on a global scale" (Gibson-Graham, 2013: xxii). The Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll, 2020) expresses an explicit hope of scaling across contexts, through a glocal approach. Changemakers in Makers Valley were also motivated by the hope that the impact of their changemaking would grow, and this underscored a sense of wellbeing. In the next section I explore other links between changemaking and wellbeing.

## 5.4 Wellbeing and the Motivation of Changemakers

Instead of increasing their levels of material affluence, many changemakers were motivated by other desires. Even so, although changemakers prioritised other proxies for comparison, individuals' sense of wellbeing was still interrelated with others, through their perceptions of other people's opinions of them and sense of respect. In this section, I discuss how changemakers drew motivation from a sense of purpose and agency in their work, and left stable jobs to engage in changemaking, resulting in an increase in their eudemonic wellbeing (I provide an overview of the concept of wellbeing in Chapter Two).

### 5.4.1 Sense of agency and freedom

The relationship between a sense of freedom, agency and wellbeing is well documented, such as economist Amartya Sen's (1999) capability approach, which supports the agency of individuals to lead the life they have reason to value, as opposed to rising GDP, industrialisation or technical progress. My findings aligned with Sen's (1999) capabilities approach, both in the case of participants whom I interviewed to ascertain a contextual understanding of 'a good life', and in the case of changemakers. The Nando's community development facilitator said, "choices … freedom: this is the real basis of a good life – to go where and when and with whom I want" (I15, 15/04/2020). Similarly, for the manager of the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence, a recent time that he felt some of his good life was being "taken away" was when he needed to sell his car. He said, "it just felt less. … I'd rather have it parked [even if there is no need to drive it] than have it not there" (I16, 24/04/2019). Sen (1999) speaks about how capabilities (such as having access to a car and the ability to drive) are not necessarily used, but still impact positively on a person's wellbeing.

Mothers that moved into the same Changemakers Residence described how they had felt resentment towards their children when they were the only caregiver.

They felt burdened because their agency was limited, for instance in what they could do during the day, or the jobs they could seek. At the house they were able to use the childcare services, and other responsible people in the house also cared for their children. They described how much happier they felt, and how their relationship with their children also improved: when they went to work they now missed their children and were happy to see them when they returned (I17, 09/06/2019; I18, 09/06/2019).

Furthermore, as I mention in the discussion on 'learning by doing' (Chapter Seven), a sense of agency had a positive effect on wellbeing, motivating and enabling changemakers. Changemakers described the "rush" of seeing their ideas become reality, even in a project as simple as printing t-shirts promoting their social enterprise: "before, it was just an idea, but now it was coming to life. The feeling was amazing. I feel like even tomorrow I want to do something, I can just do it" (I3, 10/06/2019).

My own conception of a good life involved this sense of agency and I greatly appreciated the freedom in managing my own time, which the PhD process allowed me to do. However, the link between choice, a sense of agency and wellbeing also manifested on the other end of the wellbeing 'spectrum' for me. As highlighted by McLeod (2012), too much choice can be immobilising and impact negatively on personal wellbeing. Furthermore, when a goal seemed unachievable, where I had been trying to accomplish something but felt thwarted, or that there was no progress, my sense of wellbeing significantly declined. My instinctive response was to 'cocoon', overcome by anxiety, and thus my agency diminished further. Other changemakers also described this sense of overwhelm that immobilised them, particularly in the face of goals that would enable significant transformative social innovation but were unachievable given the constraints to agency. Linking to literature on flourishing and flow identified in Chapter Two (Huppert & So, 2013; Seligman, 2011), this immobility likely arose from the inability to match our available knowledge and resources to our intentions. To sustain a degree of changemaking within existing macroeconomic systems, compromises must be achieved in transformative visions, through a

'politics of hybridity' (Schmid, 2021) I discuss in the following chapter and in more depth in Chapter Seven how MVP needed to deploy this politics to achieve a collaborative vision.

### 5.4.2 Alignment with life aspirations and a sense of purpose

As already discussed in the literature review (Chapter Two), having a sense of purpose and meaning, often derived from day-to-day actions, enhances individuals' sense of a life well lived or eudemonic wellbeing (Huppert & So, 2013; Seligman, 2011; Stiglitz et al., 2009). 94 Colours cofounder said in his understanding of how to attain 'a good life', "first things first is to have a purpose" (I1, 10/06/2019). He left his job as a packer at a grocery store and experienced a significant increase in wellbeing, even though his income was not as stable. The increased wellbeing was because he had more time to "work on [his] purpose, to fulfil [his] goals" and co-founded a sneakers customisation social enterprise that 'upcycled' donated and discarded shoes. Another changemaker said, "I was dying inside when I was working at the software firm" and she left the regular, relatively high-paying job to "hustle". She said, "I'd rather struggle a little bit, be a little broke, and really live up to passions, be true to myself" (I8, 20/09/2018).

A study of transformative social innovation communities living according to utopian principles in the United States, despite current systemic constraints, highlights that building these 'nowtopias' involves an "exodus from wage labour on one side, and the embrace of meaningful, freely chosen and 'free' (unpaid) work on the other" (Carlsson & Manning, 2010: 924). These conceptions of 'a good life' contrast the mainstream neoliberal model promoted by advertising and the media: a high consumption lifestyle, in which 'positional goods' are flaunted, such as ostentatious cars, houses and vacations (Schneider, 2007). 'Positional goods' fulfil a need for respect and social status among peers (ibid).

Many Makers Valley changemakers also had an alternate aspirational model made up of non-material goals. Indeed, for participant changemakers, there was

"a very strong sense of self-identity and self purpose within the label of a good life" (I6, 24/06/2019), involving transformation that would benefit others. A changemaker working in early childhood development said, "I want to leave a legacy of why I was here – pass on whatever I am acquiring at the moment to the next generation" (I2, 23/04/2020). Johannesburg Inner City Partnership founder said she would "like to be remembered for trying – making an effort to make a difference. Most importantly, enabling others to grow" (I5, 15/04/2020). 94 Colours co-founder aimed for more systemic change. He wanted to create

> something that … would continue to help people, even after I die. … I'd like to have a positive impact [on] people who I'd never met before, people who are not in my circle" (I1, 10/06/2019).

This sense of purpose and meaning that respondents derived from their changemaking work is what led me to include in my definition of changemakers (see Chapter One) that changemakers are those who 'find life meaning' in changemaking. As organisation Ashoka relates, based on its work building a community of changemakers globally, changemakers are "motivated by a genuine and heartfelt desire to make the world a better place, even if it is on a very personal scale" (Rahman et al., 2016: 3). While some changemakers, including me, did not have the same need for positional goods promoted by a mainstream conception of 'a good life', I found that we still had the need for respect and status among peers, family, or people of power. The next section presents these findings.

## 5.5 Affirmation and Validation

As White (2017: 121) argues regarding her understanding of relational wellbeing (see Chapter Two), the "autonomous individual is a cultural myth". While positional goods played less of a role in changemakers' motivation, some instead satisfied their needs for affirmation and respect from others through their changemaking work. Responding to open-ended questions in interviews and in informal focus groups, Makers Valley changemakers described how affirmation supported a greater sense of meaning to life. Nonetheless,

changemakers did not experience a continuous elevated sense of wellbeing from their work, and there were nuances regarding this relationship between changemaking and personal wellbeing, such as in the case of pressure from kin.

### 5.5.1 Opinions of kin

While my formal interviews did not include a question about family or kin, a number of respondents raised the theme, particularly regarding a lack of understanding or support of their chosen lifestyle and work. Some had family that had actively encouraged them to follow a more mainstream aspirational model. The 39 Victoria manager spoke of how his assumptions of what his family may think, and their expectations of him had sometimes steered him to work that earned a higher income even if it had no benefit to others, and did not fulfil his changemaking goals (I16, 24/04/2019). A changemaker who had started a mobile centre for young children spoke about how some of his family "went through the stages of life with a different mindset … and they are then stuck there. People are not easily convinced that you have a dream" (I2, 23/04/2020). He said he could be equally critical of his family members whose lives do not have a positive impact. He said he would ask, "what are they bringing to the table [of the world]?" (I2, 23/04/2020). Changemakers with unsupportive family members continued in their work, and sought out validation elsewhere. It was important to them to be around other changemakers who shared the same aspirations (in the form of the nascent changemaker community of Makers Valley).

Other changemakers spoke of a supportive family in interviews. A Troyeville House manager recounted how he sees his drive in his work to be "a genetic thing" (I12, 17/07/2019). His grandmother showed him "this caring and sharing part". She would take people in, including refugees from Mozambique (they lived close to the border), and try link them with jobs. The changemaker continued this role of providing shelter and sharing opportunities when he moved to Johannesburg. McEvoy-Levy (2001) argues with reference to youth changemakers that a precedent of changemaker work in one's family indirectly

stimulates those in the next generation. 94 Colours co-founder said a highlight of his year was a message from his sister (who struggled with depression), which she had sent after she attended the youth expo they organised. Her message read, "I am inspired by you. I got out of the dark place because of your positivity" (I3, 08/04/2020). In her study of 'agents of social change' in Cape Town, Lemmen (2015), she found that siblings inspired and motivated each other to become changemakers: the author found this particularly true between siblings involved in anti-apartheid moments.

As for the role of my own family in my motivation to take on changemaking, as long as I could support myself financially, I experienced positive reinforcement from my family to do this, rather than take up a job in which the purpose was simply to make money. Personally, I experienced this as pressure, as opposed to 'inspiration' as found by Lemmen (2015). Some pressure came to continue the legacy of people such as my grandfather who I introduce in Chapter One. The way my parents spoke about me to their friends and celebrated my achievements highlighted the importance they placed on my social justice work. While my interviewees experienced pressure to generate a high income, I felt pressure from my family to undertaking changemaking work. This pressure contributed to a sense that I needed to prove myself to family and to others, and thus the end result for my sense of wellbeing was not always positive. For me and other changemakers, it was not only the recognition of kin that impacted their changemaking desires and their wellbeing. Public recognition had a significant role as well.

### 5.5.2 Public recognition

The human need for appreciation and its link to life meaning and life satisfaction has long been recognised in psychology (Amodeo, 2016; Frankl, 2011). Another major contributor to wellbeing for Makers Valley changemakers that arose out of their activity was their work being publicly celebrated or an increased sense of respect from people in power. Changemakers living in Makers Valley were generally managing to cover their basic needs but were not wealthy. They did

not have cars, they rented basic rooms in the Makers Valley area, and had never been on a luxury vacation. However, many gained respect from wealthy people, including some that followed a more mainstream aspirational model. 94 Colours co-founder described a situation shortly before the interview where he gained a sense of "Oh wow! We're here!" when being praised by elites of Johannesburg. This was due not to the display of positional goods, but to the work they were doing and the identity as changemakers that they had built for themselves. They gained status from changemaking rather than additional material possessions, and this increase in status also supported an increase in their wellbeing. This praise motivated him to continue in the work, even though he was concerned about covering his rent at the time. The field of psychology shows this to be linked to the sense of 'validation' and a perceived rise in 'subjective social status', an individual's perception of their position within the social hierarchy (Haught et al., 2015: 357). One changemaker spoke in an interview about attending a media launch for a high-profile festival in Johannesburg. He described how the founder of Nando's was there,

> and all these powerful people in the room, and it's just how they acknowledged us … we just realised the growth, now we're able to chill with these people, the powerhouse. It made me realise that what we're doing somehow it has bigger impact … They respected what we are doing and were excited … it means we can influence more people who have more power (I1, 15/04/2020).

I had various experiences like this where I noticed that public acknowledgement of being useful or of being a good person, or recognition of my skills, had a significant positive impact on my own wellbeing. For instance, the managing partner of Victoria Yards would pretend to look for angel wings on my back when showing visitors around Victoria Yards. There was a sense of a rise in status through people's opinions of me, though I was also immediately concerned that others that were present were possibly being made to feel less worthy, or that the impression was given that I was only doing the work for the attention I received. On reflection, I found that this attention indeed was a driver, though not the only one. In their work on transformative social innovation, Pel et

al. (2020: 7) argue that changemakers "seek for a sense of belonging" (a basic need for relatedness), and transformative social innovation communities can provide alternative ways to fulfil these needs.

### 5.5.3 Communities motivating changemaking

While reflecting on Cycle Four I discovered various pieces of literature on how social relations and communities can enhance sharing because people want to be seen to be doing good (Ariely et al., 2009). Sharing can be motivated through appealing to people's desire to boost their 'image' or 'status' (ibid). Bénabou and Tirole (2006) argue that the motivation to give is intrinsic (where people have private preferences for others' wellbeing), extrinsic (material rewards like tax breaks or expressions of thanks), as well as in relation to image promotion and maintenance (a desire for respect or status, based on the perceptions of others, according to what is deemed to be 'good' according to the community's norms and values, as in the qualities of 'a good person'). Therefore people have been shown to act more 'prosocially' (to the benefit of other people or society as a whole) in the public sphere than the private sphere (Francois & Vlassopoulos, 2008). In their research on crowd funding online, Cox et al. (2018) found that the number of loans increased but the total value of the individual loans did not, with online lender profiles. This seems to demonstrate that image enhancement was more important to donors than altruistic goals.

Bearing these motivating and enabling effects of recognition in mind, in Cycle Five, MVP started using social media to publicly celebrate changemakers' work. This became particularly effective in the Covid-19 Response (Cycle Six), where a story on a different changemaker was featured approximately every week on the Makers Valley Facebook page, and the initiative's WhatsApp group became a place to celebrate achievements. By celebrating the people behind the actions, we aimed to encourage those being celebrated to continue their work toward the common good, as well as encourage other potential changemakers to be inspired to act in similar ways. We hoped to begin to influence people's aspirations more systemically. Thus, we wanted to enable a changemaker culture and community

(as discussed in Chapter Six) through elevating and making desirable those actions towards the greater good. Credit for their work was publicly given to changemakers in other settings as well, for instance at Makers Valley poetry events, neighbourhood clean-ups, or strategic planning meetings.

In fact, there are a diversity of awards celebrating 'changemakers' in different contexts, from active citizens in Detroit, USA (Mackey, 2020), to those working with water systems at a broader scale (Global Water Partnership, 2020). The term can serve to motivate and facilitate an alternative life purpose than materialism. Moreover,

> On a practical level, Changemakers have to be recognized as such in order to be able to attract the funding they need to make a change. Therefore, the very act of branding yourself as a Changemaker creates the actual being of a Changemaker not only logically but also pragmatically (Bandinelli & Arvidsson, 2013: 68).

The rise of social media has further intensified the interactions between social entrepreneurs, funders and other stakeholders (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012). Francois and Vlassopoulos (2008) show that reputational elements are heightened in spaces where there is repeated interaction, such as within social networks. Bearing in mind the literature presented in Chapter Six regarding social capital (Putnam, 2000), denser social relations can thus enhance prosocial behaviour.

Though no one raised concerns with MVP's social media posts celebrating changemakers, I became aware of a critique of 'performative activism' in Cycle Five (mid-2020) during the Black Lives Matter movement. Activists such as Metta (2020) denounced as 'meaningless' those posts on social media that were considered to be more about self-promotion and did not require any real effort by the person posting them. As highlighted by Metta (2020), I was concerned about MVP perpetuating narcissistic drivers of changemaking, potentially encouraging disingenuous behaviour or representation on social media. One example of this was where someone consistently posted photographs of collective efforts she was not directly involved in, without crediting those who

were. She then received the credit for the action, as viewers assumed she was the changemaker behind the work. This appeared to enhance her own reputation as a changemaker and in turn her ability to attract resources. Those who were actually involved expressed a sense of injustice as their efforts were not publicly recognised. In another case, someone released a number of newsletters reporting activities of MVP partners without crediting them as individual organisations, resulting in similar dynamics. The role of ethical intermediary organisations in working with these dynamics, as discussed in Chapter Six, again came to the fore.

The response to public recognition was occasionally unexpected. For instance, in an early cycle, I posted on the Victoria Yards WhatsApp group when a specific tenant had offered to pay the school fees of one of the children in the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence. However, this changemaker sent me a private message asking me not to post news of such actions on public forums, as she "generally does not like to be lauded" for these (pers. comm., 05/02/2019). Interestingly, Schervish (1994: 23) finds that "purely anonymous giving is practically difficult and conceptually rare". Private donors almost always remain known to their spouses, administrators and financiers, at a minimum. Donors can be motivated to give anonymously simply due to concerns they should be seen as desiring enhancement of their image (ibid). And yet, more anonymous giving can reduce others' incentives to give (Tamura, 2018). Nevertheless, MVP learnt to take a more balanced approach in these respects. In Cycle Five, MVP adopted the practice of checking with changemakers before publically acknowledging them and in many cases an MVP representative interviewed them so changemakers could present their story as they preferred.

I found further nuance to the links between changemaking and recognition on the one hand and wellbeing on the other. Changemaker work did not necessarily lead to a heightened sense of wellbeing. A highly impactful changemaker spoke about the link between her changemaking work and the need to "prove" herself: that she was "intelligent" and "capable" (I6, 08/04/2020). She said that during the Covid-19-related lockdown, she experienced a decline in this need, and the

sense of wanting calm and "less stress" was becoming "more important" to her than "validation". This led her to shift her focus from active changemaking to art, and this opened the doors to a new phase of life. Furthermore, she had spoken previously about the potential "disconnect" between working as a changemaker to enable a good life for others and having a sense of living a good life herself (I6, 24/06/2019). Many changemakers expressed a sense of 'burnout' at different times. Indeed, Severns-Guntzel and Murphy-Johnson (2020: 3) document how international partnerships such as The Wellbeing Project have been set up specifically to catalyse a "culture of wellbeing for all changemakers". Changemakers in Severns-Guntzel and Murphy-Johnson's (2020) study reported serious mental and physical health repercussions as a result of the dedication they gave their work. The authors highlight how, by supporting the flourishing of changemakers, they can be more effective at solving complex systemic problems (ibid).

## 5.6 Conclusion

In Chapter Five, I have covered neighbourhood wellbeing as well as the links between different forms of wellbeing and changemaking. In the first section, I covered my findings on neighbourhood wellbeing in Makers Valley, linking to my discussion in Chapter Two on wellbeing and place. Various aspects of the neighbourhood impacted negatively on residents' wellbeing, and this informed MVP initiatives as well as the Theory of Change process (see Chapter Six). Some residents did not have security in their ability to meet their basic needs. This significantly limited their subjective wellbeing and was a key finding regarding the application of a wellbeing economy framework in the Makers Valley context. Specifically, the shift in vision away from individual material affluence towards collective wellbeing should therefore be directed primarily at individuals and organisations on the upper end of the income and wealth inequality spectrums.

Participants experienced a sense of life satisfaction 'in relation to' other people, with drivers linked to social status, dignity and the avoidance of shame. Thus, the

emphasis of most wellbeing economies on the reduction of inequality rather than economic growth (see Chapter Two) rang true in the Makers Valley context as well. Wellbeing was also experienced 'in relation to' other periods of respondents' own life, and my findings supported the literature regarding hedonic adaptation. Respondents' current level of life satisfaction was also influenced by their hopes for the future. Hope regarding better futures enhanced changemakers' eudemonic wellbeing and motivated them in their work in the neighbourhood. Shorter-term periods of difficulty did not detract from their life satisfaction if they saw them fitting into their broader vision. In Chapter Six, I present findings regarding hope and a wellbeing economy vision in Makers Valley.

In the second half of Chapter Five, I focused on aspirations alternative to the mainstream that were in support of a wellbeing economy. A sense of freedom and agency was important for Makers Valley changemakers' wellbeing, and a number of changemakers had left jobs that had secured higher levels of material affluence but in which they felt constrained. Changemakers directed their agency to work that gave them a sense of purpose, where they had impact beyond themselves. This supports a core tenet of various formulations of wellbeing economies, where, above securing a universal ability to satisfy basic needs, the focus shifts to meaningful work. Moreover, enabling changemakers such as these could support transformation toward a wellbeing economy. In Chapter Eight I discuss my hesitance around the degree of change the action research achieved.

While positional goods played less of a role in changemakers' motivation, they remained motivated by the affirmation and validation they received for their work and regarding their identity. While some changemakers experienced support from their kin, others' families wanted them to take up more regular, higher paying jobs. The importance of an alternate community was important here, and MVP strived to build a community that normalised a changemaking culture. MVP found that celebrating the work of individual changemakers was effective to maintain motivation and incentivise others to join initiatives and utilised social media for this purpose, but 'performative activism' could be a

concern. Lastly, changemaker work often involved significant challenges, and there were occasions where it did not enhance changemakers' wellbeing, at least in the short term.

# 6. ENABLING CHANGEMAKERS: BUILDING COMMUNITY

## 6.1 Introduction

A core drive behind my action research project was to see a growth in the number of changemakers with a vision that aligned with wellbeing economies. Firstly, I set out to explore, through a method inspired by autoethnography, how I could enable my own potential as a changemaker while not sacrificing my wellbeing. But, recognising the limits of my agency, my approach to actualising transformative social innovation was to enable other changemakers. I aimed for them, in turn, to have the capability to enable others, and so forth. As expressed by Ashoka founder, Drayton (2006: 82), the greatest contribution of every social entrepreneur is

> Catalysing new local changemakers into being. Unless the entrepreneur can get someone in one community after another to step forward and seize his or her idea, the entrepreneur will never achieve the spread that is essential to his or her life success.

Chapters Six and Seven focus on the activities and processes that supported enabling changemakers (as represented in Figure 1.1 in the introductory chapter). They answer my second research sub-question, "How can people be enabled as changemakers, and how do these processes work?" Chapter Seven covers the enabling factors of learning by doing and working with ebb and flow. The current chapter presents my findings related to building communities.

In the following section I provide more understanding as to the outcomes of my original intentions for a "Makers Valley" community. I then discuss the enabler role of Makers Valley Partnership (MVP) as an intermediary, which was key to building and sustaining community. Lastly, I identify the significance of social capital and physical spaces.

## 6.2 Finding Makers Valley: Community and Place

In line with a complex systems approach, Schmid (2019: 219) argues that a collaborative network can "exceed the focus on individual examples in isolation". Moreover, it would then be possible to "cumulatively build the institutions and attitudes that make local changemaking progressively easier and more respected" (Drayton, 2006: 82). After the first observation and reflection stages of Cycle One, however, I was clear that the most effective 'local changemakers' are generally those with the most agency: with significant knowledge and resources to mobilise. Thus, I set out both to inspire wealthy people in particular to adopt a culture of changemaking, and bring them together with those who had changemaker ideas and intentions, but less agency to realise them.

Essentially what I hoped to do through the action research was build a 'community' of changemakers. Originally, I envisioned this as an intentional community of people living and working in the same place. This was based on my learning from 'Cycle Zero' of the PhD, where I explored intentional communities in Europe (I provide an overview of the research cycles in Chapter Four). I enabled three iterations of co-living in Makers Valley over the research period. In Cycle One I managed 44 Fourth as the first Changemakers Residence, in Cycle Three I started the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence adjacent to Victoria Yards, and in Cycle Seven, The Troyeville House, a few blocks away. I also enabled iterations of coworking at Victoria Yards: 'Coworking and Community' (Cycle One), Victoria Yards (VY) Commons (Cycle Two), and Makers Valley Studio[7] (Cycle Seven). I hoped that though small, these communities could become enablers of broader social innovation communities of Makers Valley.

The other strand of community-building I explored was through a neighbourhood partnership model. I was influenced by MVP partner, the

[7] I was not involved in operationalising Makers Valley Studio aside from linking the Makers Valley CEO with a funding opportunity that arose due to MVP and my relationships (social capital).

Johannesburg Inner City Partnership, as well as some elements of the nearby eKhaya's focus on neighbourhood wellbeing and Maboneng's placemaking success, though I was concerned about the reported displacement in both eKhaya and Maboneng (I have discussed eKhaya and Maboneng in Appendix C). To this end, MVP strived to attain neighbourhood-wide involvement, through the sector representation format typically followed by community regeneration partnerships, but applying a bottom-up approach as promoted by eKkhaya (HDA, 2012). There was a focus on area-based management, with the typical primary goals of a 'clean' and 'safe' neighbourhood rising to the fore of the common agenda in stakeholder engagements. However, in Cycle One I saw potential of this model embedding neoliberalism at a local level (as argued by Didier et al., 2012), rather than enabling transformative social innovation towards a wellbeing economy, as I hoped to. I also acknowledged MVP's limited agency given the limited operational funding and complexities of community-building in fragmented inner city contexts (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2014). From Cycle Three, MVP began trialling a different approach, in which we focused specifically on building community between individuals with an interest in social and creative enterprise. In Cycle Four, the MVP Team formally adopted the slogan 'Jozi's heart of social and creative enterprise', defining our mandate.

A similar change in focus occurred over the research cycles when it came to changing the physical identity of the broader neighbourhood. The initial collective had come together as a result of the opportunity to secure upgrades to the neighbourhood through the municipal-owned Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA). In the US Consulate-funded creative placemaking project, The Coloured Cube experimented with tactical urbanism forms of placemaking. However, the project did not make permanent changes to the look or feel of Frere Street, the spatial focus of the project. While a JDA upgrade to Fuller Park was finally secured in Cycle Seven, the streetscape and feel of the neighbourhood remained largely unchanged over the research period.

Between Cycle One and Cycle Four, MVP held four workshops of varying sizes and three surveys of stakeholders (including residents not yet aware of MVP) to

'crowd source' and clarify the neighbourhood identity and name. A name containing the word 'Valley' inevitably surfaced as the most popular, due to the topography that meant the low-lying section that formed MVP's focus was affectionately known as 'The Valley' by some stakeholders. The 'Makers' component originated in the proposal submitted to the JDA prior to the start of my research, referencing the number of artisans of the Valley (as discussed in Chapter Three). The lack of rebranding to a new name was not as much to do with the name itself as it was the lack of placemaking, which had been far more extensive in nearby Maboneng (Gregory, 2016). 'Rebranding' the neighbourhood as 'Makers Valley' did not occur, in that it was uncommon even for participants to speak about 'Makers Valley' as a place (Moela, 2019). It felt inauthentic to me as well to refer to the area as 'Makers Valley' unless I spoke in the future tense (for instance in funding proposals or tours), or added a disclaimer, as I did in Chapter One of this thesis. In Cycle Five I also became more concerned about an apparent rise in property prices in the research location, and warier of the displacement potential of creative placemaking projects in other inner city contexts. My attention was drawn to this as a result of further reflection on the literature (Catungal et al., 2009). I explore this further in Section 6.6.

What did develop between Cycles Two and Five was a network of social relations, largely informal. For instance, a project evaluation report indicated that the creative placemaking "has broken the communication barriers between existing organisations that did not engage before. They now invite one another to various events and activities [and] also consult with one another" (Aha Development Consultants, 2020: 47). Nevertheless, respondents had contrasting views on whether this was a 'community' or not. A prominent resident changemaker saw Makers Valley as a community of people who "can be different in what they're doing or believe in, but it's a specific group where you're aware of what they do and are willing to help each other" (I1, 10/06/2019). Schmid's (2020) findings regarding community economies in Stuttgart were similar. The 'community' he studied was a 'network', a web of social relations around shared interests in transformative social innovation to alternative economies. Another resident changemaker desired a greater sense of community. He said that the

MVP Team should bring everyone "together in the same space with [other Makers Valley changemakers]: for the community to actually prosper it needs to know" itself as "a community" (I2, 23/04/2020).

Makers Valley became broader in interest and far more recognised as 'a community' which someone could be a part of in Cycle Six during the Covid-19 Response. (I discuss this as a 'window of opportunity' in the next chapter.) MVP's nebulous structure morphed once again into a 'Network of Possibility' (see Figure 7.5), with about 30 partners focused on the Response (MVP, 2020b). As reported in a media article by Heywood (2020) regarding growing support of MVP activities, "It takes a crisis to raise a community". MVP also grew in number of paid and unpaid staff and became significantly more recognised as an organisation by general residents. This was largely due to MVP's reorientation to food security, initially through food parcel distribution. The 10–20 fieldworkers undertaking a door-to-door survey would be celebrated in the streets by passers-by who recognised the yellow Makers Valley t-shirts (see Figure 6.1). Recognising the importance of the likes of the above comment regarding building a face-to-face community, the main coordinator of the Covid-19 Response facilitated conflict management sessions and thanksgiving meals with volunteers and stakeholders.




**Figure 6.1:** Some of the MVP volunteers conducting the 'community needs survey' in the first months of the Covid-19 lockdown (April to June 2020 in Cycle Six). (Source: Heywood, 2020).

The changemaker mentioned above, who was sceptical about the sense of community, himself started to champion 'a Makers Valley community' identity through creating videos featuring volunteers wearing the Makers Valley t-shirt. This may have been in part because he was able to secure a much-needed income from MVP, and thus it was in his self interest to publicly promote the identity and his association with it. Indeed, in general, I found that which my grandfather wrote to hold true: "people change [only] when it is in their interests to change" (Mayson, 1990: 4). Furthermore, the changemaker, too, was celebrated by residents and other changemakers for his work (I discuss the motivation of affirmation in Chapter Five).

Many other neighbourhoods also formed initiatives attending to the perceived crisis of food insecurity during this initial 'hard' lockdown (Nortier, 2021). A significant sense of community was built in these neighbourhoods, too, around the universally understandable, common cause of food distribution. However, in Cycle Seven, with the change in landscape, of reduced lockdown measures and

the Covid-19 Response coordinator's need to focus on her own social enterprise again, MVP focused on its mandate of social and creative enterprise once more. MVP's Food Hub formalised and moved towards operation as a social enterprise with a nascent community currency.

In interviews that focused on MVP's impact, and where participants were asked whether they saw Makers Valley as 'a community' or not, respondents did not doubt the growth in number and diversity of social relations. A black resident changemaker, who became known for his ability to inspire diverse supporters' faith in changemaking, spoke about how previously he knew white people only in often-strained employee/ employer relations. He got to know me and then worked at VY Commons with two white interns while coordinating the 2019 Youth Expo. This gave him the confidence to build further relations with white people, which he found greatly enabling (I3, 8/4/2020).

VY Commons, Victoria Yards as a whole and the Changemakers Residences were important in drawing diverse people to the same space, but the thickening of diverse social relations in these spaces relied on what Marks et al. (2018) refer to as "meaningful contacts". Deliberate activities were essential to overcome challenges in the formation of social relations, with joint project work being most effective over time. One changemaker identified a key contributor to his sense of community as being an experiential learning-based social enterprise course that was run in VY Commons over four months (I1, 10/06/2019). The community of participants that developed was linked to the broader Makers Valley community, but with its own identity. Online platforms, particularly WhatsApp groups, played a big role in the continuation and maintenance of communities such as these, even once the initiative that had brought people together was over.

I further illustrate the need for deliberate activities using a series of cases involving food which took place over the research cycles. MVP providing a self-service buffet did not result in significant new meaningful contacts, but intentionally seating people to disrupt existing groups did result in some. Still more resulted where people cooked and ate the same meal together; they

worked on a joint project and celebrated the fruits of their labour. Indeed, diverse economy researchers Cameron and Gibson (2005b) describe the community-building potential of communally making and eating food in their action research. I found that even more social relations developed if people planted and grew their food together over time. Nevertheless, as highlighted by Wuthnow (2002), retaining social relations between individuals from diverse socioeconomic groups is more challenging and "depends on institutions capable of nurturing cooperation among heterogeneous groups" (ibid: 670). MVP had some success in this, playing the role of an intermediary organisation, as discussed below.

Research participants also shared an interest in the common good of the neighbourhood (whether they referred to the area as 'Makers Valley' or not), and willingness to collaborate towards that end. The executive director of a local non-profit organisation (NPO) and a key MVP changemaker commented that "I've never worked with so many people that will do things just to help the next person – normally it's about what I can get out of it at the end of the day" (I4, 21/06/2019). Building community around shared hope, MVP worked towards transformative social innovation in line with diverse economies researchers Cameron and Gibson's (2005: 276) call to "think of community as the call or appeal to become something new and different". Nevertheless, while some changemakers desired transformative social innovation towards a wellbeing economy, others simply wished to alleviate poverty through charitable acts, potentially maintaining the status quo.

Thus, through the analysis of participants' conceptualisations I found 'community' to exist in Cycle One, and to experience overall growth through to Cycle Seven. This growth was enabled by MVP striving for a neighbourhood (place) and community (social and creative entrepreneurs) identity of 'Makers Valley' through the projects and activities discussed below. However, what arose was an amorphous and often nameless 'community', or rather diverse forms of intersecting communities. In line with the community economies approach (Gibson-Graham et al., 2020), this community was an interdependent network of

volunteers, residents, changemakers and enablers connected through varying social relations.

In conclusion, the community that developed was grounded in place, with Victoria Yards and the co-working and co-living spaces acting as MVP hubs in the broader neighbourhood, yet also online, with the online component featuring people in the broader Johannesburg region, but with some representation from elsewhere. Toivonen (2013) found this combination of offline local communities buttressed by global online communities to be characteristic of social innovation communities. In Makers Valley the online community was predominantly made up of local residents on the WhatsApp groups, including a community 'noticeboard', with broader networks forming part of the email database, Facebook and Instagram pages. The 'Makers Valley' community and place was reified by the website.

The community was characterised by a culture of changemaking, though participants' visions for this sometimes contrasted when interrogated (as discussed in the next section) and was realised through a growth in number and diversity of social relations. It consisted of residents from different backgrounds (though a greater proportion of youth) and well-resourced stakeholders from elsewhere in Johannesburg and other countries. While it was supported by the MVP Team and nebulous MVP organisation and associated initiatives, it had a life of its own. It was affected by challenging conflict and power struggles, as is often the case in communities (Mayson, 2013), and was not experienced by most participants as a single community with 'members' that identified as such. The remainder of this chapter presents the findings related to enabling this community.

## 6.3 A Collaborative Vision as an Enabler of Changemakers and the Collective

A core role of the MVP Team (as operational support) was in formulating and seeking consensus around a collaborative neighbourhood vision, within which to

base changemaking actions and ascertain which neighbourhood initiatives to support. This section provides an overview of these processes and shows how they were effective for enhancing agency at individual and collective level, but simultaneously required MVP to deploy a 'politics of hybridity' (Schmid, 2021). As argued by Woolrych and Sixsmith (2013), the absence of a shared vision can have detrimental effects on the sustainability of neighbourhood initiatives, with unintended consequences for collective wellbeing. Across Cycles One to Five the MVP Team played an enabler role in six workshop processes (some consisting of a series of workshops), and four door-to-door and street interview processes. Each workshop process was in partnership with a different organisation that facilitated the sessions largely independently, with support from a representative from the MVP Team. The partner facilitator generally led the process through a consensus-based approach. The process that provided the most solid output regarding neighbourhood vision was the Makers Valley Theory of Change process in Cycles Four and Five in 2019. The MVP Team invited 30 stakeholders that had already been involved in MVP projects and previous open-invitation workshops. Open invitation 'Community Conversations' followed, gaining feedback from neighbourhood stakeholders at a broader scale. The diagram in Figure 6.2 below is a summary of these discussions.

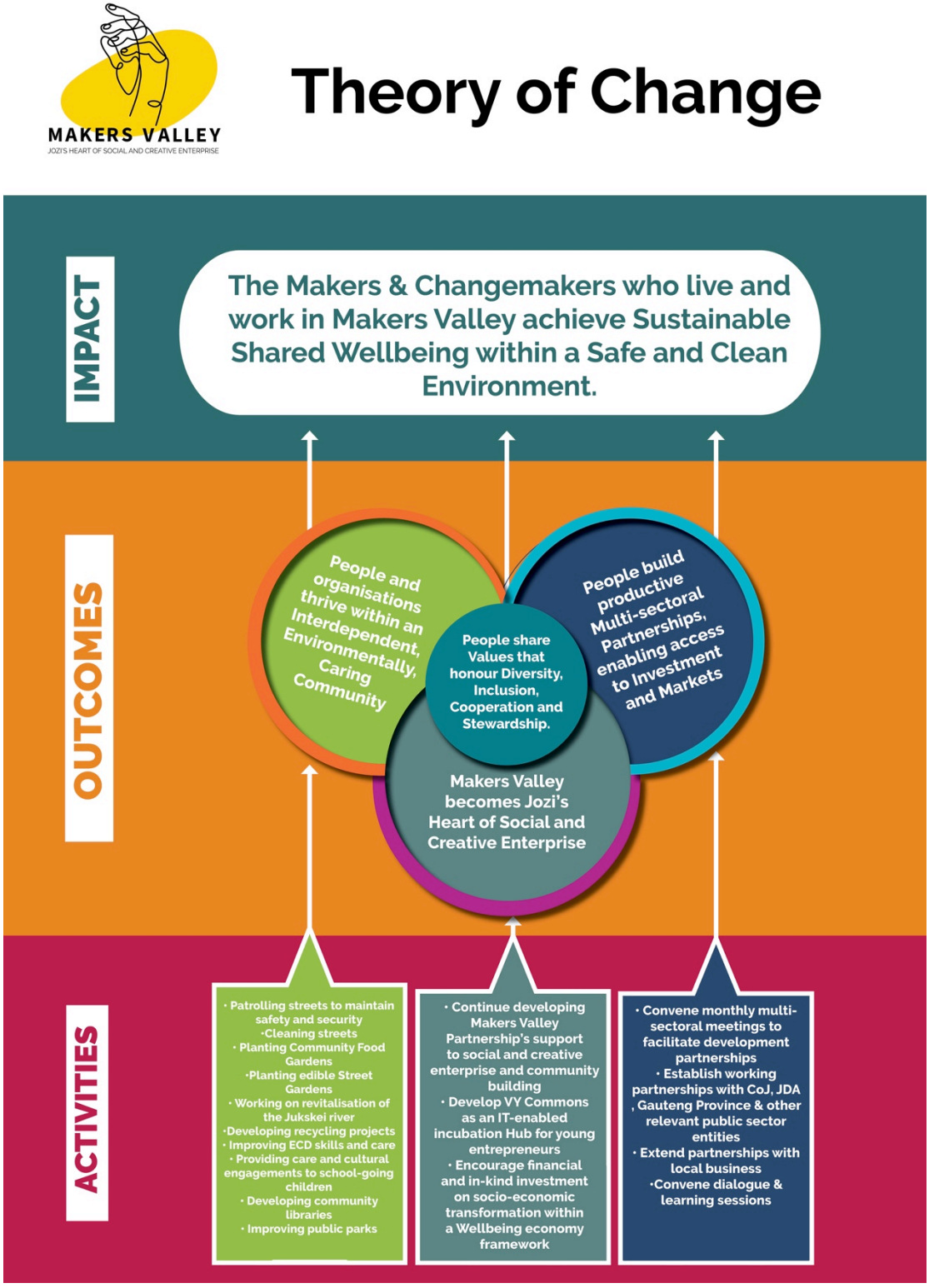



**Figure 6.2:** The neighbourhood Theory of Change diagram arising from MVP workshop processes in Cycles Four and Five in 2019. Elements of a wellbeing economy are represented, but a wellbeing economy is not mentioned explicitly as such. Neither does the Theory of Change diagram show a prioritisation of social and ecological goals *before* profit. (Source: MVP Team, 2019).

The vision-formulation processes were important to partners, in strengthening their bonding social capital and thus agency. (I speak more to this in Section 6.5). Greater alignment in individual visions and agency also increased the potential for transformation as argued in Sewell's (1992) interpretation of structuration theory (Giddens, 2013).[8] Within MVP, the documents did not receive much attention beyond their initial formulation. However, the Theory of Change document in particular was valuable in informing MVP's external communications, including funding proposals.

Playing an enabler role, I built relationships with potential funders and disseminated the United States Consulate and British Council calls for proposals to potential project partners, in more understandable forms. I then worked with those interested in collaborating to formulate their own visions and aligned them to a collective vision that, in turn, was aligned to that of the funders. Particularly in the case of the British Council fund, this alignment process took several months, and required transparent communication between the British Council fund representative (primarily about alignment with the organisation's key performance indicators and monitoring and evaluation requirements, which would allow sign-off on the grant), MVP (defining realistic capabilities of individual partners) and the contracting agent and MVP incubator, Johannesburg Inner City Partnership (about financial risk management).

The success of these formal funding proposals was due to the demonstration of an inspiring collaborative vision between multiple partners (as indicated in feedback from two MVP funders). A key concern of the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) regarding MVP's initial funding proposal was the lack of collaborative vision at the time. This was due in part to a simultaneous submission from a separate organisation in the neighbourhood, which featured different design proposals and neighbourhood identity.

[8] Giddens (2013), which I found helpful to read, is an updated version of his original 1987 publication. Sewell (1992) cites the version published in 1987.

Having collaborative proposals also enabled the MVP proposal to promise funders a more comprehensive package than competing proposals. This was because each partner had depth of knowledge and capabilities in their specific area, and this agency could align in working towards the broader vision. Between partners, having sufficient consensus within an overarching vision formed the cornerstone of the ability to collaborate in the first place, because they believed in the same broad direction of change.

Over and above attracting financial resources that enabled various changemakers in the neighbourhood, having a narrative of hope underlying a collaborative vision also attracted well-resourced changemakers, who in turn played an enabling role. A key MVP enabler living in Johannesburg's northern suburbs mobilised various resources and enabled other projects such as Afrocentric mini libraries. She said the reason she was attracted to Makers Valley was that she "resonated with the people, with the vision and with the fact that this is not an isolated project or initiative" (pers. comm. via WhatsApp, 16 Jan 2021).

Thus, achieving sufficient alignment in changemakers' individual visions was beneficial to enhancing the changemaking potential of individuals and the collective that MVP sought to support. However, I frequently became aware that I held the most agency in Makers Valley collaborative vision building processes. Building on the discussion on positionality in Chapter Four, most of the workshops were conducted primarily in English using western constructs such as theories of change. Agency also arose from my enabler role. In the Theory of Change workshops, I noticed that, despite me being away for two of the workshops and participating over video call, the facilitator started and ended with input from me. There was extensive debate on certain topics, but workshop summaries were drawn up by the MVP Team members, who had already been exposed to a wellbeing economy vision through me.

As argued by Burns et al. (2012: 99), if action researchers are not "mindful" of

the risks arising from "complex webs of inter-relationships", the outcomes will be superficial or even hold unintended consequences. Burns et al. (2012) critique Participatory Action Research's typical reliance on workshops. They argue that researchers need to also informally consult a range of stakeholders, to even begin to understand the multiple perspectives, in order to achieve 'Systemic Action Research'. I found the informal discussions that were made possible by my immersion in the neighbourhood particularly useful. Other initiatives included door-to-door interviews with residents. MVP volunteers undertook these in isiZulu or French if preferred by interviewees, although they still had to report them in English.

Thus, the imbalance in agency needed to be 'red flagged' for the potential dangers associated with it, but it did not necessarily present an insurmountable problem. In collaborative visioning processes, certain voices will inevitably dominate. I (and then the MVP Team) strived as an intermediary to reflectively maintain greater neutrality than, for instance, property owners, and act toward the greater good for the neighbourhood. Furthermore, Marshall (1999: 165) inspired me to explore an approach of "knowing when to persist and when to desist" (see Chapter Seven). For example, in the Theory of Change process, I purposefully gave minimal input on the final diagram, even though I personally desired a more explicit mention of a wellbeing economy. Compromising on my own vision of a wellbeing economy that explicitly prioritises social and ecological goals over for-profit goals was difficult, and I discuss this as navigating a 'politics of hybridity' (Schmid, 2021) in Chapter Seven. Playing an enabler role, I tried to ascertain the collective vision and then align my personal vision and agency with this. Simultaneously maximising and counterbalancing my agency required a heightened awareness that was mentally tiring and remained imperfect (similar to the experience of Pettigrew, 2003).

## 6.4 MVP as an Intermediary Organisation, Fostering and Sustaining Community

A transformative social innovation initiative is "often born out of a partnership or other form of cooperation between actors representing different institutional logics, and sometimes itself emerges as a hybrid institutional entity" (Pel et al., 2020: 9). MVP started as an informal group of individuals leading local creative businesses, which I joined in Cycle One. In Cycle Two some of us started using the name 'Makers Valley Partnership', though it was not registered, and the partners and arrangements shifted from project to project. After intensive debate during the Theory of Change processes regarding formalisation, the MVP Team heeded the advice of enablers such as the founder of the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership, who played a key role in MVP's enablement. She said, "the organic without structure can crumble … somebody has to be organised and hold that vision" (I5, 15/04/2020). In Cycles Five to Seven, the MVP Team programme manager drove the process to enable the organisation as an independent operationally and financially sustainable intermediary organisation. In this form, we hoped that MVP as a registered NPO, supported by the MVP Team, could be used as a 'vehicle' by linked changemakers towards their enablement.

### 6.4.1 Working towards a collaborative vision through connecting and channelling agency

In different formulations over the action research cycles, MVP grew into a role as an intermediary or 'backbone' organisation, enabling changemakers in overlapping communities to "begin to take their economic destinies into their own hands" (Tompt, 2018: n.p.n.), though we continued to be faced with significant structural constraints. At neighbourhood level, MVP mobilised social and financial capital and built connections between changemakers. MVP also formed connections between local changemakers and those within international organisations such as UK-based Real Ideas Organisation, a partnership that developed its own buoyancy, leading to wellbeing economy-linked activities

impacting wider systems in the UK. Indeed, Tompt (2018: n.p.n.) identifies the importance of "weaving 'convergence networks' of diverse individuals and organisations across localities", achieving system transition as opposed to isolated activities, which often have limited longevity.

Westley et al. (2013: 31) motivates that intermediaries "create a bundle of knowledge, meaning, and vision that is open ended enough to attract different interest groups with their different concerns, and to allow them to work collaboratively on a common project". In this way, MVP Team strove to realise the outcomes that arose from the collaborative Theory of Change process, but not to undertake the activities itself. It tried to channel sometimes disparate or 'siloed' changemaking agency into something more programmatic and sustainable, building institutional capacity and continuity beyond individuals. We worked primarily with partner organisations that knew their constituents more intimately, and already had a following. Nevertheless, "partnership is the ultimate postmodern organisation, characterised by fluidity, uncertainty, ambiguity, and discontinuity" (Pettigrew, 2003: 376). The loose partnerships held by MVP were in many cases beset by these characteristics, particularly as many partnerships were voluntary and informal. In these cases, if partner changemakers became busy with other projects or found paying work, there were no legal or financial repercussions. Thus, actualisation of the vision in these cases was dependent on the changemakers' ongoing belief in the collaborative vision, or sense that there would be long-term personal benefit to them in some way.

As argued by Purdue (2001: 2217) concerning intermediaries, I found MVP's "mediating role" key to resolving conflict that would otherwise have derailed the transformative social innovation. The MVP Team and other enablers within MVP acted as facilitators and strived to remain unaffected by attacks that sometimes became personal. However, Dey et al. (2016) caution against the hegemonisation of diverse enterprise forms that can result from dominant intermediary organisations. As raised in the previous section, I recognised imbalances in agency skewed towards me and other enablers. This had the potential to lead to

the ideas and preferences of MVP Team and linked enablers dominating. Aligning with Schmid's (2021) work, in Chapter Seven I discuss how building MVP as a 'hybrid infrastructure' was supported by the reflectivity offered by action research, and how more defined 'critical alliances' with universities could enhance future infrastructures.

### 6.4.2 Providing strategic support and mobilising resources by navigating bureaucracy

Practice-based literature argues for intermediaries to play a strategic enabling role for initiatives in the longer term to ensure their sustainability (Cheuy et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2012). Purdue (2001: 2217) highlights one enabling role intermediaries should play: "bearing the burden of fundraising". Indeed, I found that resource mobilisation in the form of large-scale financial funding has the potential to significantly enable changemakers. However, due to the bureaucratic requirements of donor governments or organisations, this funding usually comes in the form of grants with limited flexibility. Most changemakers who formed different iterations of MVP would not have been able to individually access the formal funding that if they were not represented as 'MVP'. Moreover, Cameron and Gibson (2005) caution that once-off grants can render community economy initiatives unsustainable in the long term, and funding should rather be strategically given. Indeed, the last decade has seen a growth in interest from funders that acknowledge the potentials of locally based intermediaries such as MVP (Jenner, 2016). The significant funding MVP received from the British Council was targeted at intermediaries who would in turn support social and creative enterprises, through a 'glocal' approach (British Council, 2018).

Intermediaries can play a similar role with government. Buijs et al. (2016: 1) put forward that to maximise the outcomes of changemakers or "active citizens", governments may adopt the enabling and context-sensitive "mosaic governance" style that works with the "heterogeneous array of people, institutions, and spatial practices associated with active citizenship". However, as I discuss in the following chapter, MVP's experience with the JDA showed that government's

ability to employ a 'mosaic' approach was limited even when its aims were such, due to the lack of flexibility and red tape around procurement. If responsive to heterogeneity, intermediary organisations like MVP could be a key component in achieving this 'mosaic governance'.

Moreover, intermediaries can scale across contexts by enabling other similar intermediaries. Due in part to the positive coverage in the press (for example Heywood (2020); Ho (2019)) MVP has been asked by organisations working in other neighbourhoods to share its approach and working models, and support their operational sustainability, catalysing a 'ripple effect'.

### 6.4.3 Stimulating a ripple effect towards transformative social innovation

The ripple effect mentioned in the section above was essential to MVP's function as an enabler. Before the formalisation of the MVP Team, MVP was enabled by formally registered partners. In particular, two NPOs, namely the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership (JICP) and the Curriculum Development Project Trust (CDP), as well as the company The Coloured Cube (TCC), acted as intermediaries where formal contracting was needed for donors or financial management. The NPOs had an established board, and a financial track record of over twenty years managing large donor funding. One of them would stand as the formal representative for MVP in fundraising proposals and contracts. Without JICP and CDP first enabling MVP in Cycles Two to Five, through bridging formal and informal initiatives (when MVP was still an informal collaboration), MVP would not have been able to access the significant formal funding. Furthermore, the MVP Team would not have been able to establish itself as a sustainable organisation. Once formalised legally and in its financial management practices, the MVP Team could then 'pay it forward' by playing an intermediary and enabler role with other initiatives, such as the Makers Valley Food Hub and the 'edible streets' urban gardening project (see Chapter Seven).

A stilt walker in Makers Valley was highlighted by other changemakers in my interviews as a classic case of 'paying forward' the enablement he experienced,

creating a ripple effect. The stilt walker participated in workshops for the creative placemaking project in Cycle Three. Another changemaker recounted how he "developed a drive and a momentum for himself as a stilt walker and [was] not necessarily [dependent] on people or other structures ... Now everything is happening because he is driving it" (I3, 08/04/2020). Furthermore, the MVP project gave him the "proof" to show what he could do and he was able to generate an income for himself as a result (I6, 08/04/2020). In Cycle Four he was funded to become an implementation partner for the project, teaching children stilt-walking skills. He then taught the more gifted children to go on to train others, and in Cycle Six they were ready to perform in front of an expected 9 000 people as part of the Makers Valley Festival (which Covid-19 put a stop to, as indicated in Chapter Three). MVP played a key role as an enabler in stimulating this ripple effect as an intermediary. As highlighted by an MVP Team programme manager, "the main resources were the social capital[s] – the networks that were brought in" (I28, 14/05/2021). I turn to the enabling potential of social capital next.

## 6.5 Social Capital

Several participants spoke about how 'networks', 'relationships', 'connections', and 'partnerships' formed a key enabler to their agency. A 94-Colours co-founder said, "in the work that we do, most important are the networks and the relationships that you build along the way, and without it *haai* nothing's going to happen" (I1, 15/04/2019). This informed the definition of social capital I use in this research: simply "interpersonal networks that help people attain their goals" (Wuthnow, 2002: 669), that is, relationships that enable. I use the term 'social capital' because it is reflective of its value as a resource upon which to draw and has the agglomeration potential of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). As identified in Chapter Two, 'bonding social capital' occurs within social groups and 'bridging social capital' between people with contrasting social identities (Bekkers et al., 2006). I found both capitals to enable an increase in access to knowledge and resources, in part through enhanced sharing. The next three sections look at how

changemakers were enabled by bridging and bonding social capital, trust, and sharing and other prosocial behaviour.

### 6.5.1 Bridging and bonding capital in in Makers Valley

In Makers Valley, bonding social capital seemed particularly useful in providing the confidence and support base for changemakers to act on their intentions: having likeminded peers that shared the same vision, informing peers about opportunities that could support their work, and giving critical feedback regarding challenges. Picnics held between implementation partners of the creative placemaking project were found to grow social capital. Many of these changemakers were already working in the same neighbourhood on similar visions but did not previously link up with one another at a social level. Greater social capital can result in greater collective wellbeing and community resilience, including in the face of economic crises (Helliwell et al., 2014), as we found in Cycle Six with the MVP Covid-19 Response.

Bridging social capital was useful in enabling changemakers' access to knowledge and resources beyond their usual networks. While in Cycles One and Two I argued for MVP to focus on building networks within the neighbourhood, through reflection on input from other changemakers I realised the importance of strong links with likeminded changemakers beyond the neighbourhood. Some of these connections and the associated sharing of knowledge that enhanced agency happened through group events like the aforementioned picnics. In other cases, bridging capital needed more significant intention and structured intervention. In many instances this capital simply arose from personal introductions from changemaker to changemaker. For example, an MVP Team programme manager connected me with colleagues from when she had managed a philanthropic organisation (she utilised her bonding social capital to enable me to grow bridging capital). At the time they were managing funds that they were interested in providing to support early childhood and were a good fit for the Changemaker Children partnership. I then connected their organisation with the director of CDP and supported her with the funding proposal. With the funding

she was able to lead a roll out of early childhood teacher and principal training in the neighbourhood. Therefore, by accessing various stocks of social capital, MVP was able to agglomerate further resources to enhance the agency of early childhood development changemakers, and thus increase their changemaking potential.

### 6.5.2 Trust as an enabler of social capital (enhancing agency) and a wellbeing economy?

As set out in literature on community economies and alternative economies (Schmid, 2020; Walker et al, 2000; Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013) a core ingredient of developing and maintaining social capital in MVP was trust. Participants spoke often of the importance of having the trust of colleagues and of those with greater agency. 94 Colours co-founder said, "The number one thing that comes to mind [as an enabler for his changemaking] is trust and relationships" (I3, 08/04/2020). For instance, in early 2018, he and his business partner built what Purdue (2001: 2214) calls "competence trust" with the manager of Victoria Yards through volunteering to undertake small tasks for her. The manager then introduced them to me in Cycle Two of my research (late-2018), and because I had competence and goodwill trust in the manager (I trusted that she had made an accurate assessment of their trustworthiness), I quickly trusted the 94 Colours team. In later cycles I introduced them to various people such as tour guides, and over the next months I observed them to build their own relationships of trust with them. This trust enabled them to access resources in the form of paying clients or space to host events, often without payment in monetary form.

The 94 Colours co-founder also spoke about the competency trust other participants placed in him. He said that people "are constantly seeing more" in him and his business partner (I3, 08/04/2020). He appreciated having people around who recognise that "you could be doing much more" even where "you don't see it in yourself". He identified the creative placemaking project manager

as an enabler whose trust in him had been particularly motivating. This trust in his capabilities boosted his sense of wellbeing and in turn his agency.

These findings are in line with Purdue (2001: 2215) who identifies that changemakers in neighbourhood settings "have to act as 'brokers', making connections … to establish an effective civil society". As identified in the previous sub-section, this brokerage of trust took place in as simple a fashion as introducing people to each other or passing on contact details. There was an assumption, if I passed on the contact details of someone, that I had trust in them. Because of the implications this could have on people's trust in me, I learnt from earlier cycles to specify if I could not vouch for someone, that is, I hadn't developed an in-depth relationship of trust with him/ her/ them as yet. I also became careful to check, when people recommended individuals to me, how well they knew them, and evaluated this against how much I trusted the recommender.

VY Commons, the Makers Valley co-working space, also arose through a relationship of trust between individuals. There were no written or formal contracts, and yet over the research cycles, the lack of formality did not result in any tenancy issues or otherwise. The relationship of trust I brokered between VY Commons managers and Victoria Yards management led to them working together to ensure the functioning of the space. This work involved mundane day-to-day operational issues like ensuring the Wi-Fi worked, or more complex issues of conflict management. The VY Commons managers in turn were able to broker trust between members of the space and develop a web of relationships of trust, through working on joint projects of common relevance, like painting the interior of the space, garnering left over food from Victoria Yards management for sharing among members after events, or simply by introducing new members to others, in their first few days of using the space.

Indeed, additional networks of reciprocity developed between Makers Valley changemakers and supported enablement. For instance, an urban farmer received help from a waste management entrepreneur in planting his garden,

and in exchange (months later), the urban farmer helped the waste management entrepreneur with his computer system. This builds on the findings on a ripple effect of enablement, discussed above. In a later cycle, MVP built a myriad of relationships of reciprocity in a somewhat formalised format with a 'swap shop' where residents received points for work that they did towards the greater good in the neighbourhood, which they could swap for essentials at a shop. These trust-based non-monetary exchanges symbolised what Fioramonti (2017) identifies as building blocks of wellbeing economies.

In his study on community economies in Stuttgart, Schmid (2020) found that the initiatives placed a high degree of trust in individual users as opposed to formalised or written agreements, including relationships of trust linked to the coworking space he studied. Furthermore, he found trust to be a "prerequisite for organisations to engage in decommodified exchange", based on "shared values, solidarity and mutual interest" (Schmid, 2020: 190).

Fukuyama (1995) identifies how communities of shared ethical values or a common vision "do not require extensive contract and legal regulation of their relationships because prior moral consensus gives members of the group a basis for mutual trust" (1995: 26). Indeed, the Victoria Yards managing partner said that trust is a "fundamental element to partnerships … [he] never write[s] anything down … it's about trust". The trust his partners have in him despite his "loose and chaotic way" have "enabled [him] to create" what he set his mind to (I7, 20/03/2019). The Victoria Yards manager said that, as she did not have financial resources, her honesty was one of her biggest resources in enabling her to carry out what she wanted to (I8, 20/09/2018). People commented on this about me, too, linking respect with trust.

Retrospectively, I understand that what I was intuitively doing in the first part of my research was to build trust. I focused on developing relationships of trust with various stakeholders in the neighbourhood, or with potential connections to it, that I saw as having value for my action research. As Roelvink (2020: 459) indicates, some of this trust-building process was simply about carrying out the

"mundane duties" of research with others: to "show up, to be dependable and be depended upon". She found in her action research that "being responsible and keeping commitments are vital for facilitators to elicit a positive response from community partners … the participants required time to realize that the project was going to occur and that we facilitators were serious about it". Being consistent and reliable with those with whom I engaged, and acknowledging when I made mistakes, helped enable relationships of trust. Moreover, speaking to my vision of enabling a wellbeing economy in the neighbourhood – speaking consistently, confidently and passionately, but in a way that my audience would find reasonable and plausible – seemed to inspire and build trust. As identified by Purdue (2001: 2215), "transformational social entrepreneurs must secure the trust of others to be effective. They win confidence through their reputation for competence in acquisition and management of resources, and goodwill by their personal attributes of vision, commitment and energy".

Within a month of moving to Makers Valley in Cycle One (January 2018), I had joined the collective of creatives that had formed around the JDA regeneration project (see Chapter Three) and was undertaking informal participant observation in other initiatives as well. I was able to start living, working and thus researching in the Valley with such short lead-in or integration time largely because stakeholders quickly trusted my intentions. As mentioned in Chapter Four, some of this trust came about because they could see a 'self interest' purpose of me being there – my PhD – and could allocate an identity to me that did not compete with theirs (as would, for example, a for-profit entity that may take their business), or threaten their leadership position in, for example, the residents' association. Thus, the identity of 'PhD researcher' seemed to lessen constraints and enable me to carry out the work I wished to carry out in the beginning, and to grow individual relationships of trust with existing stakeholders in Makers Valley. This was the case with Victoria Yards and The Coloured Cube owners in the first months, who invited me to use their offices as co-working spaces and even to sit in on confidential meetings, to gain a better understanding of their work.

Yet I was sometimes troubled that this sense of authenticity was somewhat constructed and relied on me presenting the most appropriate parts of myself to enable the building of trust. Though I did not investigate the hunch further, I wondered also about how much the speed that people, particularly property-owners and corporate decision-makers in the Valley, placed trust in me was linked to my other identities as a white cisgendered male – the demographic that most commonly held power in those contexts.

Putnam (2000) highlights the negative relationship between social capital and trust, and tolerance for social difference: there is an implied condition of conformity (ABS, 2002). As recognised by Fukuyama (1995: 26), trust is based on "commonly shared norms". I intuitively downplayed aspects of my identity that I judged would maybe generate confusion or doubt among participants, and I found and elevated common shared norms. Thus, the trust that formed was based on a partially constructed identity. A more explicit example that set the norms I needed to subscribe to was when a joke was shared about effeminate men during an introductory meeting soon after I started my research in the neighbourhood. I simply laughed along. However, there were many subtle examples of heteronormativity that established that I should be careful while building trust about revealing aspects of my identities they may not easily accept. As argued by Dasgupta (2005), tight social networks establish social norms, and push out those that do not conform. Thus, I found that a balance was needed between establishing a network within which people perceive sufficient common ground, and being inclusionary.

These dynamics played out beyond me, as well. Makers Valley neighbourhood was highly diverse and lacked common norms upon which to automatically rely. This underscored even further the importance of enablers. Furthermore, it was a common vision of hope and an improved collective future that seemed to act as the 'future norms' upon which many members of the Makers Valley community built their relationships of trust (for example, changemakers that contributed to the Theory of Change process). Russell et al. (2015) demonstrate the role a shared vision can play in the building of trust and social capital. Vice versa, as

also found by Schmid (2020), trust is an enabler of a common vision, in that individuals place trust in others with whom they are working to further similar goals of transformation, and therefore maintain their drive for their own work. Schmid (2019: 165) describes trust as the "lubricant that facilitates mutual support" within and across organisations. Nevertheless, trust does not obfuscate the need to compromise (ibid), as arose as a key theme in my action research, and which I explore in Chapter Eight.

Furthermore, MVP was cautious of the risks inherent in this dependence on individuals that results from informal arrangements without an institutional grounding. As I am no longer operationally involved in MVP, a formal memorandum of understanding, including a lease agreement with Victoria Yards clarifying and formalising the arrangement under which Victoria Yards does not charge MVP rent, is one of the tasks the new MVP CEO is undertaking. This institutional formalisation, guided by input from research participants, is in the hope that the relationships will endure, no matter who plays an operational role with MVP. However, this agreement would still be impossible to reach if the new CEO had not gained the trust of the Victoria Yards managing partner and manager first, as they are in the end trusting her to continue leading the organisation in a way that is sufficiently aligned with the shareholders' vision, and according to sufficiently shared norms.

### 6.5.3 Sharing and other prosocial behaviour, and the relationship to social capital

Relationships of trust assisted significantly in the redistribution of resources, through sharing. For instance, changemakers in need of resources to realise their intentions for their initiatives were able to access these through relationships of trust with others who had surplus resources or access to knowledge and resources elsewhere. This ranged from securing donations of children's toys, to having publicity (social media posts, articles in the press, or otherwise) about their work or featuring people in need, which resulted in the mobilisation of additional resources. The increase in the number of people benefitting from this bonding social capital that facilitated this redistribution was core to

transformation towards a wellbeing economy that I saw over the action research period. The increased bridging capital both enabled changemakers (increasing their agency through increasing their access to knowledge and resources), and had the potential to reduce inequality, even at a very small scale. At a national scale, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) identify that those societies enjoying greater trust also have greater equality and wellbeing. One changemaker said, "The more people you help with what you have, the more you receive, not from the same people but from other people – it's all interconnected" (I2, 23/04/2020). He saw immediate benefits to his personal wellbeing as a result of sharing (including the ability to attain security in covering his own basic material needs).

Facilitating fairer opportunities for changemakers to access knowledge and resources was at the core of first my, and then MVP Team's *raison d'étre* during the period of action research. While my level of agency was not such as to be able to tangibly increase redistribution at a broader scale, I hoped to enhance it at a neighbourhood scale and observe any results. In Cycle One I found the first iteration of the neighbourhood partnership to lack the diversity that would enable opportunities for sharing. The literature shows that greater social capital, or denser social relations, can mean greater prosocial behaviour (Barton et al., 2020). This was verified through this action research: sharing happened primarily through the extension of bridging social capital, with the most significant single transfers of resources and knowledge occurring between people of different socioeconomic backgrounds, both within and outside of Makers Valley neighbourhood.

MVP frequently acted as a 'middleman' to redistribute surplus. Over the two years of action research, I put out a number of calls for resources, initially using first my personal Facebook page until the MVP page and WhatsApp group were set up. We sometimes received significant responses, particularly when it involved the needs of children. Most donations through me came from people I already had established social relations with.

When enabling the Changemaker Children project with local NPO CDP (see Section 6.4), we received sufficient materials and donations to start an early childhood development centre, purely through in-kind donations and via a crowd-funding platform (though the centre was put on hold due to the Covid-19 lockdown). As is usually found regarding crowd funding (Cai et al., 2021), much of the early-stage donations came from those with whom key individuals involved already had social relations. I had the same experience when setting up the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence. This sharing happened not only in response to explicit calls by me or MVP, but also as a result of participants with different levels of access to knowledge and resources forming bonds with each other.

Even formal donor arrangements arose, at least to a small extent, from enablers' social capital and the trust underlying these social relations. There were also around 10 changemakers who generally lived in wealthier neighbourhoods and connected with wealthier people and companies in Johannesburg, and who would regularly contact less-resourced people or MVP to offer items. By the time the Covid-19 Response was started in April 2020, the social relations making up the community of Makers Valley had grown more extensive. MVP was able to leverage its collective social capital, both with those with resources to share and with neighbourhood changemakers, to ensure more effective distribution. It was also able to use its collective social capital to encourage journalists to showcase its efforts, thus building its reputation and attracting additional resources to redistribute.

In my action research, sharing generally opened up possibilities for enhanced wellbeing for both the givers and the receivers, as identified in the literature (Choi & Kim, 2011; Meier & Stutzer, 2008; Surana & Lomas, 2014). After some months of doing repairs and supporting younger children at the lower income 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence, a serial changemaker said in an interview about his understanding of 'a good life' that when "you know how to share and care for each other, then life will be good" (I9, 17/07/2019). I worked at building a culture of sharing as a key tool for 'changemaking' and enablement, through

setting an example myself in the early days of supporting the space's operations, but it was mostly simply ensuring people with a desire for community moved in, a culture of sharing food developed, and informal social relations formed. When asked about social relations within the house, a Changemakers Resident with a stable job said, "I help out the guys. I buy things. … I can see them working. You support that … you're in it for the relationship" (I10 18/09/2018). A resident who was a small-scale entrepreneur yet to gain a secure livelihood described how he and others would be supported by housemates.

> There are times when shit is really down, and there's not food, and maybe [another wealthier housemate] would come through – either cook for us, or lets us go with her to the store and get stuff that we know to get us through a week or two … This is not even what we spoke about and said we're going to do – it comes from that we look at each other as brothers and sisters, as family … *Isandla sekezana*. Hands wash each other (I23, 18/09/2018).

The social relations that formed through physical spaces in Makers Valley, as described in the next section, encouraged greater sharing, often simply because the differences in levels of material affluence were harder to ignore, and people could be persistent with expressing their needs to those with resources to share, when living in the same property.

In discussions in which I explored participants' motivations and experiences of sharing, some better-resourced participants were scared to establish longer-term relations with people from very different means, due to the sense of resentment that had arisen in previous relationships of this nature. I found I had to establish and clearly communicate boundaries regarding the support I offered. Literature on preventing burnout for changemakers identifies the need to balance inner wellbeing with changemaker work to ensure its sustainability (Gorski & Chen, 2015; Severns-Guntzel & Murphy-Johnson, 2020). These findings also support literature on the 'dark side' of social capital and prosocial behaviours, particularly when there is little reward perceived by long-term givers, such as tangible benefit to their reputation or image (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Furthermore, Bénabou and Tirole (2006) found that resentment can build

up among givers in cases where gratitude is perceived to be insufficiently expressed by recipients.

There was still further unrealised potential with people from outside of the neighbourhood, where MVP did not have the capacity to manage volunteers undertaking more complex tasks, even where there was willingness on their side. We had eight interns from outside of Makers Valley neighbourhood who each stayed a month or more, over the action research period, and we tried to make it comfortable and friendly for people to become part of initiatives. Many people from wealthier parts of Johannesburg shared their knowledge and skills over the years of fieldwork, some on a long-term, consistent basis. However, one enabler put forward that we could have had significantly more people sharing their skills and resources if we had offered clearer opportunities to get involved. The lack of capacity of the MVP Team meant we did not manage to offer additional volunteer opportunities, as we knew we would also need to have the capacity to provide the volunteers with guidance and support.

These experiences of effective redistribution at a small scale caused me to wonder about the potential for voluntary redistribution at a larger scale, through the promotion of social capital between people. The anthropology, psychology and neuroscience literature on prosociality identifies this as a core trait across different cultures, that is activated particularly within social and organisational groups (for a systematic review of prosociality, see Bolino and Grant, 2016). House- and neighbourhood-scale communities allow for longer-term and more sustainable relationships to develop between people, rather than impersonal or fleeting encounters that are common at city-scale, and semi-public micro-spaces in hyper-diverse areas, like Victoria Yards and VY Commons in Makers Valley, seem particularly useful for this (see Peterson, 2017).

In stratified societies such as South Africa, social groups usually consist of people with similar access to knowledge and resources. Greater bonding social capital has been shown to involve an exclusionary element towards other groups, thus retaining resources within wealthier groups (Putnam, 2000). Judging from the

Makers Valley action research, if more bridging social capital could be developed, however, more opportunities for sharing could naturally develop, and thus more redistribution, less inequality and enhanced wellbeing for both the 'haves' and 'have nots'. The diversity of Makers Valley neighbourhood and community, including wealthier participants in other neighbourhoods, offered more potential for social relations to form across socioeconomic divides.

Nevertheless, ongoing forces of redistribution and equality through networks of social relations should not be assumed. Previous studies show that local elites in networks generally capture most of the resources, thus strong community cannot be relied on for redistribution (McKean, 1992). Furthermore, established relationships of reciprocity that are beneficial to strong social relations and the accumulation of social capital can also encourage what could, if viewed through another lens, be seen as corruption (Dasgupta, 2005). It becomes more difficult to retain dispassionate objectivism in tighter-knit communities, that is, networks with higher degrees of social capital (ibid). For instance, in the short-listing of seed funding applicants in the DICE project of 2020, the selection panel knew some of the applicants, some of whom had previously supported the members of the selection panel. This made the selection process difficult for the panellists. The MVP Team needed to halt the process and introduce more formal measures of transparency, scoring, and recusal. Even so, it was more complex to remain objective than in the 2018 Makers Way selections process, when the Makers Valley community was less established. This seemed to demonstrate a growth in social capital, but also showed how this could easily lead to an agglomeration of resources, without the involvement of an intermediary organisation striving for objectivity. In the absence of trust in public institutions, fostering and maintaining trust in intermediaries like MVP through careful transparency and conflict management could perhaps enhance more sustainable prosocial behaviour and growth of social capital with more equitable outcomes (see, for instance, Andriani & Sabatini, 2015). As highlighted in Section 6.4, the formation of social capital between diverse people and real integration requires intentional action. The following section discuses how the same is required to maximise the community-building potential of physical spaces.

## 6.6 Physical Spaces as an Enabler of Social Capital and Community

The street life and built environment of Makers Valley neighbourhood as a whole leant itself to building social capital through being open to chance encounters (Halligey, 2017). Even the houses are relatively open to the street compared to more affluent suburbs of Johannesburg. MVP and partners could generally easily gain access to the occupants, for instance for the comprehensive door-to-door survey MVP carried out for the Covid-19 Response, or several surveys on local perceptions of wellbeing in Cycles One and Two. Interestingly, as highlighted by Jacobs (1992), neighbourhood wellbeing is also supported by unplanned social interactions. Within this neighbourhood context, physical spaces that drew together people from diverse backgrounds were important to creating both bonding and bridging social capital. Skills Village, Ellis House and Victoria Yards were all selected as Makers Valley hubs. However, in Cycle Three, MVP decided to focus its efforts on Victoria Yards, due to limited human resources. MVP was given rent-free space for a three-month trial period and then 'in perpetuity' according to the Victoria Yards managing partner. Through different partnerships, the space developed into the VY Commons coworking space. We conceptualised VY Commons as a hub within the Victoria Yards hub, within the Makers Valley 'heart' of social and creative enterprise.

### 6.6.1 The nuances of Victoria Yards in light of a Wellbeing Economy vision

The Victoria Yards development was the most successful hub compared to Ellis House and Skills Village at drawing wealthier people from the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, as well tourists from elsewhere in South Africa and abroad. With its high perimeter walls and aesthetically appealing interior of Victorian facades and edible gardens, Victoria Yards provided a safe space for people to wander and interact with the 'makers' (the creative entrepreneurs or artisans) and at times, changemakers from the neighbourhood.

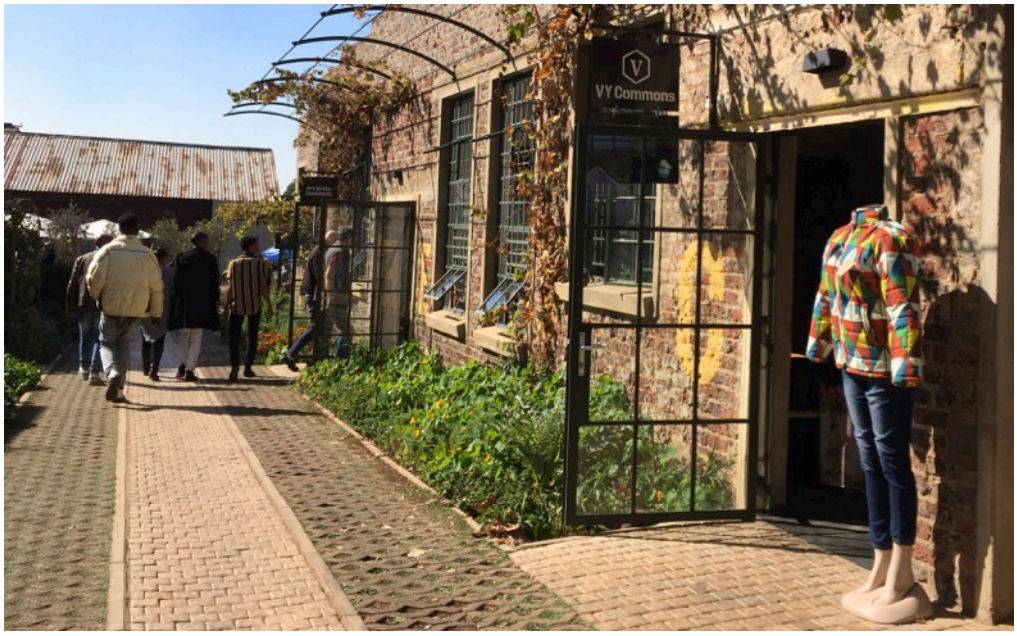



**Figure 6.3:** Inside Victoria Yards, including the entrance to VY Commons coworking space with a creative entrepreneur showcasing her designs outside the door. (Source: author, 2019).

Indeed, over the course of the action research, I realised the importance of aesthetics, particularly in drawing people to a neighbourhood where they would otherwise not go. A shift to the aesthetics of higher income groups, or shift in what is considered the aesthetic fashions of these groups, is often a significant contributor to the shift in users of a space that ultimately results in gentrification (Chang, 2016). However, like in the case of Maboneng (Nevin, 2014) discussed in Appendix C, it was also the aesthetics that attracted other enablers to Victoria Yards and then to MVP work. Participants highlighted that Victoria Yards was the 'feather' in the Makers Valley 'hat', and without it, it is doubtful MVP would have been able to catalyse the human and financial resources that were required for enablement. Decision-makers for the US Consulate and British Council grants visited Victoria Yards before awarding MVP the funding, and I am certain this played a key role in their decision-making. Though they were not explicit about Victoria Yards motivating their selection, both funders held several events at Victoria Yards following the award. MVP's relationship with the British Council led to a visit of British royalty to Victoria Yards, hosted by MVP representatives, and funders sometimes seemed to conflate Victoria Yards and Makers Valley in their communication. Victoria Yards was something tangible that represented, at

face value, the creative placemaking and social and creative enterprise visions held by the US Consulate and British Council, respectively.

The Victoria Yards managing partner was candid that profit came first, and a wellbeing economy vision to prioritise social and ecological goals did not always hold true with the Victoria Yards shareholders. However, its aesthetics also attracted people for whom a wellbeing economy paradigm did hold true. These people were attracted to the beautiful gardens made up mostly of edible plants (urban farming has strong links to alternative or community economies), artisans and craft beer (also with links to local economies sentiment), and the appearance of many buildings being kept in their original form with limited intervention (minimalist design). Victoria Yards therefore catalysed resources that did benefit surrounding residents and could be deployed for wellbeing economy initiatives. For instance, an MVP 'fan' who played an enabler role through sharing her social capital said that

> Makers Valley was the first project I came across that was connecting people and resources from the ground up and [with the Team being located at Victoria Yards, which] served good coffee I felt I could bring anyone to it. It was accessible without being threatening, [which] made it easy to get involved (pers. comm., 17 June 2020).

Victoria Yards also provided an easy hub for corporate 'experiential learning' tours, and MVP developed informal partnerships with three tour operators working with wealthy corporates and clients. We structured these in ways to allow for informal interaction between local changemakers and visitors, and small opportunities arose out of this, including income generation opportunities from subsequent paying tours where attendees brought their family or friends (I3, 08/04/2020) or donations of clothing and shoes.

Victoria Yards became the physical space around which the Makers Valley changemaker culture developed, and similarly of the use of the property as an enabler for further changemaking. In setting up VY Commons at Victoria Yards, with MVP using it as their base, and the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence opposite the Victoria Yards entrance, I assisted in centring this community

further. Being next door and considered safe, it also enabled Nando's employee changemakers to significantly increase their own changemaker work in the neighbourhood, particularly as part of the Covid-19 Response in the latter half of 2020.

When I visited the site in late 2017, I found the development of Victoria Yards already to be securely underway. Thus, using an asset-based community development approach and influencing the development in small ways through my acquaintance with the managing partner, I worked to maximise the development's changemaking potential towards a wellbeing economy. However, I became aware as I worked with people who were previous tenants of the space before it became 'Victoria Yards' that there had been significant displacement. Participants described how 'makers' like conventional carpenters, mechanics and welders that did not fit with Victoria Yards' boutique artisanal aesthetic were evicted, and visual artists and bespoke lighting and clothing manufacturers aware of aesthetic trends of the elite were brought in.

With one of the core tenets of a wellbeing economy being fairness, including spatial justice, displacement in the surrounding neighbourhood remained one of my biggest concerns. This could arise from typical gentrification pressures: increases in housing prices, then property rates and rentals, meaning that current tenants would no longer be able to pay. Average sale prices in Lorentzville and Judith's Paarl (mapped in Figure 3.3) did rise beyond inflation between 2017, when Victoria Yards started trading, and 2020, when property prices dropped across the inner city due to the Covid-19 lockdown and associated slowdown in the economy (Property24, 2021). At the time of writing, the trends were not yet clear enough to make a judgement as to the impact of Victoria Yards. Even if Victoria Yards was a driver of gentrification, it was one of many concerns I could do little about, given the realities of those who held greater agency than me, due to the resources they had at their disposal. I had to maintain positive relations with Victoria Yards shareholders. While I raised my concerns about displacement with the managing partner, he too had little control

over the impact on the surrounding neighbourhood that may arise from the success of Victoria Yards.

Unlike other inner city gentrification, such as that in the surroundings of Maboneng (Vejby, 2015), Makers Valley's common typology of single-story houses on properties mostly under 500 square metres would mean investors would have to have significant patience for limited returns, even if they did manage to develop a higher-end market for any converted properties. Thus, I hoped that the surrounding built environment provided too much an unlikely terrain for gentrification to jump the walls of Victoria Yards. Given the proportion of housing still owned by the City of Johannesburg in Bertrams, the trajectory of the neighbourhood also depends particularly on the decisions around that housing, which have been pending since the early 2000s: if it is kept as City stock, given to long-term tenants, or sold. Furthermore, South African legislation, if invoked, would significantly slow or prevent eviction from the many shared and informally occupied houses, backyard rooms, and informal settlements, as current occupants could likely prove they would be rendered homeless if prevented from staying in their current accommodation. And thus, partnering with Victoria Yards and basing the MVP hub there was a compromise that, though a difficult ethical decision to make, was likely the most significant single contributor to MVP's successes in enabling a wellbeing economy.

### 6.6.2 A Makers Valley 'hub': coworking and community?

Using a wellbeing economy approach of non-monetary exchange, as an enabler I connected different opportunities and needs together. Victoria Yards needed to promote their community and skills development image and had space to share. Local changemakers and small business owners needed space but did not have the financial means to rent their own. Furthermore, though the neighbourhood was diverse, race and socioeconomic barriers were prevalent. Coworking-spaces can increase social relations, including social feedback, trust, learning, and collaboration between experts with different expertise (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018). A fellow changemaker and I founded what became VY Commons as a co-

working makers' space. Makers at different times included tailors, book binders, leather worker and 3D visual artists. Changemakers included a waste management social enterprise, urban gardener and an NPO hosting national 'integrity awards'.

The coworking space offered the opportunity for people from different backgrounds to connect and build a rapport with each other, contributing to bridging social capital. This was particularly common between entrepreneurs battling to secure a stable livelihood and well-resourced individuals (particularly expatriates) interested in finding more meaning or connecting with the realities of Johannesburg. It was a flexible 'makers' space with limited barriers to entry: a policy of 'pay as much as you can afford', availability of Wi-Fi, computers and basic equipment, tea and coffee meant that one did not have to have income or assets to use the space. Yet being within Victoria Yards, it also drew people from beyond the neighbourhood.

As the MVP Team's office, VY Commons also provided formal meeting and workshop space for a variety of activities, from connecting and building relationships with City of Johannesburg officials during Makers Valley Festival planning meetings, to providing desk space for diverse MVP interns. VY Commons became the place many participants first connected with MVP. For some changemakers, VY Commons was a place to bump into someone and have a conversation about things that brought them meaning. These conversations and connections then enhanced social capital. Schmid (2019) also recognised the importance of co-working and collaborative workshop spaces to facilitate the generation of social capital towards community economies. The spaces he studied served as meeting places for "diverse individuals that would not meet otherwise" (Schmid, 2020: 174).

Schmid (2020) found the coworking spaces he studied also exposed visitors and regular users to relevant narratives – visions of alternate economies – and facilitated the spread of these alternative practices. The set-up in one workshop subtly confronted visitors with issues around resource use and economic

growth, for instance. In the case of VY Commons, I was surprised by the number of users who contemplated, and in some cases started actively questioning, "What is a good life really, and how do we get there?" (the question that I used as my key action research question when introducing people to the wellbeing economy paradigm), simply because the question was stuck up on posters on the wall. Running VY Commons as a social enterprise, we also explored alternate management practices through learning by doing (a concept I turn to in the next chapter), including aspects such as labour time in lieu of cash payments, collaborative decision-making, 'pay as much as you can afford', a 'swap shop' where unwanted items could taken by people that wanted them, as well as more conventional practices like composting.

The coworking space also had similarities to those found in Impact Hubs, one of which was found in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg, and with whom MVP had a relationship (in Cycle Two, before re-opening as VY Commons, we had encouraged the owner to set up a satellite Hub at Victoria Yards). Avelino et al. (2019) highlight that an Impact Hub, a social enterprise itself, demonstrates social innovation through aiming to provide an inspiring space, vibrant community and meaningful content. However, as with individual Impact Hubs and other coworking spaces (Longhurst et al., 2016), the challenge with VY Commons was actually in realising social innovation at the level of systemic change, or building a changemaker culture beyond a handful of people. MVP struggled also with retention of higher income users, perhaps because of slicker offerings closer to the richer neighbourhoods where they lived. Cycle Seven of the action research saw a major revamp of the space made possible by external funding, and MVP hopes this will encourage longer-term retention of higher income users.

The biggest challenge I found was preventing 'free rider' problems, where some users did not take joint responsibility in caring for the common spaces in the co-working and co-living arrangements of VY Commons and 39 Victoria. In Cycle Three the induction of a relatively full-time user-manager helped. She was already a user of the space and could take on the additional management

responsibility and be compensated for this. Grazian (2020) highlights that user-managers can both mitigate free-rider issues as well as foster the growth of social capital between users of the space, though they need to go beyond simply organising events, and themselves build social capital within the space. In this way, the user-manager can act as a trust broker (discussed above). However, they do need to strive to remain dispassionate, in order to minimise conflict regarding the unanimous rules, and instead play a conflict resolution role (McKean, 1992).

MVP also struggled to find someone who was strong enough to play a management role, but who would stick to managing those rules that had been agreed upon by all VY Commons members through a vote, rather than bringing in or focusing exclusively on their own rules based on their preferences (as found also by Grazian, 2020). At VY Commons, there were conflicts every few months that I, and as of June 2020 (Cycle Six) the new MVP CEO, had to step in to resolve. If the conflict was not easily resolvable I usually called a face-to-face meeting where people could be transparent about their views, then moved to tangible solutions, bringing to other members the difficult and relatively unrewarding role the manager was playing. We changed managers twice due to unresolvable situations. I present next how I played a similar role in the Changemakers Residences, once the partner changemaker had taken over management.

### 6.6.3 Co-living: Changemakers Residences

Working with partner changemakers, I set up the Changemakers Residences with the aim of supporting a culture of changemaking, including the social capital this required. Co-housing has been found elsewhere to support both bridging and bonding social capital (Ruiu, 2016). In Cycle One of my research, before setting up a Changemakers Residence in Makers Valley, I interviewed residents from the first house I had set up of this nature in 'Cycle Zero', on the east side of the inner city. As it had been running for three years by then, I wanted to gain residents' input, to guide the establishment of Changemakers Residences in

Makers Valley. Some residents spoke about social capital in relation to having a group of individuals around them who were "aware" of them and their "gifts" (I20, 18/09/2018). Even though not all of them were "on the same page" (I20, 18/09/2018), they were "open minded" and wanted to see each other to "grow as people" and they motivated others accordingly. Other housemates made them feel "part of the family" (I23, 18/09/2018) and there was an unusual "bond" (I10, 18/09/2018), a trust in the other person and in the relationship which led to a sense of support in more challenging times.

Building social capital and community was not a straightforward process in the Changemakers Residences, however, and challenges of conflict, a culture of 'social deviance' and negative impacts on my own wellbeing, due to the intensity of life in the 39 Victoria Residence concerned me. Nevertheless, particularly in the other Changemakers Residences, residents described the development of social capital. They identified it primarily as enabling a support base, and various Troyeville House and 44 Fourth residents described the community that developed as a 'family'. This sense of community motivated further changemaking and provided a safety net in more challenging times.

## 6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the findings around enablement through building community. MVP did not enable significant promotion of a common identity for the neighbourhood as 'Makers Valley' or otherwise. Neither did it succeed in enabling a major upgrade of the public spaces, as originally intended. Nevertheless, through the multiple joint projects undertaken by MVP as different iterations of loose partnerships, a community of changemakers did form around the physical spaces VY Commons, the Changemakers Residences, Victoria Yards, and the broader neighbourhood. This community was small in relation to the number of residents and other stakeholders in the Valley, but diverse. The challenging Covid-19 lockdown acted as a window of opportunity for expanding the Makers Valley community, as I explore further in Chapter Seven.

The collaborative visioning and fundraising processes run by MVP enabled individual changemakers and the partners involved, and other enablers were also attracted by the Makers Valley collaborative vision. There was the potential for those with greater agency to influence visioning processes, however, with the involvement of MVP as an intermediary that strove for impact towards the common good, this did not necessarily present a problem.

Indeed, intermediaries were crucial to enablement. Several organisations played an intermediary role over the course of the action research. Two long-standing registered non-profit organisations partnered with and enabled MVP, through acting as a conduit for funding and deploying their governance and accountability structures. In turn, MVP enabled changemakers in Makers Valley, and was particularly helpful for smaller, less formal entities. This was an example of a ripple effect, where changemakers who were enabled went on to enable other changemakers. MVP also worked to grow the community of changemakers and promote a culture of changemaking. It found that working through partners who were growing their circles of influence within focus areas were effective for this.

Bonding social capital (between people holding similar identities or socioeconomic groups) and bridging social capital (across diverse socioeconomic groups) played a key role in enablement. Securing the trust of others, including enablers and other changemakers, enhanced changemakers' agency through relationships of reciprocity, the sense that others believed in their capabilities, and a support base in more challenging periods. These relationships generally preceded formal agreements and were generally between individuals, with enablers making connections as trust 'brokers'. Nevertheless, in later cycles MVP began processes to institutionalise this trust, aiming to ensure that relationships lived beyond the involvement of individuals. Even here, the role of the enabler was beneficial to enhancing the transfer or brokerage of capital. Trust building was supported by shared norms. Given the diversity of Makers Valley stakeholders and thus diversity of norms, a shared vision and intermediary

organisation was important in the action research. I also found myself intuitively overlooking differences between my (or MVP's) norms and visions and those of the stakeholder when I felt the differences would perhaps confuse the trust-building process.

Physical spaces, in particular Victoria Yards, drew people from diverse backgrounds. MVP was able to informally catalyse this into social capital through co-working and co-living spaces within and opposite Victoria Yards. These spaces also worked to expose visitors and members to wellbeing economy visions and practices. The chance meetings made possible because of the built environment and social characteristics here and in the broader neighbourhood also enhanced possibilities for growing social capital. Lastly, the more extensive social relations and social capital that arose in Makers Valley community led to sharing that enhanced wellbeing for some sharers, as well as enabling changemakers facing greater resource constraints.

# 7. ENABLING CHANGEMAKERS: LEARNING BY DOING, RESPONSIVENESS AND HYBRIDITY

## 7.1 Introduction

Enabling changemakers required responsiveness at all levels. This required enablers to navigate a 'politics of hybridity' (Schmid, 2021) in order to realise tangible action. Chapter Seven presents further processes that supported enablement towards transformative social innovation in Makers Valley. In the first half of the chapter, I explore three approaches that enabled changemakers through 'learning by doing' (Section 7.2): effectively gaining knowledge of existing social relations or structures, to realise more agency in changing them. Learning by doing approaches included flexibility in working with partners, allowing freedom for experimentation, including low-risk, incremental projects, and lastly experiential learning approaches where classroom-based learning is simultaneously tested in practice. In the second half of the chapter I focus on the role of 'an enabler', including an analysis of my own experience as I aspired to maximise my changemaking potential through enabling other enablers. The two linked themes I explore are a hands-off approach (Section 7.3) and working with the ebb and flow of action (Section 7.4). Lastly, in Section 7.5 I discuss the need for responsiveness to broader systems and the possibilities of forming hybrid infrastructures such as the Changemakers Residences and Makers Valley Partnership as an intermediary organisation.

## 7.2 Enablement through Learning by Doing

In urban planning, the approaches of 'tactical urbanism' (Berger, 2017; Lydon et al., 2015), 'small change' (Hamdi, 2004) and 'massive small' (Campbell, 2018) share the principle of 'learning by doing' (Kato & Ahern, 2008), as discussed in Chapter Two. Action research assumes participants should "learn their way forward" (Burns et al., 2012: 5), to better make sense of complex situations. This principle underpinned Makers Valley Partnership (MVP)'s work, including the

formal donor-funded projects. While I had not conceptualised Makers Valley as an 'urban living lab' at the start of the research, this is the model it came to resemble, including as a manifestation of the learning by doing principles in a contained geographical space (a core aspect of urban living labs, as identified by Marvin et al., 2018, and discussed further in Chapter Eight). A resident changemaker, co-founder of a social enterprise, said, "knowing that there is room for experimenting [and] … such a human connection: … that is [a] special thing about Makers Valley" (I3, 08/04/2020). Similar to that which is attempted in urban living labs, MVP processes allowed for the "idea of supporting and allowing micro-ideas and micro-projects to have the space [they needed to be tested]", as the convenor of the group of creatives that led to MVP reflected (I6, 08/04/2020). Learning by doing was a core driver within this group. In the next three sub-sections I discuss three themes within the overall findings concerning 'learning by doing'.

### 7.2.1 Flexibility with accountability

Burns et al. (2012: 5) highlight that "change is non-linear and emergent": "outcomes result from multiple actions and … [these] outcomes may look quite different from what we would expect if we aggregated all of the individual actions". While flexibility is key in being responsive to emergence in complex systems, I found that risks needed to be managed through flexible accountability measures. Within key members of the group that grew into MVP, the approach of learning by doing preceded the start of my action research. In the proposal the original group of creatives submitted to the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), they set out to use processes where "ideas are explored and concepts in our public realm experimented on" through "open calls" for innovative designs to be implemented and tested in the neighbourhood (The Coloured Cube, 2017: 10). In a reflection stage of Cycle One of my action research (early 2018), supported by a literature review, I recognised the approach as tactical urbanism (Lydon et al., 2015). In their submission, the group aimed to work with a flexible approach using local suppliers to prototype solutions to urban design and management challenges. However, in Cycle One of my research, the JDA told the

group that municipal procurement procedures meant that this approach would not be possible. Despite some JDA staff being passionate about tactical urbanism (JDA planning manager, pers. comm., 15/03/2018), without a change in the Municipal Finance Management Act (2003), local suppliers could not be used unless they had already successfully tendered for the supplier database, which was renewed every three years.

However, in Cycle Two (late 2018) MVP obtained a significant grant from the US Consulate for a creative placemaking project (MVP was formally represented by a longstanding non-profit organisation, the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership (JICP)). MVP changemakers were excited by greater opportunities for a 'learning by doing' approach, due to more flexibility on the part of the funder. As highlighted by the creative placemaking project manager, it is "one thing to have ideas and it is a very different thing to be given the opportunity to actually implement those ideas" (I6, 08/04/2020). The creative placemaking project became an opportunity to "allow people to explore those ideas, but with a sense of community and public space at the heart of the project" (I6, 08/04/2020).

The MVP project manager for the creative placemaking project was passionate about carrying through the learning by doing approach, also into the administration of the project. She was cognisant of how the inflexibility of grant-funded projects could limit possibilities of learning by doing and strived instead for a project management style where "rules shifted according to what the limitations were … depending on individual and [implementing partner]" (I6, 08/04/2020). She identified that this enabled the project to be a "catalyst for action, creativity, exploration and community initiatives", through which more "doers" became engaged because they were able to be freer about implementing their own ideas in their own way (I6, 19/03/2020). This increased the prospects of interventions continuing beyond the funding cycle, as grant funding could be used to enhance changemakers' agency to realise their own intentions.

The typical role of an implementing partner is to carry out predetermined activities to achieve the outcomes set out in the funding brief. However, one

implementing partner said, “Not once did she put me under pressure to say we need so and so many numbers” (I4, 21/04/2020), referring to the absence of typical predetermined deliverables such as the number of new businesses registered (the remainder of this section discusses the repercussions and management of this aspect). This approach also inspired other enablers like me to try the same in their work. As argued by Burns et al. (2012: 6), “a plan that changes as learning emerges (rather than showing that predetermined indicators were met and the original plan stuck to) is an indicator of good action research”.

However, significant tension developed between the MVP project manager and the JICP due to the project manager’s approach. The first key issue JICP had was with the less formal contracting process her company, The Coloured Cube (TCC) followed with some implementing partners. The project manager acknowledged that this could be “hugely frustrating to a governance committee” (I6, 08/04/2020), but remained adamant that JICP, who, as the official contractor with the US Consulate, chaired MVP’s project governance committee, was not sufficiently understanding of the need for this flexibility. TCC played an essential role as a second intermediary, as many implementing partners would otherwise not be able to access the available resources through the standard formal means. Having two intermediary organisations was necessary to enable changemakers, who did not yet have the formalities needed for contracting, to access the resources from the formal donor-funded project. JICP contracted with the funder and was able to satisfy financial reporting requirements by submitting TCC’s formal invoices. This meant that TCC as the official implementing partner was able to use fewer formal arrangements with smaller partners who realised most of the action.

Even so, though I understood the role of experimentation in innovation, I found some of the project manager’s decisions to be lacking in democracy and accountability, without sufficient research or consultation. This approach led to disgruntlement among some residents. For instance, when trees along the project’s focus route were wrapped in yellow cloth, residents saw it as wasted

expenditure. Many cloths were stolen, and the remainder were perceived to look ugly and became tatty within a few months (member of the local residents' representative body, pers. comm., 09/11/2019; I15, 15/04/2020).

Furthermore, the project manager was haphazard in monitoring the interventions undertaken by the implementing partners, so the outcomes were often dependent on the partners' ethics, capabilities or motivation. TCC sometimes awarded funding based on very rough ideas that did not materialise in any significant way. Implementing partners were nevertheless paid in full, as long as they produced a report in the form of a blog post. I found that this led to some service providers maximising the impact of the intervention and others maximising their own profit, with limited benefit to others. For instance, having been awarded the set budget for interventions in that project cycle of 5 000 ZAR (350 USD), one implementing partner held only a ten-minute ad hoc street workshop, giving away about 30 plant cuttings placed in soil in recycled cans. Flexibility without effective accountability measures and support sometimes led to disappointing outcomes.

Through reflection over the action research cycles, I found that these issues could have been overcome through quick but more thorough research, and innovative accountability processes being set up before resources were used, though care would have to have been taken to avoid delays due to indecision from too many people being involved, or conflict. The project governance committee generally identified issues too late, once the intervention had already occurred, or were not able to be useful in planning future interventions. Three months was too long a time to plan for, given the tactical urbanism approach taken (governance committee meetings were held quarterly).

In Cycle Four (specifically in April 2019) I set up a Makers Valley steering committee and part of its role was to provide monitoring and direction for the funded projects. It was made up of 12 members, as an attempt to reflect the wide diversity and multiple communities in Makers Valley (see Chapter Three), each with their own portfolio. However, Aubé et al. (2011), argue that larger teams

such as this lead to counterproductive behaviours. I found the first iteration of the Steering Committee to be too large for members to feel a sense of commitment. Like the project governance committee, there was also a disconnect between the day-to-day interventions and decision-making. Crucially, the creative placemaking project manager did not want to be a part of the steering committee. Most committee members stopped attending within a few months as they struggled to see the value of it (I discussed the importance of validation in Chapter Five). In Cycle Five (in March 2020), MVP was to launch the steering committee again with only five members, with more direct decision-making power. This was to be in combination with the open-invitation Makers Valley Community Conversations held quarterly or on demand, where MVP consulted residents, reported on activities, and generated awareness about opportunities. However, the Covid-19 lockdown prevented this from happening.

During much of the creative placemaking project, I played a 'hands off' enabler role (which I set out in more detail in Section 7.3), as I recognised that the project manager was a capable enabler and did not need my support. However, in the final reflection stages during Cycle Seven (after completion of the project), I realised the enabling potential of monitoring and corrective feedback, spurring more effective learning by doing. Kato and Ahern (2008) argue for the usefulness of structured learning by doing in 'adaptive management', to deal with the uncertainty inherent in complex systems. In adaptive management, actions are "best understood and practiced as experiments" (Kato & Ahern, 2008: 543), which infers that monitoring of these actions is key. An intermediary organisation such as MVP could achieve greater accountability, from a neutral perspective. Now that a larger MVP Team has been secured in Cycle Seven (at the end of 2020), in future similar projects, representatives could play a monitoring role, for instance attending interventions and providing critical feedback to implementing partners, a steering committee and the project manager.

As highlighted by Burns et al (2012: 5) "'results' are unknowable in advance but will emerge along the way" as complexity is navigated, "generating action-knowledge to test the boundaries of what is possible". However, I was concerned

about the lack of any 'results' if implementing partners were given grants without the co-formulation of clear expectations. Another proposal to enhance monitoring was for the interventions carried out by implementing partners to be broken up into smaller portions. In this format the enabling aspects of flexibility could be retained, while maintaining accountability. Potential changemakers would submit short straightforward reports at each phase, encouraging self-reflection. This proposal was put forward earlier by a member of the MVP Team, and MVP started trialling a phased approach with the British Council Developing Inclusive and Creative Economies (DICE) project in Cycle Six. In March 2020 social and creative entrepreneurs were awarded a first tranche of funding based on their written and verbally pitched proposal competition. As with a phased approach in larger formal grants, awardees would have to provide evidence of work done and outline plans for the next 'cycle' before additional funding tranches would be granted. However, additional tranches would be granted based on the demonstration of learning by doing and responsiveness to findings from implementation, as opposed to the fulfilment of predetermined criteria or their original project plan. However, due to the Covid-19 lockdown on 27 March 2020, two weeks after the pitch competition, the trial of this approach was not able to happen beyond the initial allocation. Nevertheless, it was evident that an approach achieving a middle way between flexibility and stifling accountability would best enable tangible actions towards changemaking. While MVP explored a hands-off approach to monitoring through initial cycles, along with greater formalisation of the MVP Team as an organisation has come more possibilities to balance flexibility and accountability needs.

### 7.2.2 Low-risk beginnings, iterative scaling and building capabilities

The knowledge and resources that enhance changemakers' agency in one context may not be appropriate in another, where different systems are in place (Buijs et al., 2016; Hamdi, 2004; Pel et al., 2020). Therefore, I found learning by doing also to be an appropriate strategy for applying general principles to the local context of Makers Valley with its specific dynamics. Limiting risk at the start of an initiative and iterative scaling up was important here. Social entrepreneurial

activities, of the sort enabled by MVP, are highly influenced by context (Gupta et al., 2020). Many of the wellbeing economy concepts and projects, and approaches like tactical urbanism, were developed and trialled in the global North (as I mentioned in the introductory chapter). In this section, I use a small example of what became the 'edible streets' programme to show how MVP projects trialled wellbeing economy ideas (often originating in a different context of the global North) in Makers Valley through an iterative scaling approach.

The 'edible streets' concept, where vegetables and other edible plants are planted on sidewalks for public picking and consumption, is typical of transformative social innovation communities in the global North. It originated in 1970s New York (Fraser, 2010), and was more recently popularised in the United Kingdom and elsewhere from 2008 (Incredible Edible, 2020). During my reflection stage in Cycle One (June 2018) I found significant literature on community gardens in South Africa. Ruysenaar (2013), for example, evaluates Gauteng Provincial Government's programme to be ineffective in addressing food insecurity for the poorest residents (Johannesburg is located in the province of Gauteng). MVP partners were doubtful it would work in Makers Valley, where residents and stakeholders often bemoaned the lack of care towards common spaces like streets, and the pervasiveness of theft. Nevertheless, I suggested the idea of developing an edible street project to an MVP volunteer and assisted him in accessing the minimal resources needed to start. Through a partnership approach with students from the University of Johannesburg and Victoria Yards he coordinated the planting out of the first sidewalk on a 'safe' site we chose on Viljoen Street, directly outside Victoria Yards where there were security guards during the day. While I, too, was sceptical about the issue of theft, passers-by picked the vegetables but usually left enough for the plants to continue producing.



**Figure 7.1:** Children who were part of an MVP early childhood development programme plant seedlings in the edible streets garden on Viljoen Street outside Victoria Yards. (Source: MVP, 2020).

With the first iteration seeming successful, in Cycle Three a few months later a resident of the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence expanded the edible streets project to the pavement outside the house. This site required more resources to prepare (a retaining wall and some planting soil), but it also remains productive at the time of writing, with minimal resource inputs required. In Cycle Four, the same changemaker expanded the initiative further along the street, first with vegetables and then with a large donation of fruit trees organised by a key MVP enabler. However, when the summer rains came and the soil loosened allowing for easier removal, 20 of the trees were stolen at night, likely for resale. Learning from this, in July 2020 (Cycle Six) the changemaker decided to try using just a few (i.e. minimising risk) non fruit-bearing trees, and they are still in place at the time of writing (for this he needed to be flexible enough to change his original vision of planting only edible plants). The learning from these iterations enabled Victoria Yards management to decide in October 2020 (Cycle Seven) to build raised beds and expand the original 'edible street' initiative along two more blocks of the pavement on Viljoen Street (a significantly more resource-intensive intervention). As a result of public space urban agricultural initiatives like these, the 39 Victoria resident has been featured in the media (Heywood, 2020b; Rajaonary, 2020) and has secured funding to scale up his social enterprise,

Growing Community which supports homestead gardens in the neighbourhood. Thus, the low-risk start has allowed him to increase his access to resources and thus enhance his agency over iterative cycles.

Another MVP social entrepreneur spoke about this dual process of building capabilities and trust through learning by doing, from his perspective of working with other changemakers in Makers Valley and previously in Maboneng.

> When you talk to people about your ideas when you haven't done anything as yet, they don't take you seriously. But if you've started even something small like inviting a few friends to donate shoes [and] sketching logos … [you can tell] that story … 'ah I've tried it, this and this happened before', then it's easy [for people to have greater trust in your initiative]. … I don't even take people seriously [when they only have] ideas and haven't even started. You meet a lot of them, 'oh I have this idea of doing this thing 1, 2, 3' … and then two years, three years, [they are] still on the same ideas, still haven't tried it out (I1, 15/04/2019).

Thus, the edible streets and the sneakers social enterprises are examples of how low-risk beginnings followed by iterative scaling served to enable changemakers through building a track record and attracting additional resources.

These examples also demonstrate how learning by doing through smaller projects within changemakers' existing capabilities can generate a sense of self-efficacy. Linking to the findings on changemakers and wellbeing I discuss in the following chapter, growing capabilities through direct experience like this can enhance agency by being highly motivating (Hitlin & Elder, 2006). As noted by Pel et al. (2020: 4) regarding changemakers acting towards transformative social innovation, "the belief in the ability to achieve goals requires the actual experience of achieving some degree of impact". The Housing Development Agency's (HDA, 2012) and Pooe's (2016) research on the nearby eKhaya initiative (discussed in Appendix C) found that successful actions, however small, generated appetite for more actions, which resulted in the development of larger-scale projects, and ultimately enhanced pride in the neighbourhood and trust between changemakers as well as residents (HDA, 2012; Pooe, 2016).

Through my action research I came to see that a core part of my role as an aspiring enabler was to be encouraging and to support potential changemakers to implement projects in small, manageable and low-risk ways (to translate ideas into tangible action).

Indeed, Avelino et al. (2019) argue the importance of a lower-risk, iterative approach to transformative social innovation. Transition Towns, many of which feature edible streets initiatives in the global North, work mostly with volunteer labour and donated goods in low cost, low-risk initiatives (MacKenzie & Lewis-Hunstiger, 2017; Westley et al., 2011; reviewed in Chapter Two). Similar to the enablement experienced in the examples above, changemakers behind these initiatives test proof of concept, expending minimal resources aside from their time, and if successful, can use this to attract more resources. As Avelino et al. (2020) and Zademach and Hillebrand (2013) found, using glocal approaches to build translocal networks between these initiatives has the potential to grow alternative economies and spaces. Translocal networks can further support learning by doing across different contexts, as with MVP's trial of the edible streets initiative, using experiential learning in the global North. Nevertheless, MVP found workshop- and classroom-based learning to complement real-world experience, thus further enhancing learning by doing.

### 7.2.3 Combining workshop-based learning and real-world experience

MVP and partners tried to incorporate learning by doing principles into classroom-based learning, too, inspired by an experiential learning approach (Kolb, 1984). In the DICE project in Cycles Four to Six (April 2019 to March 2020), implementing partner the Curriculum Development Project Trust (CDP) incorporated a learning by doing, experiential learning approach into their classroom-based training programme. Participants applied the skills learnt in workshops to tender competitively for work to produce material, such as carnival gear, for the Makers Valley Festival. Some participants grew significant bonding social capital through the programme and collaborated to produce a range of goods from recycled materials (see Figure 7.2), even though the Festival

could not take place due to Covid-19. In another CDP training programme, however, in which there was no clear incentive structure encouraging learning by doing through applying the workshop-based learning, I was disappointed in the lack of outcomes. Practitioners and principals had promised they would implement the practices they had learnt in the classroom, but when the CDP director and I carried out site visits to their early childhood development centres, we found only one of 16 workshop participants had made any tangible change in their Centre. This is despite the workshops being highly flexible, where material and trainers were included as the programme proceeded, based on requests from participants about what they wanted more knowledge on.



**Figure 7.2:** Making giant puppets from 'upcycled' newspaper and discarded art supplies for Makers Valley Carnival, which was indefinitely postponed due to the start of the national Covid-19 lockdown on the same date it was due to commence, 26 March 2020. (Source: CDP, 2020).

The lack of tangible action arising from this approach, and similar experiences from some of the other classroom-based skills development workshops held during the action research (MVP programmes ran 83 workshops in total), emphasised the possibility of minimal enablement arising from classroom-based learning. This was despite participants generally evaluating the training

experience as valuable for their practice. Participants must be incentivised to trial new knowledge and incorporate it into everyday practice. Without opportunities, or even pressure, to practice skills promoted in workshops, MVP partners' training programs would have been less effective.

To clarify this argument, MVP found learning by doing to be most effective when classroom-based learning and real-world experience were combined. For instance, the 94 Colours co-founders held a pitch competition in Cycle Two at the end of 2018. (A pitch competition is a contest where entrepreneurs present to a panel in the hope of securing investment or other support to launch or expand their business.) They received extensive feedback from other MVP partners, and over the following cycles, attended more established pitch competitions and two entrepreneurship courses. 94 Colours coordinated another competition in 2019 (Cycle Three) and again in 2020 (Cycle Six), with the support of the MVP Team. Various MVP partners remarked on the substantial improvement in facilitation skills of the 94 Colours coordinators, as well as in the level of the competing entrepreneurs. This showed the efficacy of multiple opportunities to experience real-world learning by doing.




**Figure 7.3:** An entrepreneur pitches for seed funding for his social enterprise at the 2020 Youth Expo. (Source: MVP, 2020).

The low-risk 2018 event enabled the facilitators, and me as 'enabler' and grant writer, to explore pitch competitions, a common tool of enabling entrepreneurship (Daly & Davy, 2016), in the Makers Valley context. MVP was more confidently able to request and defend a higher sum in our proposal to the British Council (MVP, 2019), and hold an improved process in pitch events that formed part of this programme. Furthermore, in line with the findings highlighted in Section 7.2.2, changemakers expressed improvements in their own capabilities. A 94 Colours co-founder said of the learning by doing experience, hosting pitch competitions, "I have grown so much from the pressure that we have got from handling the project, and being trusted with it" (I3, 08/04/2020). However, both 94 Colours co-founders credited a classroom-based entrepreneurship course they attended as a fundamental contributor to this growth. The classroom-based course was directly linked to the potential to grow 94 Colours through coordinating the pitch competitions and other MVP opportunities.

Acknowledging the importance of both real-world and classroom-based learning, a key change MVP made to the 2020 competition was to make a pre-pitch workshop training programme compulsory for some categories of participants, focusing on business plan development and pitching. We also prioritised participants of a DICE workshop programme (the pitch competition was supposed to act as an incentive to develop tangible businesses in these programmes). However, we reserved two categories for people that could show that they had already trialled their business ideas in some way (that they had taken it beyond an idea). For instance, in the 2020 pitch competition, only two of the 35 shortlisted entrepreneurs had taken part in a DICE workshop programme, despite these participants being prioritised in the shortlisting criteria. Reflection with programme convenors and participants concluded that future iterations should include better integration between the classroom-based workshops and the incentive structure; the pitch competition. One suggestion was a 'stepping-stone' preparation stage, in which the MVP Team (as the intermediary) would provide mentoring to participants in the application process. Furthermore, as

supported by Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2, structuring programmes that are able to be flexible yet require accountability through a phased approach, or that incentivise learning by doing through iterative scaling, have a higher chance of enabling tangible changemaking.

Lastly, the stages of the action research cycle as set out in Bradbury (2015) hold intriguing similarities to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. Action research, through experiential learning, therefore has the potential to enhance the action researcher's own capacity in the broader field that is action-focused as opposed to purely academic. Nevertheless, Kolb's (1984) model has been critiqued for its individualisation of the learning process (Cherry, 2020; Yardley et al., 2012). I certainly found that the action carried out by MVP changemakers was supported by group format learning, as was the case in the workshops described above. Exploring my own 'enabler' role over the action research cycles, I learnt to step back from the action into a role more typically played by Participatory Action Researchers (Mason, 2015). Through the reflection stages of Cycles Six and Seven, I recognised this approach, common to other MVP enablers, too, as one of responsiveness. In the remainder of the chapter, I focus on the dynamics of responsiveness at different levels. The third level I focus on is responsiveness to broader systems, which leads me to a discussion on hybridity.

## 7.3 Responsiveness to Changing Needs of Potential Changemakers

As discussed in Chapter Two, Sewell (1992) draws on Giddens' (2013) 'theory of structuration' to argue that 'enable' agents are those that are capacitated with the knowledge of the relevant social schemas and sufficient human and non-human resources. The action research found 'enablers' to be a particular type of changemaker that helped others translate their changemaking ideas into action through enhancing their access to knowledge and resources. With reference to Schmid's (2021) concept of 'hybrid infrastructure', which I discuss with relevance to my findings in in Section 7.5, Thompson and Downing (2007: 528)

argue that 'entrepreneur enablers' are "those people who build the necessary infrastructure" that welcomes and encourages new entrepreneurs.

I strived to see connections between potential changemakers, ideas and resources that fitted an overarching wellbeing economy vision: the prioritisation of social and ecological goals before individual profit. Sometimes I helped set up the operational framework for an initiative, for instance the goals, processes and training necessary to run a social enterprise. However, I would keep away from the subsequent action as much as possible, in order that changemakers could learn by doing, and so that I could test the operational independence of an initiative. I identified six other MVP 'enablers' who followed a similar approach. Cameron and Gibson (2005b) worked more with groups than with individual changemakers, but also followed a comparable approach in their community economies work. They highlight that the support needed will vary over the course of a project, and should be provided in a way that it "does not hinder a group's capacity to deal with challenges themselves (and even to learn from its mistakes)" (Cameron & Gibson, 2005b: 283).

A small example of a situation in which I played an enabler role was the second iteration of the Makers Valley Youth Expo (March 2019, in Cycle Three), which included the pitch competition mentioned in the previous section. I arranged for an MVP intern to join the 94 Colours team to provide the administration support they lacked, linked them with a mentor, sought budget for them from other funded projects and provided them leads through my social capital to further funding opportunities. I then played only a monitoring and advisory role myself, meeting with the team on an ad hoc basis to check on progress. Yet I remained invested in the initiative more than a mentor or a coach would be, as I saw the potential of it contributing to the broader agenda of transformative social innovation toward a wellbeing economy. In the final days before the event, it appeared that the marketing strategy had not worked and there would be no participants to benefit from the efforts. Thus with the 94 Colours team's support I stepped into operations again and drew together a team of promoters, paying them stipends from my personal funds, knowing there was a chance the 94

Colours team may find funding to reimburse me later, which they did, from the creative placemaking project.

In the US Consulate-funded creative placemaking project, once the funding contract was signed and the institutional arrangements were established (September 2018 in Cycle Two) I seldom got involved aside from my role on the project governance committee. Because of this, a running joke started that I was the 'Ghost of Makers Valley'. The creative placemaking project manager said of the conflict between her and JICP (discussed in Section 7.2) that "those tensions and dynamics were hard because you were not involved, but would still have an opinion and bring in your voice … and it was confusing, where to place you" (I6, 08/04/2020). She was referring to situations where I would become involved in decision-making in conflict situations, even if I had not been involved in the activities that led to the situation. The JICP founder, who also described herself as an 'enabler' (I5, 15/04/2020), had similar criticism levelled at her. However, I saw that this intermediary role that the JICP founder and other changemakers, including myself, played was essential in preventing stagnation that could arise from the conflict. As founders of the initiatives, also holding formal positions on governance committees, our positionality lent us authority. If an overarching principle of fairness was consistently applied, other changemakers generally continued to respect that authority. However, part of this neutrality seemed to be as a result of us being removed from the day-to-day action. Schmid (2020) raises the importance of those supporting alternative economy initiatives to maintain critical distance, so as not to reject potential allies or become dogmatic in their approach. (I continue this discussion in Section 7.5.)

Nevertheless, other changemakers also found my approach to be too removed at times. In my interviews for the current research I asked for critical feedback, and three changemakers raised concern around me not providing enough support. A 94 Colours co-founder recounted how an MVP intern had been left to conduct a Community Conversations session alone. The respondent said "just being there more … showing face … telling people they did well on a certain project I think would also bring some form of comfort and warm feeling about [their] role

because you are highly respected and you are valued in what you say" (I3, 08/04/2020). I attempted to take this kind of feedback on board in later cycles by promoting comfortable, open, honest and direct communication with the MVP Team as well as the various changemakers I worked with. In those later phases I was more conscious than I had been in earlier phases about checking in about how capable the MVP Team and partners were feeling and if they wanted my support. Nevertheless, this approach of relying on direct feedback depended on people's own assessments of their capabilities and how comfortable they felt sharing these with me. Though as the MVP Team we followed a collaborative visioning process, in which each person drafted their own job description, we adopted a typical organisational structure because of the stability and simplicity it offered. Even though my formal title became 'Enabler' in Cycle Four (May 2019), an informal hierarchy developed in any case.

In Chapter Four I built on Herr and Anderson's (2005) 'lenses' of positionality to show how the diversity in experience and therefore capabilities between us and the agency associated with my positionality led to hierarchical relationships. I acknowledged this imbalance in agency and, motivated by the approaches of action researchers such as Brydon-Miller et al., 2006, tried to use it by holding a mix of informal and formal consultation with a variety of stakeholders, as well as stepping back where my opinion would otherwise dominate.

The creative placemaking project manager also played a hands-off 'enabler' role working with implementing partners. Building on the section above on flexibility, some partners expressed frustration at the lack of guidelines or rules (and lack of support in some cases). Even if removed from the action in other stages, I found the project formulation stage to be the key point an enabler should be involved. Co-creation involved assessing the alignment of the changemaker's initiative with the aims of the overall vision (of the collaborative Makers Valley Theory of Change, for example). It also involved maximisation of the changemakers' agency through locating gaps where additional knowledge and resources may be needed.

The level of an enabler's operational involvement in later stages depended on the partner changemaker's agency at the time. Participants were concerned about the operational sustainability of MVP, as I planned to hand over to an MVP Team CEO in Cycle Six (April 2020). Despite recognising the importance of being hands off and enabling others to step up, the JICP founder said, "You can't get out too early as you're still part of the enabling thing … it won't hold together" (I5, 15/04/2020). She said that I should "get the timing right for withdrawal". TCC CEO said of me, "You have a person who is visionary, a person who has a very clear idea of what they are trying to establish in Makers Valley Partnership … but [you] want to be hands off" (I6, 08/04/2020). She thought that in the start-up phase, enablers such as me should be "completely immersed in the organisation to get it off the ground" (I6, 08/04/2020). Other research participants were concerned the MVP Team would fail in achieving continuity in its own operations and the support it was providing to other people and organisations. Nevertheless, I placed my trust in the CEO finding the support she needed in the MVP community and remained ready to step in with operations if she asked me to.

Thus, the different leadership styles of Makers Valley enablers allowed for a comparison of approaches. It became clear over the cycles that the ideal was for an aspiring 'enabler' to find the middle way between making oneself too essential in the day-to-day operations of an initiative and being too removed. If an enabler was capable of achieving this balance, their changemaker potential was maximised. Gradually, the enabler can step further away from the action while the initiative continues, and turn to new initiatives, heightening the chances of transformative social innovation. Pel et al. (2020) found in their review of transformative social innovation that a community of operationally sustainable initiatives in a specific social-material context has a greater chance of challenging, altering, or replacing dominant institutions than an individual changemaker. As presented in Chapter Four, I undertook reflection stages of my action research, when I left the Makers Valley area for a few days or more. These periods actually proved highly enabling to changemakers in the initiatives I had set up: the MVP Team and Changemakers Residences. I was out of the action but

remained available to take calls at any time, if there was a decision or conflict that needed my input.

Nevertheless, the experiential learning for the changemaker experiencing enablement could be uncomfortable, and maintaining non-hierarchical, friendly relations was important to maintaining open lines of communication. In turn, this helped enablers such as me respond with a suitable level of support. In my exploration of an enabler role, I had to reserve some of my capacity for stepping into operations, mentoring or playing a hands-on conflict management role where it was needed, to ensure long-term sustainability of initiatives. Remaining involved enough to be responsive to the changing needs of the changemaker and the context or broader system was essential. Once again, these findings highlight the usefulness of an intermediary organisation, such as the MVP Team, to itself act as an enabler. An effective approach to enablement also involved being responsive to the changing needs and collective agency of the initiatives (the ebb and flow) and opportunities in the broader systems (windows of opportunity), which I have grouped together in the following section.

### 7.4 Responsiveness to Ebb and Flow, and Windows of Opportunity

Tasker et al. (2010) argue that action researchers should work with the "dynamics of ebb and flow" of individuals and initiatives as a whole. Linking to Seligman's (2011) work on flourishing (discussed in Chapter Two), a sense of flow is experienced where challenges stretch but do not break the abilities of the participants, while periods of ebb are where participants feel the challenge exceeds their capabilities and can destabilise a project (Tasker et al., 2010). At times during the action research, I grew frustrated when it seemed all the variables were in place for an initiative to happen, but it wouldn't move beyond the idea stage. For instance, in my initial PhD proposal, I wrote that an initiative which aimed to trial modular housing in the Makers Valley neighbourhood would be a core focus of my action research (see Figure 7.4). In Cycle One (the start of 2018), this was actively supported by the co-founder of Nando's, the

managing partner of Victoria Yards, and the innovative architects who were leading the initiative. It felt that there was significant agency backing the project, and it had changemaking potential. However, the architects pulled out due to internal issues in their firm, and by Cycle Three (March 2019) it was clear there would be no tangible action leading to transformative social innovation. Instead of persisting with the idea, I shifted my attention and agency to other projects I saw as holding more potential to flow.

Transformative social innovation is enabled by "emergent collectives of individuals", underscoring the importance of both the changemakers and the communities and broader networks of which they form part (Pel et al., 2020: 4). Building on actor-network theory (Latour, 1996), Pel et al. (2020: 3) argue for a 'relational approach' to transformative social innovation: agency is understood as being "distributed across 'webs' or 'networks' of social and material relations". Nevertheless, in my close-up exploration of changemaking I found that the step from idea to action was usually contingent on a single changemaker who formed the operational hub to this network. The absence of someone with the potential agency to operationally lead an initiative meant the initiative remained an idea, as with the modular housing project described above. If a potential changemaker had an idea they wished to translate into action, enablers in many cases managed to source the resources in the form of space, finances or materials for implementation, even just on a small scale to start with. It was then possible to test, through experiential learning (as discussed in Section 7.2), whether the initiative could gain traction or not. Thus, while action was in many cases unachievable without enablers and the knowledge and resources they mobilised, neither was it achievable without a changemaker, and the visions of changemakers as well as enablers had to sufficiently intersect for changemaking to occur (see Chapter Six). As identified by Corner and Ho (2010: 635), these changemakers then "dynamically engaged in interactions" with multiple other actors, nudging an "opportunity into manifestation".

Playing an enabler role meant I could distribute my agency more widely, but also that I was dependent on the agency of others to realise action. Connecting with

someone else who shared a passion for an idea meant I could then play a hands-off enabling role and the initiative could start under the operational leadership of the other changemaker, or a collective. A small example of this was a 'free shop' initiative that started in Victoria Yards (VY) Commons. A free shop is a space for unwanted goods to be donated and displayed for anyone to take. It was one of the examples from my Cycle Zero (2017) in Europe that I wanted to trial in the highly unequal context of Makers Valley, but I did not have capacity to take operational responsibility for it. One of the members of the VY Commons suggested using some of the space for a free shop soon after they moved in. I was then able to monitor the initiative and ensure its sustainability by supporting a shift of operational responsibility to the new VY Commons manager when the collective moved to their own space in Cycle Four. I learnt how to be patient and work with the shifting energy of other changemakers, rather than expending all my energy into implementing one initiative at the speed I saw possible, with the resultant opportunity cost being that I displaced others from the changemaker role they had the capacity to play. These findings support the theory of structuration (Giddens, 2013), and required me to embrace complexity (Boulton et al., 2015), in the sense that my and other changemakers' agency was still dependent on the surrounding structure and systems, ultimately made up of other people's interconnected agencies. Supporting collective agency when multiple factors were aligning rather than expending my individual agency to ensure the success of a project that I personally felt passionate about allowed me to distribute my agency, allowing greater potential for transformative social innovation.

In support of these findings, Tasker et al.'s (2010) work is relevant, as it looks at the potential of action research methods to understand and manage social entrepreneurship. Applying a dynamic action research cycle can work with these characteristics, for instance using periods of 'ebb' as reflection and planning stages (Tasker et al., 2010). Essential here is that the action researcher retain a balance between active participation and the ability to assess the project objectively. The periods of reflection where I left the fieldwork site assisted me with this.

Similarly, TCC CEO said that when "an idea's time has come, then you flow with it. If it's not time for that idea, it's not time for that idea" (I6, 24/06/2019). She said one has to allow oneself "to navigate as the world opens up". She gave the example of her buying a building for her company – of all the things that needed to be in place for this to happen. Roelvink (2020: 459) writes that community economies action research involves a "piecemeal kind of muddling through, taking up opportunities and being open-minded … rather than trying to change everything at once". Another action researcher, Marshall (1999: 165), writes about "knowing when to persist and when to desist" as an organising image. It is "framed within a systemic sense of the world, for example, involving attention to the dynamics of resilience and potentialities for change". The action researcher or enabler has to be conscious of the context and broader system beyond the changemaker or team one is working with, that may not be at this point conducive to change, but could be, at a different point in time.

I learnt that this could be as simple as making careful judgements around how long to leave someone to complete the part of a joint project they had agreed to do, before I followed up via email. Earlier, in efforts to ensure accountability between partners, I would diligently 'check in' as soon as deadlines were not met. However, following up too quickly could result in conflict that would sap the changemaker's and my agency, rather than this agency being directed to action in the project. If given time, events in the broader system may stimulate the changemaker into action again. I also became more aware of my own energy and commitment levels, and when to temporarily 'desist' until I felt I had capacity. This finding also spoke to my inquiry around maintaining my wellbeing while maximising my changemaker potential, and avoiding the 'burnout' often experienced by changemakers (Severns-Guntzel & Murphy-Johnson, 2020).

With regard to working with times of 'flow', Avelino et al. (2019: 199) write that "actors can strategically propose systemic alternatives when windows of opportunity appear". Using 'windows of opportunity' for transformative social innovation involves creating "the right links at the right time around the right

issues" (Westley et al., 2013: 26). These 'windows' are moments when agency can be directed most effectively for change. If timed well, this change can happen surprisingly fast, due largely to the groundwork that preceded them. In order to make best use of smaller windows of opportunity, I learnt to have several 'irons in the fire', to allow my agency at any one time not to be wasted. When one initiative was on hold due to structures within which I had limited agency, like government processes around finalising the Social Economy Green Paper (which I discuss in Chapter Eight), I turned to another, like restarting the Makers Valley steering committee.

While his work preceded the concept of transformative social innovation, my grandfather wrote regarding the transformation from apartheid to multiracial democracy,

> There is a time for planting and seedbeds, and a time for harvest. These [times of harvest] cannot be precisely predicted but can be prepared for and taken at the flood. This has happened throughout history. … These times of change are invariably times of great crisis. (Mayson, 1990, 12).

The most characteristic time of "great crisis" in Makers Valley during my action research was the Covid-19 lockdown in Cycle Six, specifically March to July 2020 (see Heywood, 2020). MVP used the lockdown as a window of opportunity, forming a Covid-19 Response (as discussed in Chapter Six). Working with the social capital and Makers Valley community that had formed through previous initiatives (see Figure 7.5), MVP called an online meeting with previous and new changemakers interested in pooling their agency in April 2020 (Cycle Five), two weeks after the start of the lockdown (Kiewit et al., 2020). MVP's aim for the Covid-19 Response was to mediate the negative effects of the lockdown and use the opportunity to enable changemakers to 'build back better', as promoted by the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll, 2020). Core principles were to build on local expertise, working with creative and social entrepreneurs, the informal sector and small business, and strengthen and expand collaborative relationships and networks (MVP, 2020b). One of the initiatives that formed part of the Response was a nascent 'community currency', where participants were

paid for recyclable materials and could use this currency to buy food, clothing and other essentials from an MVP shop (Heywood, 2020b).

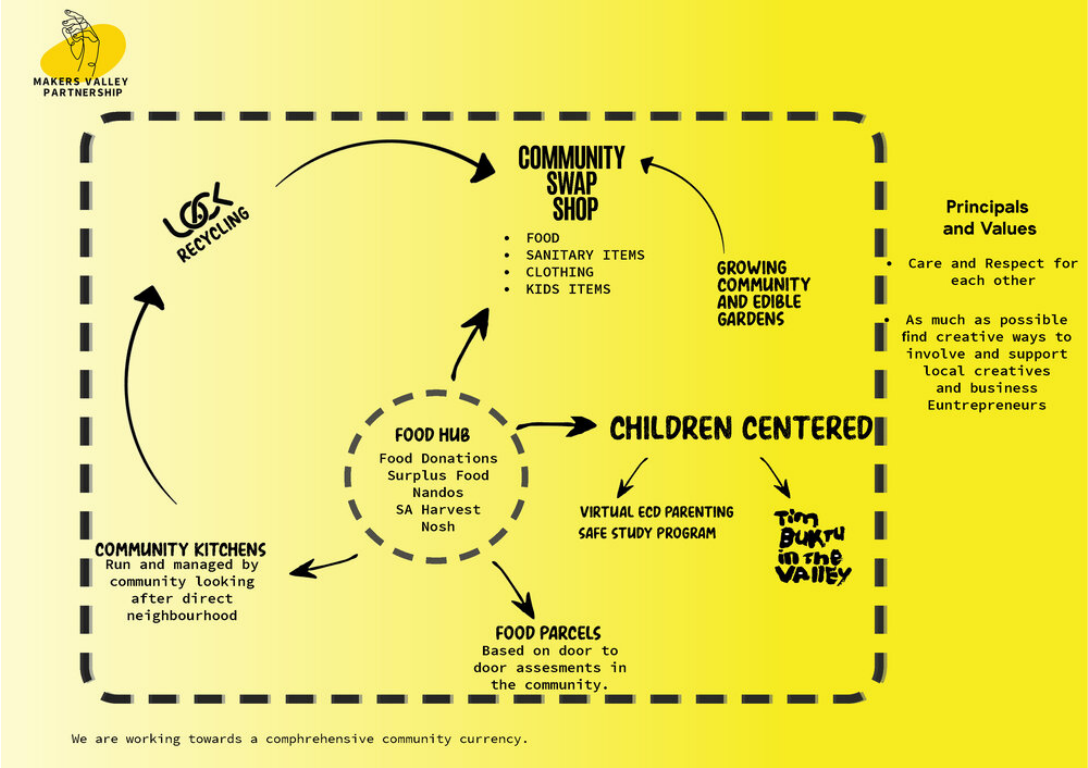



**Figure 7.5:** The MVP 'Network of Possibility' that developed as part of the Covid-19 Response, facilitated by a key MVP enabler who went on to start a mobile zero waste social enterprise, selling healthy foods from an old bus. (Source: MVP, 2020).

One of changemakers within MVP who led a start-up social enterprise took up the role of facilitator, and I supported by sharing social capital and guidance at the start. The Covid-19 Response was the result of an enabled changemaker taking the leadership role and the window of opportunity in the broader context, and the depth and breadth of social relations MVP had established by that time, which allowed the changemaking potential of the window of opportunity to be maximised. In the words of the quotation (Mayson, 1990) above, this was an example of the "planting and seedbeds" undertaken by MVP before the time of crisis. The action was dependent on the trust, social capital and access to physical spaces in this community, and changemakers' prior experiential learning specific to the Makers Valley context. These factors meant that the initiative was 'enabled' very quickly: within a few weeks it was operating largely

without my operational support, and by September 2020 (Cycle Seven) the Response's facilitator was able to hand over operations to the MVP Team. At the time of writing in May 2021, the MVP Team is enabling changemakers leading the community currency system to run it as an independent social enterprise, while it remains an MVP partner.

In Sections 7.3 and 7.4, I have shown how the changemaking potential of enablers was maximised through responsiveness to the shifting needs of changemakers, and the ebb and flow of the initiatives they led. However, the example of the Covid-19 Response highlights how enablement of changemakers and thus transformative social innovation was also dependent on changes in the broader context. Working with the opportunities the Covid-19 crisis presented resulted in relatively rapid change, compared to previous cycles. It is a demonstration of broader transformative social innovation being dependent on broader systems, which in themselves are collations of the agency of multiple actors within (Pel et al., 2020; Seo & Creed, 2002). Despite the changed landscape, MVP was faced with compromises due to established unequal social relations, and some of the new social relations of the new initiatives mimicked these. Even the need for the community currency system to follow a social enterprise model is due to the need to be responsive to broader systems, in order for the initiative to continue operating. In the next section I turn to how a responsiveness to broader systems was key to enabling changemakers to realise any action. However, this responsiveness involved significant compromises due to the constraints on agency. I build on Schmid's (2021) conceptualisation of 'hybrid infrastructures' to discuss findings regarding the hybridity of models and practices that enablers needed to employ in the short term, in striving to realise long-term strategies that aimed to see more radical changemaking.

## 7.5 Responsiveness to Broader Systems – Hybridity, but Tensions of This

As argued above, enabling changemakers required responsiveness to the changing needs of changemakers, and to the ebb and flow of the transformative

social innovation initiatives. It further required enabling a responsiveness to broader systems, which involved working with the opportunities but also negotiating challenging tensions that resulted from systemic constraints. In line with Giddens' (2013) structuration theory, Schmid (2021) argues that "the capacity to act … fundamentally depends on the surrounding patterns of activity, for the way practices are aligned selectively facilitates and impedes other activities". Pel et al. (2020) advocate for further theory regarding this aspect of transformative social innovation: how initiatives can fit within and furthermore transform the surrounding structures. Given the constraints of these structures, Van der Have and Rubalcaba (2016: 1933) argue that this theory should look at "how social innovators adapt their strategies" to manage. Schmid (2021: 8) contributes to theory formation with his understanding of a 'politics of hybridity', which he defines as "deliberate compromising in individual or organizational activities in the name of a desired future while accepting the substantiation of exploitative and unjust social relations". Through an exploration of the findings in this section, I present a reworked definition of a politics of hybridity in Section 7.5.2.

Schmid (2021) further contributes to the gap in knowledge identified by Pel et al. (2019) with the concept of 'hybrid infrastructures'. As presented in Chapter Two, hybridity is used to facilitate transformation at a smaller scale, rather than awaiting a change in regime (such as the national economic system), or simply fitting into the existing regime. Infrastructures, used in this way, refer to entities, spaces and practices that facilitate further transformation.

However, Schmid (pers. comm., 01/03/2021) reflected in personal communication regarding his article on the topic (Schmid, 2021) that, while he felt it was a "promising direction of thought" he wondered if he "strained" his empirical examples too much. In this section I aim to contribute further understanding to this politics of hybridity through the findings of my action research. First, I discuss social enterprises as hybrid organisations. I then explore the cases of 39 Victoria and Troyeville House Changemakers Residences as hybrid infrastructures that changed over the course of the action research cycles.

Finally, I present MVP as another hybrid infrastructure, and highlight the potential of intermediary organisations in navigating this politics of hybridity, while potentially being subject to it themselves.

### 7.5.1 Social enterprises as hybrid organisations

Supporting the literature and definition discussed in Chapter Two (Bandinelli, 2017; Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012; Schmid, 2020), in this section I discuss my findings from my action research regarding the hybridity of social enterprises. Doherty et al. (2014) identifies this hybridity to arise largely from their dual pursuit of social purpose and financial sustainability. The collective of young changemakers, 94 Colours, operated as a social enterprise. The organisation ran youth-focused poetry and sneaker customisation events and organised the youth expos and pitch competitions discussed in this chapter. The leaders combined revenue sources in innovative ways, including charging for services such as tours, selling products and holding raffles at their events to avoid charging entrance fees, and securing grant funding through MVP partnerships. A co-founder said of his work "I can sustain myself while at the same time doing more for people" (I3, 10/06/2019).

TCC, which played a key role in managing the MVP creative placemaking project, also operated as a social enterprise. The CEO said that the vision of social good, and the tangible ways the company worked towards realising this vision, supported its financial sustainability. "I don't think TCC would be where it is, if there wasn't a focus on positively impacting society … When I pitch to a client or pitch in tenders to government, we have a unique competitive space" (I6, 24/06/2019). By sub-contracting and thus "passing on" components of large contracts to smaller suppliers, TCC was able to boost small business as well as benefit their image and enhance their likelihood of getting the contracts in the first place. I did not find this to be problematic, as long as this was a conscious process, as emphasised by Schmid (2021) in his definition of a 'politics of hybridity', which I explore further in this section. Given the realities of the macro

economy, if enterprises that have positive social or environmental impact as authentically part of their core businesses can outcompete those that have profit as their primary mandate, they can enable some transformation to a wellbeing economy, through replacing dominant institutions in a specific social material context (Avelino et al., 2019). Furthermore, drawing from the findings on changemakers and wellbeing (Chapter Five), the servicing of personal interest can incentivise changemakers to continue their work if they are able to see some personal enhancement to their wellbeing from it (Doherty et al., 2014). As highlighted by the Makers Valley programme manager regarding this hybridity, "obviously there is self-interest there and there always will be. Just as there is on [MVP's] side" (I28, 15/05/2021). Doherty et al. (2014: 426) highlight how "the tension between individualistic orientation and collectivist sense of duty can be alleviated" through the "dual mission" of social enterprise.

Part of many social enterprises' financial sustainability strategy is motivating potential clients or funders to 'buy in' to their vision of social impact. As identified by TCC CEO, this vision can provide the enterprise with a competitive advantage. When trying to secure funding or win people over to their cause, as social entrepreneurs we could often speak easily of our changemaker vision. However, during my action research, this did not always follow through into action. A key reason MVP structured the pitch competition funding in the 2020 youth expo into tranches was to allow for the flexibility that learning by doing requires, while changemakers remained accountable and implemented what they had set out in their vision.

These findings provide further empirical material to what Schmid (2021) discusses as a 'politics of hybridity'. I found that everyday decision-making in hybrid organisations depended on changemakers being conscious of and making visible their personal ethics, as Schmid (2020; 2021) found in his research on social enterprises in Germany. As wealth generation is not illegal, social entrepreneurs must rely on their personal value judgements to work out what a fair 'middle way' is, in the pursuit of financial sustainability and social purpose. In the social enterprises I had a more hands-on role in enabling, the 39 Victoria

and Troyeville House Changemaker Residences, I found that often the effectiveness of this politics of hybridity relied on the authenticity of my own ethics and motivation to follow through with promises. It also relied on involving a democratic element to the assessment of fairness, or at least being more transparent with key stakeholders about the tensions of equity in decision-making. The next two sections discuss these aspects of hybrid infrastructures further, through exploring the cases of 39 Victoria and The Troyeville House in turn.

### 7.5.2 Politics of hybridity: the case of the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence

During the action research period, I built on experiential learning, including managing previous co-living in my Cycle Zero to enable three co-living initiatives, with the second iteration in Makers Valley being the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence. I lived in the house for Cycles Three to Six (January 2018 to March 2019), mostly in the room pictured in Figures 7.6 and 7.7, below. The original ownership model for 39 Victoria developed as a response to the tensions arising in the action research developing hybrid infrastructures in partnership with for-profit entities like Victoria Yards. MVP changemakers such as TCC CEO and I were frustrated by the limitations on transformation of social relations due to the lack of diversity of the Victoria Yards ownership and operational structures reinforcing existing inequitable social relations. The two adjacent houses at 39 Victoria Road were outside an entrance to Victoria Yards, and I saw the property as leveraging the wellbeing economy potentials that Victoria Yards offered (discussed in Chapters Three and Six). I had access to loan financing through social capital and thus could purchase the 39 Victoria property: while my agency was limited in changing social relations at Victoria Yards, I assumed that I would have greater agency for changemaking if I owned the property. However, as I found over the action research cycles, my agency continued to be constrained by the broader context and my need to protect my ability to make change in the long term.



**Figure 7.5:** Photographs of one of the 4.5 m² rooms at the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence that an MVP intern and I designed based on the need for per-person rental to be as low as possible (Mayson & Charlton, 2015). It was constructed by a changemaker combining early childhood development and building work, who later took up residence at The Troyeville House. The cushions were made by a creative entrepreneur that later moved into 39 Victoria. (Source: author, 2019).

In the reflections stages of Cycle One I read widely, based on my experiences of co-housing in Europe, and in Cycle Two (between July and December 2018) I set up a multi-disciplinary advisory team consisting of people who had worked with social and cooperative housing in the South African context, housing finance and property management. MVP also held workshops with existing Victoria Road residents. The organisational structure I decided on was a hybrid form that aimed to protect the asset from decision-making pitfalls of previous cooperative housing in Johannesburg, where levies were not able to cover maintenance costs (Wilson, 2013). To this end, I aimed to issue two classes of shares. One class was of shares in the company that owned the property (and of which I was the first owner) to residents over time through a 'rent-to-buy' model in which a proportion of the rent went to buying shares. The other class of shares was held by a board that had voting rights but no economic interest. However, I underestimated the impact of residents' irregular income on this revenue model,

in addition to their desire to prioritise other expenses rather than paying rent. I also underestimated residents' need for mobility. If a resident needed to move out, without a savings buffer the company would be unable to pay out the shares a resident had 'bought' through their rental payments.

Thus two months after moving into the house in Cycle Three (February 2019), significant compromises needed to be made, in part to secure revenue so as to pay off the loans, but also due to the real threat of collective ownership (as raised by Wilson, 2013) endangering the sustainability of the project as a whole. If I had to sell the property on the market to cover expenses, it would preclude possibilities of transformative social innovation. Furthermore, I was concerned that losing the capital I had invested would also mean losing the associated agency that I aimed to deploy in other wellbeing economy-oriented initiatives. I was thus concerned that I would lose future changemaking potential, thwarting my longer-term strategy. Following a tense house meeting in which I explained the difficulty of the company being able to pay out shares to residents should they leave, the necessary majority of residents agreed to change the model to that of a social enterprise, where any surplus from residents' rent went to savings that they received if they left. I thus removed the collective shareholding model. Doherty et al. (2014: 427) find in their review of social enterprise literature that hybrid organisations' "strategies to respond to competing external demands include compromising, avoiding, defying and manipulating".

Due to further administrative complications once the partner changemaker had taken over management, we negotiated a shift to an even less radical and more simplified social enterprise model in Cycle Six (January 2020). This was as a result of my sense that the changemaking potential of the property could be maximised through a focus on children, coupled with a disillusionment on my part with the changemaking potential of the residents at the time. The change in orientation to early childhood development involved ensuring that the basic needs of children were catered for. As the partner changemaker (Residence manager) and I used the rental revenue to cover the costs of meeting these needs, we needed to ensure residents continued paying the agreed amount.

"Strategy, here, is linked to the ability to work creatively with and through given circumstances which frequently involves trade-offs between transformative claims and the means employed" (Schmid, 2021: 2). In making decisions in running the enterprises, the partner changemakers and I had to constantly make compromises and weigh up the opportunity costs to try to ensure sustainability of the initiative towards transformative social innovation in the long term.

Building on Schmid's (2021) discussion of hybrid infrastructures, the experiences of 39 Victoria and the following case studies, I therefore define a 'politics of hybridity' as action towards a vision of transformative social innovation that deliberately accepts short-term pragmatic compromises, which may continue social relations in contrast to this vision. In the next section, I explore the case of The Troyeville House, a later iteration of Changemakers Residence which was based on the learning in action research cycles prior to the opening of the House in Cycle Four.

### 7.5.3 The Troyeville House as a hybrid infrastructure

The Troyeville House was a mixed-use property comprising of a large three storey heritage house, a chapel and hall, a stable converted into three apartments, gardens and a vacant site (see Figures 3.6 and 7.8). The initiative was set up in the acknowledgment of the constraints and compromises that would need to be made, that is, with greater knowledge of how to navigate a politics of hybridity, due to previous cycles of action research, in particular concerning the 39 Victoria initiative. Thus, though the partners and I did not name it such, it embraced a hybrid infrastructure identity from the start. In Cycle Five (December 2019) the partners and I registered The Troyeville House as a private company. This legal structure allowed the most flexibility, as in South African law there is not yet a legal form specific to social enterprise (NDED, 2019). In the shareholders agreement, we set down the practical manifestation of a wellbeing economy vision, including fair pay for employees and a not-for-profit mandate: any operational profit made in the future would be used to

further the vision of the company through cross-subsidisation of residents and activities, or expansion to other properties, rather than taken as profit by shareholders. The vision was that on an annual basis, changemakers that developed a track record in contributing to the vision of the property would be offered to become shareholders through 'sweat equity', recognised by diverse economies researchers Gibson-Graham and Dombroski (2020) as a non-market practice of providing access to capital. Changemakers would receive shares in the company that owned the property based on their work and vision.



**Figure 7.6:** Discussion in one of living rooms of the main house at The Troyeville House about the operational sustainability of Troyeville Inspiration Academy, which hoped to attract sufficient revenue to pay its facilitators. (Source: author, 2020).

The vision for The Troyeville House was explicitly one of changemaking (transformative social innovation). The property provided the space for changemaking initiatives from planning sessions for youth social enterprise collectives, to everyday coworking, dance and capoeira classes for diverse people that otherwise could not afford this, and events. We aimed to build social relations between a diversity of people, from old white wealthy people from Johannesburg's northern suburbs interested in the House's colonial heritage, to young black visual artists celebrating black South Africa's 'future heritage'. In being careful with the image we portrayed, I identified with the founder of the

open workshop, which formed the main case study in Schmid (2021: 9), who said that if too radical an approach is taken, "you're limiting the circle of people you appeal to ... [Potential users] are also afraid of being confronted with their part and responsibility in these [social and ecological] problems". Thus, like Victoria Yards (although to a much smaller extent) the House attracted wealthy guests who would otherwise be unaware of realities of urban South Africa made explicit by its immersion in the microcosm of Makers Valley (as explored in Chapter Three) and its diversity of occupants. I hoped that exposure to these realities would assist in reorienting participants' frame of reference when it came to their own material affluence and ability to share, as I discuss in the concluding chapter.

Prior to the transfer of ownership to our partnership, the property was mainly vacant. Owners of most other historical buildings in the area have struggled to cover maintenance costs and they have therefore significantly deteriorated. Some are used as residential space, with some properties being occupied by people that would otherwise be rendered homeless, thus providing valuable accommodation, though in the long run they generally become unsuitable for occupation. Many are already unsuitable for occupation and as the owners still retain some agency over them in their ability to secure them from renewed occupation, they remain vacant: disused, wasted space.

The partner changemaker and manager of the property introduced the basic hybridity as follows:

> The commercial is necessary to fund the social aspect, whereas the social aspect is necessary to keep the soul intact and the heart of the space, and stay true to the mission of what we're trying to do here – they have to work together (I8, 16/05/2021).

Through social capital where creditors and the seller believed in the changemaking vision for the property, we were able to access favourable loans and purchase the property below market value. However, the cost of refurbishment and upkeep, municipal services and repayment of the loans still put significant pressure on the enterprise, which needed to generate revenue. As

the partner changemaker managing the property said, “we’re learning how to make this model work, and unfortunately it boils down to the fact that as a House we have real costs and needs” (I8, 16/05/2021). We frequently had to balance the social mission and the needs of subsidised Changemakers Residents with the opportunity to generate revenue from paying events and guests. Thus, in the short term, we had to prioritise revenue generation instead of the House’s social and ecological goals, contradicting the core principles of wellbeing economies. Given the restrictions on public gatherings as a result of Covid-19, our revenue opportunities through events were further constrained, and we had to be less selective about the activities that took place. The manager said, “honestly … there has to be some leniency, or let me say exceptions. But not too much – not to the point where you lose sight, or you lose the integrity of the overall mission” (I8, 16/05/2021).

Like the workshop in Schmid (2021), indirectly, the House depended on the very relations it sought to counteract. This also resulted in changemakers who were using the space for free feeling their needs were being overridden when they needed to make way for income-generating events, though they were mostly more understanding when they realised the situation the company faced. In order to bring greater understanding, we openly discussed company finances with the management team, with residents at house meetings, and other changemakers that used the space. The dependence on monthly revenue to secure our cash flow even required us to tier the Troyeville House manager’s salary. In this model, she only started earning a decent amount after the property’s basic running costs were secured. This was despite a clear understanding of her and her family’s own needs for a secure income. The maintenance and cleaning employees were included in decision-making more so than is the practice in the average private company, but we were not yet able to pay the wages we aspired to, as we had originally set down in the shareholder’s agreement.

These compromises are due to broader systemic constraints to the partners’ agency as aspiring changemakers and conditions of the context, and it is difficult

to ascertain alternatives that would be more aligned to the vision. Like the workshop in Schmid's (2021: 9) case study, The Troyeville House provided space "shielded from market influences" to some residents and users. In doing so, it helped "build capacity for further action". In other words, it functioned as an "underlying or 'infra'-structure" for wellbeing economy-oriented practices. Making explicit the findings that were common to Schmid's (2021), I found this infrastructure to be both physical and social.

Furthermore, while I turned to hybrid infrastructures such as social enterprises, to attain tangible change, the two cases above were still a piecemeal approach to achieving systemic change. Zademach and Hillebrand (2013: 22) argue that

> Social enterprises cannot build and sustain systemic change alone, but are only one among a multiplicity of necessary pillars on which a socio-ecological transformation of our contemporary economic system can be conceived and built.

Social enterprise was simply the most workable model given the constraints of my own changemaking potential. Nevertheless, there is possibility that if ethically run social enterprises continue to grow, and the model begins to replace the mainstream for-profit model, systemic change will ensue, as Pel et al. (2020) argue, to a macro economy more aligned with wellbeing economy principles. Intermediaries or backbone organisations provide significantly greater potential for this transformative social innovation (Turner et al., 2012), as discussed in Chapters Two and Six. The next section returns briefly to the findings of MVP as an intermediary organisation, highlighting their potential as hybrid infrastructures.

### 7.5.4 The intermediary Makers Valley Partnership as hybrid infrastructure

Van der Have and Rubalcaba (2016) advocate that social innovation research should explore "how social value creation opportunities are constructed through multi-stakeholder and multi-level institutional settings". MVP's founding through my action research provided some further empirical findings towards answering

this question. MVP facilitated physical infrastructure in the form of coworking space (VY Commons and then Makers Valley Studio, presented in Chapter Three). These functioned like the workshop in Schmid (2021). Centred in these physical spaces but stretching beyond, was Makers Valley community – the relations that formed the social infrastructure. It was here that MVP's role as hybrid infrastructure was the most important: Schmid (2021) emphasises the "(transformative) power that rests in the organisational capacity of community". The hybridity in the Makers Valley case was more extreme than that explored by Schmid (2021), by nature of MVP being a purposefully diverse partnership as opposed to a single initiative. The fluidity of the partnerships described in the previous chapter meant that partners retained their independence, including their business models and visions, as long as they could align sufficiently to work together on a specific project. The MVP Team programme manager and key enabler highlighted that MVP ensured "values establishment and maintenance" (I28, 14/05/2021) in the partnerships, with me and then from Cycle Six (June 2020) the MVP CEO being key intermediaries within the broader organisation. She highlighted the importance of these intermediaries being "facilitative" and "enabling". As found by Song (2016:241), the presence of "trusted intermediaries" supported a "pragmatist emphasis on democracy" towards overcoming the "conditioning forces of their social contexts" to pursue transformation.

Hybridity was demonstrated in the social enterprise model utilised by many initiatives linked to MVP, and which MVP explicitly promoted with its slogan, 'Jozi's heart of social and creative enterprise'. Hybridity was also demonstrated in MVP's inclusion of and indeed reliance on donor organisations and property organisations in the partnerships that contributed the resources that allowed for initiatives to succeed. Victoria Yards was key to attracting the resources and knowledge that enabled changemaking (see Chapters Three and Six). However, the long-term consequences of the development on the neighbourhood are ambiguous and include the dangers of gentrification.

MVP's partnership with Victoria Yards could be seen to be mutually beneficial: MVP's social goals and accomplishments served to strengthen Victoria Yards' image, and in turn they provided space, services, and the tangibility of the 'heart' expressed in MVP's slogan. However, there were frequent tensions, given Victoria Yards' for-profit motives, and the need for the partners to generate revenue from rentals. Revenue generation eclipsed other prerogatives, particularly following the Covid-19 lockdown from March 2020 onwards, where many Victoria Yards tenants were unable to continue paying rent due to their own revenues suffering. The coordinators of MVP's Covid-19 Response were told several times without sufficiently early warning that they needed to move the storage, kitchen or shop facilities elsewhere, when Victoria Yards management secured paying tenants for the spaces. The coordinators became frustrated and expressed the desire to stop partnering with Victoria Yards and move elsewhere, but were dependent on the space and facilities that Victoria Yards offered, and so remained. Furthermore, because MVP's main office and coworking space was in Victoria Yards, MVP's name became "synonymous with that of Victoria Yards" (Ndlovu, 2019: 50). As put explicitly by one of Ndlovu's (2019: 50) interviewees, "if Makers Valley is from Victoria Yards then [long pause] I'm not a Makers Valley [person]" (Ndlovu, 2019: 50, qualifications in original).

Lastly, an ongoing tension between MVP and Victoria Yards management was around security, where, due mainly to security guards' concern over their job security, they profiled visitors and sometimes excluded them from the space, or Makers Valley children participating in the after-school programme that runs there were 'banned' by security due to their actions in the space. The MVP Team's function as intermediary was to ensure changemaking continued and did not get derailed by conflict between partners in these circumstances. The MVP Team's programme manager highlighted the importance of "listening and playing a servant leadership role" here. Nevertheless, this need for neutrality sometimes meant conscious slippage of wellbeing economy principles, to maintain a positive rapport with Victoria Yards management.

Schmid (2021: 7) argues that a 'politics of hybridity' must be deliberate: it "is not solely an effect of the contradictions between sustainability-orientation and capitalism but the result of reflection and debate against the background of an alternative vision". While this was the case for me at a personal level and other changemakers who strived for system change, others that formed part of MVP were more focused on 'community development' within the current system. These compromises were translated into the Makers Valley Theory of Change, following deliberations between partners. However, some of the partners holding the most agency (due to the resources at their disposal) such as Victoria Yards and Nando's chose not to prioritise these processes and were only present for some of the discussions. Thus, the wellbeing economies components were 'deradicalised', even in the MVP vision. Over the course of the action research cycles, MVP strengthened as an organisation supporting symbiotic transformation: addressing social issues and supporting alternatives without directly challenging the neoliberal macroeconomic system (Wright, 2011). This was partly due to my "gentle" approach of partnership formation (I28, 14/05/2021) that arose from my attempt to make tangible changes as an enabler. Nevertheless, I still saw MVP as a 'transformative organisation' (Schmid, 2021), that employed immediate tactical decisions with a more far-sighted strategy, including in its deliberately diverse partnership formation.

Deploying a politics of hybridity, The Troyeville House and MVP acted as hybrid infrastructures in the Makers Valley context, expressing similarities to what Schmid (2021) found in the contrasting context of Stuttgart, Germany. It is through making conscious and deliberate this politics of hybridity that the role of intermediaries can play a role, particularly if linked through translocal networks, that is, a glocal approach (Avelino et al., 2020). This formed the MVP Team's aim: through continuing to support social enterprises within a specific geographic location, and networks between these and globally, we aimed for them to establish themselves as 'the new normal'. While there was definitely an increase in social enterprises and greater networks between these through my action research in Makers Valley, larger businesses and already established for-profit businesses remained dominant, and it is yet to be seen whether MVP and

partners will succeed in enabling the neighbourhood as a 'heart of social and creative enterprise'.

## 7.6 Conclusion

In the first section of this chapter, I discussed findings on how changemakers were enabled through learning by doing. In the following sections I discussed the changemaking that resulted from enablers being responsive to the changing needs of changemakers and the broader context, and the hybridity that results. A flexible approach to contracting, invoicing, deliverables and monitoring was found to be particularly beneficial for small, less formal changemakers. However, a lack of accountability was found in some instances in which there was less monitoring of implementing partners (changemakers learning by doing), which caused tension in the formally funded creative placemaking project. Building on Chapter Five, intermediaries were found to be effective in bridging formal contracting or donor requirements and the needs of changemakers. A phased approach to funding cycles and planning, and more in-depth contextual research could enhance accountability while maintaining flexibility. Low-risk, low-cost projects were useful to support learning by doing and the incremental enablement of changemakers. This approach also increased the chances of ideas translating into action, and if workable then being able to be scaled up, with greater chances for transformative social innovation. A hybrid experiential learning model combining classroom-based and real-world experimentation was most effective in overcoming the gap between ideas and action, thus enhancing agency.

Enablers in Makers Valley were found to enhance the agency of changemakers when they were able to be responsive to changemakers' changing capabilities, and move quickly towards a hands-off advisory role, while remaining available to ensure the viability of a given initiative. Being hands off where possible allowed enablers to maximise their own and the collective changemaking potential, and changemakers were incentivised to take leadership roles to

prevent the initiative failing. I found, in my own exploration of the enabler role, I had to retain reserve capacity to step in on demand, and be sensitive to the changing circumstances of the changemaker and broader system. Enablement meant working with this 'ebb and flow', and 'windows of opportunity'. MVP, acting as an intermediary, extended the capacity of individuals to play a supportive monitoring and advisory role. Working on several initiatives simultaneously supported the maximisation of the organisation or individual's agency, through shifting focus to whichever held most potential for change at a specific time.

In the final section, I discussed how achieving action within broader systemic constraints resulted in the deployment of a 'politics of hybridity'. Through presenting three cases, the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence, The Troyeville House and MVP, I provide further empirical evidence to the concept of 'hybrid infrastructures' (Schmid, 2021). These infrastructures support further changemaking, while simultaneously compromising on the long-term vision due to constraints to agency. In the concluding chapter that follows, I return to this discussion and suggest possible ways forward.

# 8. CONCLUSION: WAS A WELLBEING ECONOMY ENABLED IN MAKERS VALLEY?

## 8.1 Introduction

In this action research, I explored how a wellbeing economy can be enabled, focusing on the 'Makers Valley' area in the eastern suburbs of Johannesburg inner city. This formed my main research question. To undertake this project, I first set out to understand residents' and other stakeholders' conceptions of wellbeing (my first sub-question). I then set out to understand how participants in the action research could be enabled as changemakers (my second sub-question): I recognised the limits to my agency as an individual and wanted to explore how to maximise my changemaker potential, while maintaining my wellbeing, through playing an 'enabler' role. Over the action research cycles I worked alongside other enablers and changemakers and reflected on my observations, using literature. In so doing I was able to speak to broader discourses regarding transformation and alternative economies in this thesis (my third sub-question).

This final chapter provides a summary of the findings, reflects on the action achieved and contribution to knowledge, and suggests possible further action and research. First, I discuss the contrasts between my personal vision and the collaborative visions that arose for Makers Valley Partnership (MVP; the intermediary created through the action research), as well as the constraints to collective agency realising these visions (Sections 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4, respectively). Bearing these constraints in mind, I provide a brief overview of the transformative social innovation towards a wellbeing economy, in which loose communities of changemakers and their initiatives were formed. Section 8.5 then highlights the contributions of the empirical work to broader discourses on transformation and alternative economies, using the lens of hybridity. Lastly,

Section 8.6 suggests possible ways forward, for action research and universities, and government.

## 8.2 Enabling a Wellbeing Economy in Makers Valley: the Action

In the action research, over seven cycles (October 2017 to May 2021), I strived to maximise my potential as a changemaker while maintaining my wellbeing, through playing an 'enabler' role. This approach involved enhancing changemakers' access to relevant knowledge and resources, to realise initiatives aligned to wellbeing economies. It also involved supporting partnerships between these changemakers, as well as other enablers. In a few cases there was no changemaker ready to take forward an initiative I wanted to explore in transformative social innovation towards a wellbeing economy. In those instances, I started the initiative myself with a potential changemaker as a partner. Figure 1.1 shows the process the action research took in enabling a wellbeing economy in Makers Valley, though it was non-linear. This process involved cycles of planning, action, observation, reflection (as I describe in Chapter Four).

The changemakers that became involved were generally already living and working in the broader Makers Valley neighbourhood, while most enablers aside from me lived in wealthier parts of Johannesburg.[9] Figure 1.3 shows the Makers Valley 'community' that formed (with changemakers represented by their initiatives), though participants generally did not identify as being part of this community (as discussed in Chapter Six). Within this broader community of people that knew about Makers Valley and supported it in some way, were the changemakers leading initiatives that partnered in varying combinations as the loose collective of 'MVP'. These changemakers grouped around specific projects in a more structured way, as described in Chapters Five to Seven on my findings.

[9] These enablers were diverse in race, but like me were of a wealthier socioeconomic class than most Makers Valley residents; factors which contributed to the agency that allowed them to be enablers.

Examples of the contributions changemakers and their organisations made to these projects included implementing various initiatives, lending their longer-established organisation as a funding conduits, enabling other changemakers under the 'Makers Valley' banner, running a social entrepreneurship course, simply leading a once-off neighbourhood clean-up campaign, or – in response to the global pandemic which unfolded in the closing cycles of the action research – coordinating the Covid-19 Response or associated Food Hub. This loose arrangement of partners changed over the action research cycles and in different projects (Chapter Five). A support to these partnerships formalised in the form of the MVP Team. This registered non-profit company itself acted as an enabler, in the form of an intermediary organisation. It also managed some of its own initiatives and operations, supported by a CEO. In partnership with other changemakers, I enabled three co-living spaces called Changemakers Residences (44 Fourth Street, 39 Victoria and The Troyeville House), and a co-working space called VY Commons (which became Makers Valley Studio). These spaces and associated activities contributed to building Makers Valley communities.

The following examples that were enabled by MVP are listed to provide an idea of their number and diversity: early childhood development, including play groups that meet on a weekly basis, a small day care, and a mini mobile early childhood centre that visits 10 existing early childhood development centres weekly; youth opportunities, including a total of 83 learn-by-doing workshops, makers labs, weekly after school programmes for primary school children, annual youth expos, and funding competitions for wellbeing economy initiatives; social enterprises, including a sneakers customisation unit, clothing manufacturer, recycling initiative and coffee shop; opportunities for dialogue, including monthly wellbeing economy dialogues, a Makers Valley steering committee meeting monthly, four picnics and seven 'community conversations'; area-based initiatives, including street patrols twice daily, six miniature Afrocentric libraries housed by different organisations, and urban gardening along three different streets and on two disused fields; events, including monthly markets showcasing local artisans and farmers, weekly or bi-weekly drama and dance classes, yoga, football, capoeira, six mini festivals involving between 40

and 100 people, and monthly spoken word events involving approximately 300 people (prior to the Covid-19 lockdown); opportunities for material support, including a bi-weekly swap shop involving about 80 people, and networks of sharing, loans and donations; a municipal urban development framework for Makers Valley; complementary research by three honours level urban planning students, a third year and a masters class of architecture students; and social media pages and an SMS and email database the MVP Team, used primarily for promoting wellbeing economy opportunities and promoting a culture of changemaking. Most regular activities are still operational at the time of writing in May 2021.

The two projects that attracted the most significant financial resources for Makers Valley changemakers were the US Consulate-funded creative placemaking project, which ran from Cycles Two to Six (September 2018 to March 2020), and the British Council Developing Inclusive Creative Economies (DICE) project, which supported social and creative enterprise from Cycles Three to Six (January 2019 to March 2020). Additional projects included a municipality-funded project upgrading public spaces, an Engineering Without Borders-funded project working with 21 international universities over 18 months, and a Summit Educational Trust-funded project supporting early childhood development in Cycles Four and Five (August to December 2019). As mentioned above in this section, each project involved different configurations of partners making up MVP.

However, while the number of changemakers involved in MVP and their work was significant, it resulted in limited transformative social innovation in the broader system, even at neighbourhood level. As described in Chapter Two, the concept of 'transformative social innovation' refers to changes in social relations contributing to societal change by challenging, altering, or replacing dominant institutions. Though significant enablement occurred through the MVP processes, the individuals holding the greatest agency at the start of 2018 remain largely the same at the time of writing, three years later. While agency was realised in the form of the initiatives mentioned above (and other initiatives not

included in this thesis) it seems the biggest claim MVP could make is that it mitigated some of the worst impacts of neoliberal macroeconomic forces, which in South Africa are exacerbated through a segregated and unjust urban spatial fabric and high levels of inequality. A wellbeing economy, where social and ecological goals are prioritised above profit, was not achieved in the form of a complete overhaul of the existing economic system or even a significant alteration of dominant institutions in Makers Valley area. While a collective vision was reached, most explicitly in the form of the Theory of Change, the next sections summarise how I found the lack of transformative social innovation to be a result of the collaborative visioning processes and constraints to agency even at collective level, in the form of MVP. While the core of my personal wellbeing economy vision at a local level remains the prioritisation of social and ecological goals over profit, this was not taken up explicitly as an MVP collective.

## 8.3 My personal vision for a Wellbeing Economy

In 'Cycle Zero' of the seven cycles of the action research (Chapter Four includes an overview of cycles), I undertook informal participant observation in intentional communities in different parts of Europe. Community members were exploring what Pel et al. (2020) refer to as transformational social innovation towards alternative economies through living them (as described in Chapter One). Following my return to South Africa in October 2017 I undertook an extensive literature review and formulated an understanding of these experiences alongside previous experiences in my practice of 'living life as inquiry', a concept borrowed from Gearty & Marshall (2020, who extend Marshall's (1999) work) whose argument I discussed in Chapter Four. As identified in the literature review, alternative economies prioritising wellbeing as opposed to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) have been argued since at least the 1970s (Escobar, 2015). Nevertheless, 'the wellbeing economy' as a more distinct concept gained more widespread attention in South Africa with the publishing of Fioramonti's (2017) book on the topic, shortly before Cycle One of my research. Inspired by literature such as the works by Fioramonti (2017) and Jackson et al.

(2004), I formulated a broad conceptual understanding of a wellbeing economy: a 'beyond GDP' approach to economic decision-making at any scale, in which social and ecological goals are prioritised as opposed to profit or income maximisation, once basic material needs have been satisfied. My reading of Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) confirmed my concerns that greater inequalities correlate with lower wellbeing, and therefore a wellbeing economy needed to strive for equity before it could enhance collective wellbeing.

In January 2018, I moved to the 'Makers Valley' area on the eastern edge of inner city Johannesburg, and the action research cycles that followed generally supported this literature, with some caveats. In Chapter Five I discussed the difference in how participants described their 'good life' when they had their basic material needs covered, as opposed to those who experienced insecurity in being able to satisfy their and their dependents' needs for food, shelter and clothing. Those who experienced insecurity described 'a good life' that featured the ability to meet these material needs, while those with stability spoke of non-material aspects of wellbeing, with a particular focus on contributors to relational wellbeing (as discussed by White, 2017).

Regarding material affluence, participants generally experienced wellbeing in relation to reference points: other people within their reference group, previous life experiences, and expectations for the future (Harrington, 2016; Pillay, 2019). Positional goods in particular signify status and provide a sense of dignity and respect (Schneider, 2007). Using an autoethnographic action research approach, I explored how it was to significantly reduce my own consumption expenditure, and I saw potential for transformative social innovation in diverting some of my scholarship income to MVP projects. I found my wellbeing to be unaffected by the reduction in consumption. However, I attained status and dignity in other ways, due in part to my positionality (as I discussed in Chapter Five). I found status and respect also to be achieved by changemakers, including myself, through affirmation for the changemaking work from kin and communities, though regarding relational wellbeing there were nuances for some of us, such as the need to prove ourselves impacting negatively on our sense of wellbeing.

These findings speak to wellbeing economies discourses (such as Coscieme et al., 2019; third research sub-question). They speak also to my personal wellbeing economy vision. Nevertheless, as I discuss in the next section, even though a collective vision was adopted by an iteration of MVP, it was not explicitly a wellbeing economy or alternative economy vision.

## 8.4 A Less Transformative Collaborative Vision

Conscious of my positionality and in an effort for the collective vision to be as accurate a reflection of a collective vision as possible, given my disproportionately large agency as a key enabler, I purposefully distanced myself from the collective visioning processes. While this meant my personal vision of wellbeing economies did not explicitly feature in visions such as that which is captured in the Makers Valley Theory of Change, elements of wellbeing economies and wellbeing were found, including "sustainable shared wellbeing" and an "interdependent, environmental, caring community" (as I discussed in Chapter Six). While MVP adopted the slogan "Jozi's heart of social and creative enterprise", it fell short of explicitly prioritising social and environmental goals over profit. Even so, as presented in Chapter Five, the networked changemakers within the Makers Valley community did succeed in some transformative social innovation towards a wellbeing economy, despite not having an explicit collective vision of this. As highlighted by a key MVP enabler, Makers Valley was "a propagation of projects and ideas" that various partners had been "doing for years": it was simply a continuation of the "same journey" (I6, 08/04/2020). Avelino et al. (2019: 198) argue that in transformative social innovation, "different discourses intermingle, changing over time, to form multi-layered narratives of change". My aim to enable wellbeing economies intermingled with existing discourses of individual changemakers and collectives. While there was some reframing at a collective level, using the lenses of wellbeing, social enterprise and changemaking, many changemakers acted on their personalised

visions and varying collective visions, depending on the needs of the specific context.

In this way, "actors can increase the transformative potential of social innovations by … linking up with multi-layered 'narratives of change' in both mainstream and grassroots movements" (Avelino et al., 2019: 204). Though the Theory of Change and slogan remained consistent, MVP also adapted the Makers Valley vision slightly in different instances to best match opportunities to further the aims, such as calls for funding proposals. As highlighted by Purdue (2001: 2216), 'social entrepreneur' community leaders are those who demonstrate a "willingness to work with the available conditions". This definition is more similar to my definition of 'changemakers' than the common definition of 'social entrepreneurs'. In working with these available conditions, I had to frequently compromise, both my vision and the realisation of this vision through action, in order to achieve any tangible change, due to the constraints to MVP's collective agency and my own.

The constant compromises I made in relation to a wellbeing economy vision led me to be concerned about what Pillay (2018: 151) raises regarding 'the art of paradigm maintenance'. This 'art' involves neoliberal institutions agreeing with more radical critics that there is a problem; but capturing and controlling the critical discourse. It uses new concepts critical of neoliberal capitalism, 'sustainable development' or 'green jobs' and "empties them of meaning" (ibid), conceding only 'reformist' reforms, like an insignificant proportion of renewable energy or social grants, thus pacifying a movement that may secure more radical changes to the economic system (Chapter Two). Pillay (2018) argues that hegemonic elites and institutions like the World Bank themselves use this 'art' to maintain the status quo that acts in their favour. Narratives that MVP linked to a wellbeing economy vision, for instance the 'social economy' to which I return below, are often positioned as counter-narratives, but they are "not always easily discernable from mainstream discourses" (Avelino et al., 2019: 198). I was concerned that MVP, in attempting to be as broad-based in its community building and visioning processes as possible, had produced a collaborative

vision, in the form of the Makers Valley Theory of Change and the MVP Team's slogan, that was far less transformative than I had personally hoped for. Simultaneously, I was conscious of the need for compromise and a politics of hybridity (Schmid, 2021), to achieve tangible changemaking action.

## 8.5 Changemaking, Hybridity and Critical Alliances Involving Action Research

'Changemaking' and the linked concept of 'changemakers' are terms usually found in popular media, with little attempt to define them from a critical perspective. In Chapter Two, I linked these concepts with theories of agency, structure and transformation grounded in sociology (Giddens, 2013; Sewell, 1992), and 'middle-level' theory of transformative social innovation (Avelino et al., 2019). Here I discuss contributions to knowledge of my empirical findings related to the themes of changemaking and hybridity.

### 8.5.1 Building a theory of changemaking: transformative social innovation

Sewell (1992) builds on Giddens' (2013: 20) theory of structuration, which argues that "society is created and recreated afresh … by the participants in every social encounter". Structure is thus understood as collective patterns of social relations arising from the contingent interactions of individual agents (Sewell, 1992). Thus Ashoka's slogan 'everyone a changemaker' (Drayton, 2006) holds true, in that the actions of each individual impact the structure, whether intended or not. However, as highlighted by Sewell (1992), some agents are more 'enabled' than others, due to their knowledge of these social schemas and relevant human and non-human resources to be able to make change. In the discussion on positionality in Chapter Three, and returned to in Chapter Six in my findings, which deepen the changemaker concept, I highlighted how my agency was greater than that of many other changemakers in the MPV collective. Applying the understanding of positionality in action research put forward by Herr and Anderson (2005), I recognised that this was due to my level of formal and informal hierarchical power, my position with regard to dominant groups,

and the resources participants saw me being able to mobilise. I found that pre-existing social capital (a key resource I and other enablers relied on) was able to attract additional social capital, as predicted by Dasgupta (2005). Nevertheless, while I had greater agency than some, I became despondent about how little agency I had to realise tangible transformative social innovation.

The "middle range", "nascent" theory of transformative social innovation builds on an understanding of structure and agency (Pel et al., 2020: 2) and provides further opportunities for a theoretical understanding of changemaking. My action research on changemaking supported further contributions to this understanding. The field of transformative social innovation and the concepts encompassed by the field arise from the study of similar processes and communities to those which I studied in 'Cycle Zero' and which came about in the action research as Makers Valley. These communities include transition towns, ecovillages and 'social innovation communities' such as impact hubs (Avelino et al., 2015, p. 205; Toivonen, 2013). Furthermore, the empirical cases from which transformative social innovation theory draws are mostly based in Europe, though there are some Latin American examples. The theory itself is also Eurocentric, likely as a result of significant European Union funding, which led most research institutions backing the research prior to be based in Europe. My research extends the theory to the global South, and a different form of community (Makers Valley) and institution (MVP).

The enablement of changemakers within this community through MVP initiatives was an approach that did achieve some transformative social innovation in Makers Valley. While MVP did not achieve its original aims of promoting a common identity for the Makers Valley neighbourhood, in Chapter Six I discussed how a community of changemakers did form around the physical spaces of VY Commons, Victoria Yards, the Changemakers Residences and other hubs in the broader neighbourhood. This community was thus both place- and interest-based, and included significant enabling factors for changemakers involved. Bonding and bridging social capital were supported by enablers playing a role of trust 'brokers'. In later action research cycles, the MVP Team

began to institutionalise these relationships of trust. Greater social capital enhanced sharing and other prosocial behaviour, and the presence of individuals within this network who had greater access to knowledge and resources was particularly enabling for MVP's collective agency towards transformative social innovation.

In Chapter Seven I covered my findings of how 'learning by doing' enabled changemakers in the action research. Flexibility in expectations around what partners said they would deliver enabled innovation through experimentation, but also meant accountability was more difficult to manage. I recommended a balanced project management approach to changemaking, inspired by the cycles of action research. An action research approach also supported low-risk, incremental projects towards enhanced learning by doing. A capacitated MVP Team as an intermediary organisation was well-placed to monitor the changemaking outcomes according to collective visions. Learning by doing was also facilitated by a combination of workshop and real-world experiences, where participants were incentivised to make use of potential enhancements to agency, such as access to funding.

Lastly, I found through autoethnographic research, and interviews and observations with other aspiring enablers that responsiveness to changing circumstances at different levels was effective for changemaking. This meant being sensitive to the changing needs of individual changemakers, and stepping away from operations as much as possible, though being ready to provide support, to avoid unnecessary failure or to manage conflict. It also meant being sensitive to the ebb and flow and windows of opportunity. Finally, it required responsiveness to broader systems to ensure tangible action, and I turn next to the forms of hybridity that resulted.

### 8.5.2 Hybrid infrastructures

As argued by Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2009), action research with community economies can provide theory to better understand transformative

social innovation. Situated within community economies but through an interdisciplinary approach, where he draws on various social innovation theory, Schmid's (2020) book on community economies in Stuttgart, Germany is based on his PhD thesis completed the previous year (Schmid, 2019). He discusses similar initiatives to those that I undertook to enable, though the ones Schmid researched were more established. The transformative social innovation he studied had similarities to Makers Valley, albeit in a different context. Both studies held 'beyond growth' economies as the vision for transformation, though Schmid (2020) refers to these as postcapitalist or community economies, in line with Gibson-Graham (2006). I included these concepts in a broad definition of 'wellbeing economies', recognising an explicit reorientation to social and ecological wellbeing at all levels, in line with Coscieme et al. (2019).

My thesis extends Schmid's (2020) work through my action research approach, due to the level of involvement I had in MVP initiatives, and the resulting autoethnographic perspective I took. Schmid "wanted to go in a more proactive direction originally but ended up with an involved but more passive approach" (pers. comm., 05/02/2021). In a paper following publication of his thesis, Schmid (2021) extends his research through the case of an open workshop or 'makers space' and explores a 'politics of hybridity' navigated by the initiative in achieving transformative social innovation. This particular case and Schmid's (2021) theorisation of it helped me make better sense of my own findings from the action research, and understand many of the initiatives I had set up as 'hybrid infrastructures'.

Building on Schmid (2021), a 'politics of hybridity' involves action towards a vision of transformative social innovation that deliberately accepts short-term pragmatic compromises (which may continue social relations in contrast to this vision). As discussed in the previous chapter, a 'politics of hybridity' (Schmid, 2021) is consistent with Sewell's (1992) transformation-orientation adaption of structuration theory, upon which transformative social innovation theory builds, where initiatives "seek to transform institutions that they are simultaneously shaped by" (Pel et al., 2020: 6). From his findings on community, Schmid (2021)

develops the concept of 'hybrid infrastructures', which I introduced in Chapter Two. These infrastructures can enhance transformative social innovation by adapting to the structural constraints to allow for action. Simultaneously, these infrastructures allow for further action towards transformation, within the sub-structures or systems they create.

Various initiatives in my action research exhibited these characteristics of hybrid infrastructures, including the social enterprises of 39 Victoria and The Troyeville House, and the intermediary MVP (Chapter Seven). While Schmid (2020; 2021) explored the role that organisations played in Stuttgart's community economy, I focused on the role of individual changemakers. Yet our studies share key outcomes regarding compromise, hybridity, and the dangers of this regarding transformation. From these findings, I argue that intermediaries or 'backbone organisations' like MVP need to fulfil this key role in securing transformative social innovation through acting as enabling 'hybrid infrastructures'. As discussed in Chapter Seven and to which I return below in this section, MVP acted as such a hybrid infrastructure to enable changemaking, as in the Stuttgart workshop example (Schmid, 2021), through an emergent approach featuring project-to-project flexibility. MVP's work with Victoria Yards was one of the most characteristic cases where we needed to deploy a politics of hybridity.

### 8.5.3 Hybridity tensions and Victoria Yards

Significant tension was experienced between MVP changemakers as a result of the extreme hybridity of the partnership. In managing the politics of hybridity (Schmid, 2021), MVP as a collective was subject to the agency of those who had greatest access to resources. This imbalance in agency caused significant consternation within MVP, particularly between coordinators of the Covid-19 Response and Victoria Yards management, when members of MVP felt Victoria Yards was acting undemocratically and unjustly in seeking revenue opportunities, as the trajectory in Chapter Seven shows. Victoria Yards was one of the most tangible showcases of wellbeing economy initiatives, and over the action research cycles, it formed the centre of the Makers Valley community and

MVP's hub (Chapter Six). However, its ownership and for-profit structure did not challenge existing social relations based on mainstream neoliberal economic practices, and its leadership did not strive for the core principles of transformative social innovation. The partnership also brought criticism to MVP by some residents and local changemakers.

Yet I found Victoria Yards to be the most influential MVP partner in enabling tangible transformation towards a wellbeing economy (as presented in Chapter Six). Because I needed to retain positive relations with those with the most agency (resources in the form of property and funding), I never explicitly challenged the ownership structures. I judged that an intervention attempt of this nature would simply reduce the flow of resources for MVP and associated initiatives, or derail future transformative social innovation potential. The MVP Team continues to benefit from the partnership with Victoria Yards. The partnership with Victoria Yards assists in attracting resources for the MVP Team and partners, including additional US Consulate funding to upgrade the coworking space at Victoria Yards from which MVP is exempt from paying rent.

Nevertheless, this hybridity required careful and conscious navigation, which I was not always successful at. Community economy action researcher Gibson-Graham (2014: 151) argues that "a weak theory of diverse economies" does open to the motivations usually drawn on by mainstream economic discourse, such as individual self-interest and private gain. However, it also opens to a much wider range of social relations, such as trust, sharing, collective agreement, guilt, community pressure, environmental and social justice, and others (ibid). I found in my action research that this 'opening up' to community economy practices had to be conscious. While Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2009) put forward that research and recognition of diverse practices reifies and strengthens these practices, I found there was a need to more actively strengthen them through day-to-day economic decision-making, given the dominance of mainstream economic discourse. As underscored by Schmid (2021: 8), "diversity can and does include exploitative and unjust relations".

### 8.5.4 Navigating hybridity through critical reflexivity

Schmid (2021) highlights the maintenance of a critical reflexivity as a key element of a politics of hybridity, for example through activist scholarship. Action-focused critical scholarship can help to "strike a balance between ethical congruency and transformative pragmatism" (Schmid, 2021: 1). Without this, Glenzer and Divecha (2020: 407) argue that even well-intentioned research cycles can lead to "eternal returns to the status quo". As is generally the case in action research (Bradbury, 2015), I found the middle way between action and research, occupying both the realms of 'doing' (in everyday MVP work) and 'critical thought' (in the university) was a productive space to occupy, but it was also very difficult to maintain a critical eye, particularly with my level of involvement in the action, and its hybridity.

Glenzer and Divecha (2020: 409) argue that to achieve 'deep equity' in their work, action researchers need to undertake 'inner work', "an inquiry by those of us with power and privilege into how we've internalised them, how our forms of openness and liberality and collaborating frequently reproduce them". This inner work can support reflection and greater understanding of the systems the action researcher is attempting to change (ibid). I found meditation not only to be key to my wellbeing, but to be a key part of my reflection stages, forming a daily opportunity for reflection, sometimes in conjunction with my research journal. I also found longer reflection periods to be essential, where I left Makers Valley as the action research site. This helped me to work with what Schmid (2021: 14) refers to as "tension between emotional and practical proximity on the one hand and critical distance on the other".

### 8.5.5 The hybrid infrastructure of MVP and focus on wellbeing as pacification?

I was troubled by questions similar to those raised by Schmid (2021: 8): "What compromises are legitimate, when and how? Is the conscious acceptance of compromise better [or] different from the omnipresent (and largely unconscious) reproduction of patterns of injustice and unsustainability?" I found

in my work that in attempting to be responsive to partners and achieve action through pragmatic compromise, along with a lack of a clear definition of what constituted a wellbeing economy initiative, the specifics and indeed authenticity of initiatives were left to my and the other changemakers' personal ethics. However, even here, I found the everyday economic decision-making difficult, when one removed the clear goal of profit maximisation that drives mainstream neoliberal economic decision-making. For instance, was it acceptable for me to take an income from rental proceeds, and if so, how much? How could I assess if an initiative was actually running within ecological limits?

Generally, community organisations lack agency to effect significant systemic change, though in striving for more ambitious goals they can play a 'corrective' role mediating the worst impacts of neoliberal economies (Schmid, 2021). However, one of the most troubling conundrums for me was whether the hybrid infrastructure of MVP was not corrective but placatory, due to the more reformist (rather than radical) vision and action that is possible within the broadness of wellbeing economies.

I was concerned about MVP work pacifying movements such as those linked to Bertrams Residents Movement or the potential for others. I deliberated whether it may unintentionally re-route the agency of people that may otherwise be more greatly angered by the injustice of inequalities in the neighbourhood. Instead of fighting for more significant system change, I wondered if participants were side-tracked by the hope of wellbeing economies messaging, and the resources MVP attracted. The New Economics Foundation, which has worked on supporting wellbeing economies since the early 2000s,[10] acknowledges that a focus on wellbeing while ignoring issues of economic justice can distract from the underlying structural issues, and even undermine the work to restructure the economy (Quick, 2019). Avelino et al., (2019: 198) argue, regarding

[10] As identified in the literature review, alternative economies prioritising wellbeing as opposed to GDP have been argued for at least since the 1970s, even though The Wellbeing Economy as a more distinct concept gained more widespread attention in 2017, shortly before Cycle One of my research.

transformative social innovation, that "attempts to empower others may have the paradoxical effect of disempowering them". Despite the core goal of transformative social innovation being a change in social relations, "relations of power depend on one's location in the system, and one cannot easily alter these relationships at the interpersonal level without changing the system" (ibid).

### 8.5.6 Deradicalisation of changemaking in the Changemakers Residence initiatives

The ambivalence I felt regarding the contrast between the less transformative vision of the hybrid partnership MVP and my own wellbeing economy vision was a key driver for me to start the 39 Victoria and Troyeville House Changemakers Residences (which opened in Cycles Three and Six, respectively). My aim was to experiment with alternatives to for-profit developments (albeit with my own, much more modest access to capital), and transfer the properties to co-ownership structures of diverse changemakers, generally people of colour. However, as I explore in the cases in Chapter Seven, over the course of the action research cycles I also had to 'deradicalise' this model, due mostly to the constraints arising from the need to cover the costs of maintenance, loans and partner changemakers' time.

The results of the compromise I reached in later action research cycles was that the Changemakers Residences did change social relations, albeit at a smaller scale, in that the initiatives enabled shifts in ownership to people of colour for whom property ownership and becoming a landlord was previously out of reach. Having gained from learning by doing, the managers of the Residences are currently taking ownership of the properties though specialised financing and sweat equity arrangements. I see this as successful enablement: with 39 Victoria I am now entirely hands-off, but hope it will continue to run as a social enterprise towards a wellbeing economy. With Troyeville House I am shifting to a non-executive role of board chair, where I will try to ensure it works for the greater good in the neighbourhood, as with MVP.

Pel et al. (2020: 5) recognise that transformative social innovation initiatives "may only induce local, limited changes … whilst otherwise largely reproducing their institutional contexts". My original intentions of the Residences attracting an intentional community of changemakers to co-own and manage the living spaces towards the same vision of a wellbeing economy, even at a local scale, remain largely unrealised. As with the partnerships with for-profit developments in the neighbourhood, I had to adopt a less radical, and essentially more neoliberal approach, to achieve tangible action and operational sustainability, including financial sustainability (Chapter Seven). In the end, the managers and I opted for a social enterprise model, in which rental income cross-subsidises non-revenue-generating changemaking activities. I am conscious that the expectation of a more just future through this model "inevitably remains speculative" (Schmid, 2021: 10).

Thus, as I write this, I find myself still deliberating how I could more radically shift The Troyeville House and other MVP projects towards a wellbeing economy. I have resigned myself to the fact that I lack the agency to make change at a broader systemic level: as noted by an MVP Team programme manager, "the reality is that neoliberal capitalism isn't going to go away tomorrow" (I28, 14/05/2021). As such, I am still searching for hybrid infrastructures that serve the core priorities of a wellbeing economy, in which wealth is more effectively shared and social and ecological goals better served, but in which the operational sustainability of the initiative is not sacrificed. Key changemakers, such as the partner changemaker for The Troyeville House remain hopeful, saying, "By the end of this time of experimenting, this first year, we'll have a good idea of how to make it work" (I8, 16/05/2021). As we found with the Covid-19 lockdown, if these infrastructures are in place, they may be able to be expanded upon when the time is right. As argued by my grandfather, this time cannot be precisely predicted, but can be prepared for (Mayson, 1990).

## 8.6 Where to from here?

Action researchers have to decide on an end point for the action research cycles that will be written up, and this point can sometimes be arbitrary in relation to the action, based, for example, on university deadlines (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Generally, write-ups end "mid-story, with longer-term impacts teasingly just beyond the last page of the manuscript" (Glenzer & Divecha, 2020: 410). I ended the final cycle for this PhD (Cycle Seven) at a point where the initiatives I had enabled were largely operationally independent. It was also the point I had to submit my thesis for examination. Nevertheless, I continue to use the 'life as inquiry' approach (Marshall, 1999), as introduced in Chapter One. Therefore, I apply the same logic of conceptualising life before Cycle One (pre-October 2017) as 'Cycle Zero', to life following Cycle Seven (post-May 2021). In the same vein, I shall call this period 'Cycle X': a period where the action will continue, and the longer-term impacts will become clearer.

In 'Cycle X', I will continue to play an enabler role in MVP through my position as chair of the MVP Team's board. The MVP Team seems to be operationally sustainable with the new CEO's leadership, and able to continue playing an enabling role as an intermediary to the independent initiatives in the loose set of partnerships making up MVP. Even so, funding for salaries will likely remain challenging to secure in the Covid-19 landscape, as is generally being experienced by non-profit organisations (Phindela, 2020). MVP itself is exploring further hybrid revenue options, given the broader context, and aims to offer fee-based learning opportunities to the private sector, for example. The Changemakers Residences will seemingly continue under new ownership of the owner-managers (if financing is successfully secured). Nevertheless, I will have limited influence over the direction they take.

### 8.6.1 Expanding possibilities of transformative social innovation

Gibson-Graham and Dombroski (2020: 459) understand social transformation not as a "single momentous revolution" but as change that is achieved in "disarticulated places that are connected through a shared language and understanding of economy that shapes what is possible". They highlight that, as

shown in examples like feminism, this approach can lead to widespread change. This is the less structured approach to scale that MVP took in the first action research cycles. However, from Cycle Six (specifically July 2018), MVP enablers have been interested in more systematically broadening the organisation's impact, without having the resources to increase its size. Influencing discourse formation through social media has been one approach to scaling up transformative social innovation (as identified by Pel et al., 2020), with this being the core responsibility of one employee of the MVP Team. Starbird et al. (2021) highlight approaches to enhancing the impact of social impact initiatives, of which MVP is focusing on two: providing knowledge and supplies to broader loose networks of other organisations; and advocating for policy change, using demonstration of our local-level experience. There have already been some examples of the application of MVP's learning to other inner city Johannesburg contexts and further afield, such as the experiences of the Covid-19 Response (Banda, 2021). An MVP Team programme manager has been involved in advocacy work through representing MVP in provincial food security partnerships and tracking and contributing to the Social Economy Green Paper process (which I discuss in Section 8.6.3). She sees the work in Makers Valley continuing to be useful, because advocacy around "changes to the overarching systems … has to be based on something that is real", where you're advocating "not from a paradigm you choose but from the experience" (I28, 14/05/2021).

Translocal networks are also a key source of empowerment for local transformative social innovation initiatives (Pel et al., 2020). MVP joined the Wellbeing Economy Alliance at an international level, and other networks at provincial and national levels. However, as discussed in Chapter Six, there is also considerable scope to deepen MVP's impact at the local level. Just as the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership acted as an enabler for MVP through sharing its financial and governance infrastructure (see Chapter Six), so MVP has started doing the same with other organisations. The CEO is exploring MVP's potentials as an intermediary, as the organisation takes on more secure legal forms. Nevertheless, there are further opportunities to deepen and expand

impact. I turn next to the possibility of Makers Valley being established as an urban living lab, featuring action research, potentially led by a university.

### 8.6.2 Urban living labs and the role of the academy in changemaking

The growing social inequalities and ecological crisis demand engagement from critical scholars, who need to move beyond their traditional roles as observers (Schmid, 2021). Universities are "more firmly and tightly contextualized within local, regional, national, and global political economies than ever before" (Levin & Greenwood, 2008: 212). There is "active interplay between universities and their contexts", in an attempt to make measurable contributions, though accountability is measured ever more through neoliberal market-based understandings of impact (ibid). My PhD was based in the Centre for Urbanism and Built Environment Studies at Wits University, which holds civic engagement as a focus (CUBES, 2020). The University of Johannesburg was also involved in the action research through two projects: the research and design of context-appropriate modular housing by Masters students supported by an innovative architectural firm (26'10 South, 2019), and an undergraduate class producing an analysis of local streetscapes for an exhibition (UJ, 2019). Nevertheless, MVP partners expressed concerns about the number of researchers involved in the area, and the lack of tangible outcomes from this. While the MVP Team collated research on a publically available repository, some changemakers saw a greater need for channelling research towards outputs useful for the collaborative vision (the Makers Valley Theory of Change). Particularly when it comes to shorter-term projects, Burns et al. (2012) argue for an action research approach where researchers develop relationships with longer-term initiatives to ensure that their research benefits participants.

Urban living labs have the potential of acting as conduits for individual, otherwise disparate research projects, connecting different actors on specific projects and place-based issues (Aernouts et al., 2020). Taking an action research approach, urban living labs, particularly those coordinated as dedicated university-based projects, can translate these independent research projects into

transformative social innovation. Rather than studying transformation from the outside, the academy has the potential to be "an integral and active part of the new worlds being constructed" (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2009: 36). While in my action research I took a lead role in initiating action, there are less risky, but still action-oriented options. If such options were made available to students interested in pursuing action research, they could partner with longer-standing intermediaries like that which MVP became, who could match them to specific independent initiatives, with the potential to benefit both research participants and the researchers through experiential learning opportunities (Douglas, 2020). Systemic action research through urban living labs has the potential to overcome the "dysfunctional divide between theorists and practitioners which, at their extreme, leaves the former ungrounded and the latter unthinking" (Burns et al., 2012: 5).

I was particularly attracted to action research because at its core is the opportunity for research to go beyond noting recommendations for other parties, often the state, to attend to. Through MVP and associated projects I was able to test reflections and recommendations in later cycles, rather than stopping at "the state has to …" (Glenzer & Divecha, 2020: 410). Nevertheless, as discussed in Section 8.5, I was still frustrated by the constraints to my agency. While the involvement of a university and action researchers in the form of living labs could offer one way of channelling additional agency, state involvement would offer far greater opportunities to scale. Globally, living labs have received varying levels of attention and funding from government. The European Union government has been particularly supportive (Bulkeley et al., 2019), including backing some labs in Southern Africa. However, in South Africa "the scale-up potential of living labs has been hindered by inadequate state support" (Teagle, 2019: n.p.n.). Furthermore, the involvement of the state does not need to be limited to the support of living labs. Schmid (2020) found that the active and dedicated engagement of a single city employee in forms of community economy in Stuttgart was catalytic to other official commitments addressing systemic issues.

### 8.6.3 A social economy policy for South Africa

In South Africa, national social economy policymaking processes happened to be run parallel to MVP's local work. According to the Social Economy Green Paper (NDED, 2019), a social economy is one that places people at its centre, and proposes a measurement scale for a 'beyond GDP' economic contribution. In that regard, the Green Paper recognises 'new economies' like the 'circular economy' and 'caring economy' and supports the recognition within tax structures of the 'hybrid' legal form of the social enterprises. It promotes 'social innovation', which is seen as solutions that meet social needs and are socially and environmentally responsible, and it proposes the provision of seed funding.

MVP saw the relevance of their experiences to the national policy processes, and enhanced possibilities to enable wellbeing economies at a broader scale. The MVP Team engaged with the Green Paper process through direct liaison with the coordinator, and submitted proposals in support of communities of interest similar to urban living labs and 'special economic zones' grounded on social economy principles, as we aimed for Makers Valley to develop into. This concept was entered tentatively into the document as a proposal to "create safe spaces for the Social Economy to test innovative products, services, and business models without needing to overcome traditional regulatory hurdles" (NDED, 2019: 30). Moreover, a key policy intervention proposed is to strengthen intermediary organisations that offer support to the Social Economy. However, the policy process seems to have stalled at the time of writing. Thus, given that the action research supported the recommendations included in the Green Paper, my first policy recommendation would be for the Social Economy policymaking process to continue. The end goal would be for this social economy to be the economy, as opposed to a subset of the failing GDP-oriented macro-economy.

Nevertheless, there is significant transformative social innovation towards wellbeing economies that can be undertaken without state involvement. A wellbeing economy can start even at an individual level (Fioramonti, 2017).

Furthermore, over the course of this research, it seems the link in the literature between 'inner transformation' such as mindfulness practice and outer (systemic) transformation has been strengthened by research and practice, especially in the sustainability field (Doran, 2017; Wamsler, 2019; Woiwode et al., 2021). Curiosity about this link was, in fact, the instigator in my decision to undertake this PhD, during a ten-day silent retreat I attended in early 2017. This curiosity was also the root of the question that drove my research, "What is a good life really, and how do we get there?" While responsiveness to context meant the inner transformation component of my action research fell away, a final recommendation would be for further research regarding this link. Inner transformation practices such as mindfulness and associated mind-body practices have the potential to expose capitalism's "pathological consumerism" as a dead end in the search for "the good life" (Doran, 2017: 11). If extrapolated to a national scale, "the link between economic growth and well-being is not just questioned but exposed as antithetical" (Schmid, 2018: 601). Thus, mindfulness practices could be central to collective liberation (ibid).

Nevertheless, as Syse and Mueller (2014) raise, individual action, including voluntary simplicity, may well have "as much effect on the world as a butterfly in the Australian desert": except for rare and largely unpredictable exceptions, it is insignificant. Thus, these individual actions need to inform larger, systematic transformation social innovation towards 'beyond GDP' wellbeing economies. While I was frustrated by my lack of agency to enable more significant changemaking towards a wellbeing economy in Makers Valley, my hope is that this thesis can promote further systemic questioning, from individual to collective levels, of "What is a good life really, and how do we get there?"

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# APPENDIX A: Action Research Cycles and Descriptions

**Table A1: Overall action research cycles**

| **CYCLE:** comm-enced | **CHARACTERISTIC** | **ACTIVITIES** | **LOCATIONAL BASE** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **CYCLE 'ZERO':** 2005 | Pre-PhD | Life as action research, but nothing formalised. Started with intentional experiential learning around South Africa before departure for college in Norway. Experimented with first 'changemakers' house on the west side of Johannesburg inner city. Worked for City of Johannesburg implementing Inner City Transformation Roadmap. | South Africa, Norway, UK, Ghana, Kenya, USA. |
| June 2017 | Embarking on PhD and initial research. | Read Buddhism, intentional communities, degrowth, wellbeing (REFLECT). Had meetings/ unstructured interviews with Transition Network, Global Ecovillage Network and intentional community leaders around Europe. Engaged in participant observation/ immersion (OBSERVE, pre-action). Wrote initial PhD proposal (PLAN) and acceptance into NRF Urban Resilience and Spatial Justice programme. Explored 'inner transition' (the original focus of my PhD): how this could enable macroeconomic transitions, such as to wellbeing economies (ACTION - autoethnography). However, through the exploration of intentional communities that were exploring these 'middle way' principles, I realised that, as with all silver bullets, Buddhism or 'inner transition' was not one. | Intentional communities around Europe, living degrowth; ecovillages; Buddhist retreat centres/ monasteries. |
| **CYCLE ONE:** Oct 2017 | Intensive literature review | Read about community wellbeing, transition, intentional communities (including Transition Towns and Ecovillages), wellbeing economy, mixed income and cooperative housing (REFLECT). Participated in Wellbeing Economy Festival. Johannesburg Development Agency asked me to help review Our City Our Block (OCOB) proposals for the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), and one of the submissions was made by the team led by Mariapaola McGurk (see Sections 1.3 and 4.4). Re-connected with Johannesburg inner city and discovered Victoria Yards (OBSERVE, REFLECT, PLAN). | Cape Town, Johannesburg |
| Jan 2018 | Community mapping in Makers Valley | Rented room in 'Makers Valley' neighbourhood, 'snowball sampling' informal interviews and growing networks. Mapped built environment and social infrastructure (OBSERVE). Read on action research, changemaking (REFLECT). Met owner of house that was interested in developing a shared house with potential for it to be a Changemakers Residence and agreed to play an enabling role in its | 'Makers Valley', Johannesburg |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | management (ACT). | |
| Apr 2018 | Exploring enabler role | Collaboratively selected director of 'Makers Valley Collective' under Makers Valley Partnership 'board' and enabled him to undertake community mapping and visioning and set up non-profit company. Was asked to chair Makers Valley JDA OCOB urban design framework process. (ACT). | Makers Valley |
| May 2018 | Intensifying enabler role | Submitted US Consulate Creative Placemaking proposal and finalised JDA OCOB (PLAN). Started reading on action that I was experiencing/ undertaking (REFLECT). Submitted first draft of PhD proposal and proposal defence (PLAN). Moved studios and re-opened co-working space as VY Commons (ACT). | Makers Valley |
| June 2018 | Reflection on MV cycle 1 | Reflected on, synthesised and presented on activity thus far at weeklong workshop for Urban Resilience and Spatial Justice PhD Programme; realised need for 'reflection' stage of action research cycle (REFLECT). | Durban |
| **CYCLE TWO:** July 2018 | Submission of final proposal | Got ethics clearance; submitted final proposal to faculty (PLAN). Did conventional research: pilot interviews with MV changemakers, general residents (OBSERVE). Finalised US Consulate funding contract and programme plan (PLAN). | Makers Valley |
| Oct 2018 | Reorientation | Separated from MV Collective as an organisation (resigned from board); refocused on co-living, including cooperative housing; purchased houses next to Victoria Yards and initiated Changemakers Residence (REFLECT, ACT). Applied to British Council for Developing Inclusive Creative Economies (DICE) funding (PLAN). Completed first set of interviews (OBSERVE). | Durban, Makers Valley, Magaliesburg (retreat), Cape Town |
| Dec 2018 | Reading, reflection, first plan of thesis | Read on action thus far, adding to compilation of extensive literature review. Completed first plan of thesis in mind map form (REFLECT). | Cape Town |
| **CYCLE THREE:** Jan 2019 | British Council DICE and Changemaker s Residence | Focused on growing Changemakers Residence and changing model (ACT + PLAN, REFLECT, OBSERVE). Partnered with Engineers Without Borders to design solutions for challenges in Makers Valley (PLAN). Set up MVP as fledgling intermediary organisation to institutionalise my 'enabler' role, as well as a neighbourhood steering committee (ACT). Partnered with RIO through DICE. Recognised effectiveness of changemaking at early childhood development (ECD) level (REFLECT). | Makers Valley |
| **CYCLE FOUR:** Apr 2019 | Shift to ECD | Shifted in focus from social and creative enterprise to ECD (PLAN). Set up Changemaker Children partnership with local NGO CDP and others (ACT). Participated in imbizos and experiential learning (OBSERVE). Continued enabler role and stepping in with MVP at times, acting as CEO (ACT). Attended various ECD conferences. Secured funding for pilot ECD training programme (PLAN). | Magaliesburg, Makers Valley |
| July 2019 | Conceptualisin | Reflected, defined thesis themes and initial coding | Thohoyandou, |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | g the thesis | of data. Consulted other supervisors in the programme. Started using PHD office to write (methods chapter – mostly discarded). (REFLECT). Exited from operational management of Changemakers Residence (ACT). | Limpopo (Venda); University of Witwatersrand |
| **CYCLE FIVE:** Oct 2019 | Back to the action | Completed sustainability plan for MVP; secured partnership for The Changemaker Centre (ECD one-stop centre). Put in offer to purchase The Troyeville House (ACT). | Makers Valley |
| Dec 2019 | Reflection and planning | Planned The Changemaker School and Changemaker Centre (REFLECT, PLAN). | Cape Town |
| **CYCLE SIX:** Jan 2020 | Exit from MVP operations | Prepared handover of Makers Valley Partnership (PLAN). Relaunched Makers Valley Steering Committee (ACT). | Makers Valley |
| Mar 2020 | Covid-19 Response. Reflection and start of final write up | Start of Covid-19 national lockdown. Enabled start of MV Covid-19 Response and managed some operational aspects in initial stages (ACT). Planned full thesis, coded all data. Started writing (REFLECT). Handed over MVP to new CEO. Finished second round of interviews with changemakers (OBSERVE). Completed further coding of large amounts of data and separation into themes and sub-themes, which became chapters and sections in my first draft. Adapted my 2019 schema and added themes and sub-themes where data did not fit (REFLECT). | Makers Valley |
| July 2020 | Reflection intensifies through the process of writing | Drafting and re-drafting of chapters. Member checking mini-interviews. (REFLECT). | Cape Town, Johannesburg |
| **CYCLE SEVEN:** Sept 2020 | The Troyeville House initiative more tangibly begins. | Moved into The Troyeville House. Initiated operations and management of Troyeville House. Continued with thesis in Johannesburg. (ACT). | Makers Valley |
| Feb 2021 | Conclusion of the write-up. | Relocated to Cape Town, with all projects operational, without me needing to be hands on: MVP financially sustainable, 39 Vic sale to manager, Troyeville House financially sustainable excluding loan repayments (payment holiday).<br>MVP continued to grow, moving into the newly funded Makers Valley Studio, growing the team, and supporting local enterprises in the JDA Fuller Park upgrade. | Cape Town |
| **FUTURE?** June 2021 | Action intensifies | Action continues and intensifies with the benefit of learning from the PhD (ACT). Submission of journal article (PLAN, REFLECT). | Makers Valley |

## APPENDIX B: Interviewees Cited in the Thesis

| Interviewee | Description and relevance | Date(s) of interview(s) |
|---|---|---|
| I1 | A Makers Valley changemaker who became an enabler of other initiatives. Co-founder of a social enterprise 'holding company' 94 Colours, as well as a sneakers customisation social enterprise. A long-term resident of the broader Makers Valley area. | 10/06/2019 and 15/04/2019 |
| I2 | A Makers Valley changemaker. Early childhood development social entrepreneur, who was enabled to start a mobile early childhood development centre, regularly visiting 10 established early childhood development centres, and holding other ad hoc events. Stilt walker, who taught children in after-school programmes and they went on to teach others. A resident of the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence. | 23/04/2020 |
| I3 | The other half of the changemaking team with I1: co-founder of 94 Colours, as well as an events company specialising in spoken word events held monthly. A long-term resident of the broader Makers Valley area. | 10/06/2019 and 08/04/2020 |
| I4 | An enabler. Director of the long-standing non-profit organisation, the Curriculum Development Project. Ran the mini street carnivals and various early childhood development initiatives, including the training with Summit Educational Trust. | 21/06/2019 and 21/04/2020 |
| I5 | An enabler. Founder of the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership with over twenty years of experience in the inner city, and firm supporter of Makers Valley Partnership (MVP). | 15/04/2020 |
| I6 | An enabler and resident of the broader Makers Valley area. Director of The Coloured Cube and project manager of the MVP US Consulate creative | 24/06/2019 and 08/04/2020 |

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| | placemaking project. Coordinator of a group of creatives that formed the first iteration of the partnership that became MVP. | |
| I7 | An enabler, although candid about his for-profit orientation. Managing partner of the Victoria Yards development, where the Makers Valley coworking space and hub was located. | 20/03/2019 |
| I8 | Enabler and long-term resident of the inner city. Manager of Victoria Yards when I arrived, and then partner changemaker and manager of The Troyeville House. | 20/09/2018 and 16/05/2021 |
| I9 | A changemaker working as a builder at the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence, before becoming involved in early childhood development at the Residence and after-school programmes with another initiative in Makers Valley. | 17/07/2019 |
| I10 | A resident of a Changemakers Residence I had started in Cycle Zero, west of the inner city, whom I interviewed to support my reflections on previous action research cycles and inform planning for the Changemakers Residences in the action research covered in this thesis. | 18/09/2018 |
| I11 | An elderly resident of Victoria Street in Makers Valley, whom I interviewed as part of my pilot interviews to build an understanding of what stakeholders understood 'a good life' to be. | 19/09/2018 |
| I12 | A student living in Victoria Street in Makers Valley, interviewed as part of the same pilot interviews as I11. Part of MVP's core target market, as an 18- to 25-year-old. | 19/09/2018 |
| I13 | An enabler, originally an implementing partner for the MVP British Council Developing Inclusive Creative Economies (DICE) project, through her organisation working with high school students. Hired as the CEO of the MVP Team in Cycle Six (June | 14/01/2021 |

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| | 2020). | |
| I14 | Manager of the VY Commons coworking/ makers space and resident of the Changemakers Residence in Cycles Four to Six (July 2019 to March 2020). | 09/06/2019 |
| I15 | Nando's employee supporting community-oriented initiatives in the Makers Valley area for Nando's Central Kitchen (head office). Provided significant resources to changemaker projects but did not derive meaning from changemaking and did not describe herself as a 'changemaker'. | 15/04/2020 and 20/04/2020 |
| I16 | Partner changemaker for the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence (of which he was a resident) and founder of the 'edible streets' project and other urban agriculture initiatives. | 24/04/2019 and 20/04/2020 |
| I17 | Resident of Makers Valley with young children in need of adequate housing who moved into the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence when it opened preliminarily in December 2018 (Cycle Two). | 09/06/2019 |
| I18 | Resident of Makers Valley with young children in need of adequate housing that moved into the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence in Cycle Four (April 2019). | 09/06/2019 |
| I19 | A youth resident of Makers Valley area, interviewed as part of the same pilot interviews as I11. Part of MVP's core target market, as an 18- to 25-year-old. | 19/09/2018 |
| I20 | A resident of a Changemakers Residence I had started in Cycle Zero, west of the inner city, whom I interviewed to support my reflections on previous action research cycles and inform planning for the Changemakers Residences in the action research covered in this thesis. | 18/09/2018 |
| I21 | A socially minded creative entrepreneur at the 44 Fourth Changemakers Residence in 2018. | 11/09/2018 |
| I22 | A socially minded creative entrepreneur at the 44 Fourth Changemakers Residence in 2018 and briefly | 12/09/2018 |

| | | |
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| | in 2019. | |
| I23 | A resident of a Changemakers Residence I had started in Cycle Zero, west of the inner city, whom I interviewed to support my reflections on previous action research cycles and inform planning for the Changemakers Residences in the action research covered in this thesis. | 18/09/2018 |
| I24 | A changemaker and builder of social capital in early childhood development. A carer for the small centre set up at the 39 Victoria Changemakers Residence. A partner changemaker for the Changemakers School early childhood development centre we were setting up prior to the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. | 19/05/2020 |
| I25 | Long-term resident of the broader Makers Valley area and aspiring changemaker. A wellness professional who ran street yoga sessions and other activities. | 19/05/2020 |
| I26 | An MVP Team intern (and aspiring changemaker) who was originally sponsored by a government programme to join the team in Cycle Five (December 2019) and was hired directly by the MVP Team in Cycle Seven (January 2021). | 20/05/2020 |
| I27 | Volunteer at the Makers Valley Food Hub in Cycle Six (April to August, 2020) | 20/05/2020 |
| I28 | An experienced enabler working previously for a philanthropy organisation. Joined the MVP Team for the DICE project in Cycle Three (January 2019) and continued pro bono after the project was completed in Cycle Six (March 2020). | 14/05/2021 |
| I29 | A resident of Victoria Street in Makers Valley, whom I interviewed as part of my pilot interviews, to build an understanding of what stakeholders understood 'a good life' to be. A mother and cleaner at an early childhood development centre in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. | 17/09/2018 |

## APPENDIX C: The Cases of Maboneng and eKhaya, Inner City Johannesburg

Two inner city neighbourhoods were of relevance to the risks and opportunities of regeneration present in Makers Valley. The Maboneng Precinct in Jeppestown, less than two kilometres walk west of Makers Valley, was initiated by a single white-owned property developer in 2008.[12] The area was characterised by light industrial buildings and some warehouses, similar to those along the Jukskei River in Makers Valley. The developer converted the first block into apartments, a hotel, restaurant and weekly markets. By 2017, conversions and public space upgrades had spread to over 12 city blocks. The development company was sold to a large holding company in 2018, before declaring insolvency the following year, after which many properties were sold on auction.

Maboneng succeeded in attracting significant individual investors and consumers, and halted physical deterioration of the built environment. It also brought non-profit organisations and low-cost private schools, and over time a significantly increased diversity of opportunities and people were found in the precinct (Gregory, 2016; Leiman, 2014). With relevance to MVP's work, the developer provided space for coworking for some time, and used creative placemaking approaches, though with the primary purpose of maximising profits. However, as with most 'successful' regeneration projects, Maboneng saw a rapid rise in property values, rates and rentals, forcing many businesses and residents out, and raising controversy in the way vulnerable residents and users of the space were treated (Gregory, 2016; Nevin, 2014).

While urban regeneration was also a core framing for the eKhaya Neighbourhood in Hillbrow[13] (Figure 1.2 shows its location), it presents a different model to Maboneng. While funded by large-scale property portfolio

[12] Maboneng means 'place of light' in SeSotho
[13] eKhaya means 'at home' in isiZulu.

owners in the area, who remain the key decision-makers, some of the larger buildings are owned by non-profit Social Housing Institutions. Furthermore, the neighbourhood initiative arose at least partially as an explicit attempt to build wellbeing for existing residents, with lead 'enabler' Josie Adler indicating this as her primary motivation (HDA, 2012). Reports indicate an increased sense of community, better recreational opportunities, different income generation opportunities, more diversity in stakeholders (including wealthier people), better maintenance/ improvement of the built environment/ housing stock, and most frequently mentioned, the area was perceived as safer and cleaner (HDA, 2012; Pooe, 2016). Nevertheless, from the perspective of who benefitted it is noteworthy that there was a documented decline in occupational densities over the period of the initiative, attributed at least in part to its effectiveness; that is, fewer residents were able to enjoy the improvements than were living there previously, likely as a result of a tightening of controls over flat sharing (Gewer & Rubin, 2015).

These cases present typical dynamics of gentrification: as a neighbourhood becomes cleaner, safer and with higher potential for neighbourhood wellbeing, existing residents can often no longer afford to stay there. Thus, the nearby eKhaya and Maboneng experiences informed my wariness of displacement in Makers Valley. In Chapter Five I discuss this in more depth, with reference to Victoria Yards in particular.

## APPENDIX D: Guiding Questions – First Set of Interviews

The first set of interviews were based on the following questions.

A Location, Date, Observations

1. Notes

B Demographic questions

2. How old are you, roughly?
3. Do you stay in the area?
4. Who else is in your household?
5. Who else stays on the same property?
6. How long have you been living in the neighbourhood?
7. How long have you been in the place you stay?
8. Do you consider this 'home', or where is home to you?
9. What did you do for school so far?

C A good life – daily life

10. How does an average day go for you? From when you wake up to when you go to sleep?
11. How do you make a living? How do you get by?
12. Tell a story of recent life that made you feel life was good.
13. Tell a story of recent life that made you feel life is not good.
14. What is a good life to you?
15. Are you living your good life right now?
16. Why/ why not?
17. Pick one main thing that would help you help yourself to make a good life for yourself and those around you/ those you care about. Tell me about this – who/ what/ where? [I.e. what would enable you greater ability to make a good life for yourself and/ or those around you?]

D Purpose

18. What are you striving for in life? What drives you?
19. What makes life meaningful for you? Worth living?

E Household unit, neighbourhood and a good life

20. What about living in your house/ space enables you to live your good life?
21. What doesn't?
22. What make for a good life for you in this neighbourhood (e.g. initiatives/ facilities/ resources/ other)?

23. What would you like to change in the neighbourhood that don't contribute to you living a good life?
24. How could you personally go about making these things better?
25. What activities do you undertake, or resources do you make use of in the neighbourhood?
26. Is there a sense of wellbeing in general in the area? How do you feel other people live in the area – do they have good lives?
27. Would you want to live anywhere else in Johannesburg or further afield? Why?
28. Who forms your community? What 'community' do you feel a part of? What is 'community' to you?
29. Do you know of any Makers Valley initiatives? Of Victoria Yards? What do you think of the development? Has it impacted you in any way?

## APPENDIX E: Guiding Questions – Second Set of Interviews

Combine with first set of questions if interviewing for the first time.

1. What is a good life for you? (quick – revisiting if interviewed before – has it changed since the last interview?)
2. Follow-on question: what do you want in life?
3. How are you getting there – do you have a plan (even if not clear)?
4. How have you gotten this far in life? What/ who has helped you achieve your dreams so far?
5. Who/ what has made it difficult/ stopped you from reaching what you want in life?
6. What aspects of life do you feel comfortable that you know how to do them?
7. What has enabled you thus far in life – what has helped you get where you want to go? Within yourself, and without?
8. In the last two years, what have your goals been – what have you wanted in/ from life, and have these changed at all? If so, how?
9. In the last two years/ the Makers Valley Partnership-related projects, what has been supportive of you defining your goals and then achieving them, i.e. working towards living your own good life? And other people?
10. In the last two years, what Makers Valley Partnership-related projects have been successful in enabling others i.e. enhancing agency?
11. Have you enabled others to live toward their own good life, through Makers Valley Partnership-related projects? What made you do it? What were the impacts, if any?
12. Aside from this, what do you think has worked in Makers Valley neighbourhood over the last two years?
13. And what hasn't? (Be honest!)
14. Are there any examples of action inspiring/ causing further action, and so on (a domino effect)?
15. What do you think of my role in the last two years? What has worked, and what hasn't? What should I do differently going forward? What should I continue with going forward?

16. What do you think of quality daycare and parent support programmes as enabling people to live a good life?
17. What recommendations can you make for Makers Valley projects and otherwise, to enable people to live their good life?

## APPENDIX F: Participation Information Sheet for Formal Interviews




UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

**School of Architecure and Planning**

**Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Telephone: +27 65 901 7793.**

**Fax +27 11 717-7649. E-mail: ssmayson@gmail.com.**

Dear Madam/ Sir

**RE: Participation in action research enabling a wellbeing economy in the Johannesburg Inner City 'Eastern Gateway'**

My name is Simon Sizwe Mayson and I am a PhD researcher from Wits University's School of Architecture and Planning. I am doing action research on enabling a wellbeing economy in the Johannesburg Inner City suburbs of Troyeville, Doornfontein, Bertrams, Lorentzville, Judith's Paarl and surrounds. The research aims to explore what residents and stakeholders see as a 'good life', what is good about life now, and what is not so good. The aim is to use this information to facilitate practical interventions that enable people to live good lives and support others living theirs. However, any projects that result may be small-scale and may not have a direct impact on you.

I invite you to be a part of this research by participating in this interview. You have been selected as a key 'changemaker' in the area to share your experiences. It is an invitation to be part of identifying neighbourhood assets and strengths, and modelling potential solutions to any issues. There is no payment for this participation. The interview can take as long as the time that you have available, and should not be longer than one hour. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview on my phone. You can

decide to stop the interview at any time, or refuse to answer any questions without giving a reason. Participation is voluntary, and there will be no consequences should you decide not to participate. Any information you give will be kept securely and made anonymous and confidential before it is shared with anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation, in my final thesis. This thesis will be available online on the university website. I can make a summary of the research available to you should you want this.

Please contact me or my supervisors at any time if you have questions using the details below.

Sincerely,
Simon Mayson
Email ssmayson@gmail.com
Phone 065 901 7793

**Supervisors:**
Marie Huchzermeyer
Email marie.huchzermeyer@wits.ac.za
Phone 011 717 7688

Sarah Charlton
Email sarah.charlton@wits.ac.za
Phone 011 717 7717

## Appendix G: Consent Form for Formal Interviews




UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

School of Architecure and Planning

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Telephone: +27 65 901 7793.

Fax +27 11 717-7649. E-mail: ssmayson@gmail.com.

# Consent Form

**Enabling a Wellbeing Economy**

**in the Johannesburg Inner City Eastern Gateway**

**Simon Sizwe Mayson**

I …….. agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous YES NO
(please circle)

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes
in his research report YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded YES NO

I agree that the researcher may take photos of me (but not my face) YES NO

I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously by other researchers following this study YES NO

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of participant)

…… (Date)

# Appendix H: Ethics Clearance Certificate

Research Office

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**
R14/49 Mayson

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: H18/06/20** |
| **PROJECT TITLE** | Enabling a wellbeing economy in Johannesburg's Inner City Eastern Gateway |
| **INVESTIGATOR(S)** | Mr S Mayson |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT** | Architecture and Planning/ |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 22 June 2018 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | Approved |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | 20 September 2021 |

**DATE** 21 September 2018 **CHAIRPERSON** J. Knight
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Professor M Huchzermeyer

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

S Mayson
**Signature**

30 / 09 / 2018
**Date**

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES**