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Reimagining the city, rewriting narratives: music, suburban youths, and inner city redevelopment in Johannesburg, circa 2015

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Abstract

This research explores the influence that inner city redevelopment in Johannesburg has had on both its music scenes and the identities of those participating in the music scenes, particularly young participants from Johannesburg's suburbs who did not interact with the city before its redevelopment. Understanding the city's history as well as the current lived and imagined divides between its suburbs and inner city illuminates its fragmented nature and informs the significance of the presence of suburban youths in today's inner city music scenes. Personal and collective narratives gathered from participants of these inner city music scenes provide insight into the city's spatial, social, and musical transitions, adding subjective voices to the city's complex and ever-evolving history. The use of culture-led regeneration (within cultural clusters), as a model of redevelopment, has aided in the success of attracting new audiences to the inner city once eschewed by suburbanites, providing grounds for new experiences and interactions within an increasingly diverse social sphere. Due to this, the music's diversity within these spaces is expanding too. The role of music – and in particular, alternative music – in enticing suburban youths to the inner city requires an understanding of why 'alternative' (or arguably, creative) people are often drawn to urban spaces, and in doing so, often become main contributors to the accomplishments and successes of redevelopment initiatives. Examining social interactions and relationships within the inner city, in comparison to those in suburban Johannesburg, exposes a unique and highly valued manner of communal bonding amongst participants that is often tied to involvement in similar music scenes. The experience of the inner city, the experience of music in the inner city, and the experience of a community of like-minded people within the inner city all combine to create new discourses about Johannesburg, as well as impacting on the identities and experiences of those contributing to these discourses. Transforming city. Transforming music. Transforming people.