

# City Identity for Durban: Port with a Green Heart

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## Abstract

Durban is the busiest port in Africa. Although the harbour is somewhat removed from the consciousness of the residents, it is well-positioned to become a driving force to propel Durban into a Smart City Eco-Port with linkages to the Esplanade that curves around the bay.

The 'Green Heart' title can be anchored by constructing a giant green heart sculpture at the entrance to the harbour (North Pier) that links into the Esplanade. The sculpture will impact the skyline and serve as a prominent symbol for Durban. Apps, QR codes and electronic signage featured in the KulturWalk and 'Heart2Heart' Route guide people into the harbour area.

The theoretical framework builds on place-identity and placemaking that foreground the branding of Durban as Green Heart City and include the residents in taking custody and care of the harbour. Renewable elements of the Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icon include wave power technology and solar film energy.

An accessible Durban Harbour will foster an invigorated identity for the Eco-Port and endear the public with a sense of place attachment. As Durban firms its position on tourist maps, people will identify Durban through branding created by the Green Heart and the spectacular harbour.

## Keywords

Smart City-Port, Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icon, KulturWalk, African fantasy, 'Heart2Heart' Route, Green Economy, SanKofa Book Bridge, city branding, place-identity, placemaking.

## Introduction

The centrality of the port is recognised in Durban's isiZulu name, eThekweni (from itheku, meaning "bay" or "lagoon"). In earlier years, Durban harbour was a maze of activity with restaurants at the harbour entrance, a bathing jetty and a vibrant sailing community. Due to restrictions, such features no longer exist. Consequently, the present-day harbour is somewhat removed from the consciousness of the residents.

The citizen-based Green Heart Movement suggests entrenching the harbour in the consciousness of residents by raising the happiness factor through expanded entrepreneurial opportunities. Such activations underpinned by communal elements include storytelling, board games and comic books that pivot around the harbour and environs.



Figure 1. People's Port shaping into an adventurous place to meet, mix and mingle. Future plans for Durban Harbour will ensure that the port is integrated more fully into the daily life of the City. An exciting mix of entertainment and commerce unfolds as Durban takes its place amongst the great cities of the world. ©Sanabelle Ebrahim.

The Embankment is enhanced through iconic features of palm trees, cobblestone footpaths, yachts, bicycles and ecological abundance woven into a visual tapestry referred to as the Green Heart Boulevard. The refreshed public space will see citizens and tourists strolling along the sun-splashed Embankment sporting green felt hearts and interacting with artists, Deaf poets, accordionistas and penny-whistle players. The socially interactive space follows the curve of the yacht basin and evokes a carnival atmosphere.

The name Green Heart Boulevard echoes a new reference to Durban as Green Heart City. The 'Green Heart' title can be anchored by constructing a Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icon at the entrance to the harbour that links into the Esplanade. The sculpture would be visible from aeroplanes and cruise liners as a prominent symbol for the City-Port of Durban. The eco-lighthouse featuring heart-beat pulses and green flashes would place Durban at the forefront of the Green Economy.



Figure 2. Green Heart City Durban beaded pin-on reflecting traditional patterns. ©Mikhail Peppas.

The Green Thrill “Pumping up the Green Beat” creates awareness around the designer structure and heightens interest in eco-arts and skillscraft such as beaded green hearts and BunnyKat folk craft puppets made by indigenous crafters from the Valley of 1000 Hills.

The surrounds of the Sculpture include an events platform featuring a BunnyKat Playzone and Green Heart City Book & Design Boma where the public can contribute and purchase new and used books. A photographic platform and performance arena at the base of the Sculpture Sky Icon couples with a skillscraft trading and demonstration centre to provide viable economic and tourism opportunities. Talks about renewable electricity are featured as part of the eco-arts platform.

### Place-Identity

The theoretical framework in support of the Green Heart is informed by place-identity theory and placemaking. A rekindled fondness for the harbour will foster a sense of place attachment as the accessibility expands. Place association will imbue citizens with civic pride and encourage active citizenry around the changing eco-scape of Durban Harbour.

The prospect of place-identity is deeply embedded in the aims and vision of the Green Heart Movement and finds

expression across a spread of activations ranging from city branding to cultural tourism and creative thinking that have direct impact in the making of a great city. Place-identity theory emphasises ‘the influence of the physical environment on identity and self-perception’ (Hauge, 2007, p. 44). City features such as a vibrant arts scene, central library, bookstores, museums, parks, bustling streets, and an efficient public transport system evoke a sense of place and attachment.

Julian H. Steward (1955) defined cultural ecology in his book, ‘Theory of Culture Change’ as ‘the study of the processes by which a society adapts to its environment.’ Place-identity and cultural ecology are used in a refreshed form to link City Identity and infrastructure development to the Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icon and related green heart merchandising. At the heart of the initiative is the placemaking potential of the eco-city to inspire citizens to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces.

The visual strategy to enrich City-Port ambience includes adventure trips on the narrow-gauge railway line with art and environmental workshops on the Fun Train, a BayWide BookBarge, and SanKofa Book Bridge spanning the City-Port. The activations transform the Embankment into a bustling locale of choice. City-Port spin-offs enhance hospitality and tourism opportunities in the Greater Durban Area.

A working harbour enveloped in African fantasy is envisaged. The active features of the harbour – giant cranes, storage sheds, shunting yards, trains and carriages – would be culturally-decorated and painted in Zulu beadwork patterns and zebra-stripe graphics. A symbiotic relationship develops that sees citizens and the port in growing unity.

### City Identity

Durban lacks a spatial landscape feature recognisable worldwide where tourists and locals can take photos that firmly identifies the City of Durban as the backdrop. The Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icons are set to address this concern.

The northern Heart Sculpture will be positioned at the legendary Blue Lagoon on the uMngeni River. At the opposite end of the beachfront promenade, the southern Heart Sculpture will tower above the entrance to the harbour.

The iconic Sculptures provide a heightened attraction for visitors and citizens of the City of Durban. The Sculpture Sky Icons echo the new reference to Durban as Green Heart City, in a similar light in which New York is known as the Big Apple and Paris as the City of Love.

The landscape Sculptures establish Green Heart City at the centre of a movement around eco-arts and sustainability. The Green Heart is structured at an angle, with a base fashioned from wood, rock and iron – to withstand any storm. Cut glass defines the sculpture with a shape curving up towards the heart’s cleavage and allows solar energy to power the LED lighting system.

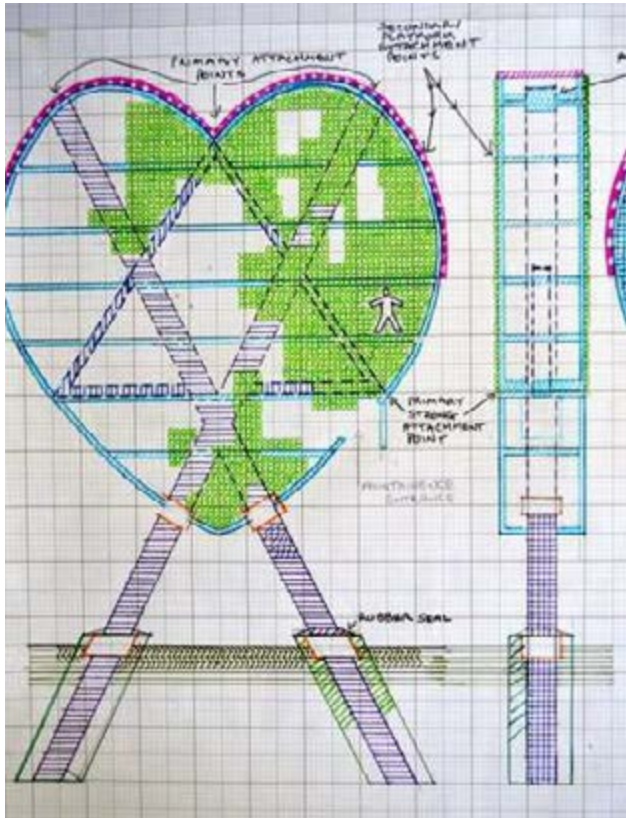


Figure 3. An example of one of the prototype Green Heart electronic art sculpture designs by artist Alex Flett 4DNA (Durban Next Aesthetic). Flett contributes artworks to the Edinburgh Festival and holds exhibitions at Summerhall, Edinburgh. ©Alex Flett.

The theme embodying ‘Ancient meets Hi-tech’ showcases a design that blends African wisdom with symbols such as the Sankofa bird complemented by a weather vane and original sayings sandblasted on to the surface of the sculpture that include ‘Green hearts beat fresher,’ ‘Take a walk on the Greenside,’ and ‘Green with Glory’.

Electronic ribbon on the skin of the Green Heart Structure updates the public on various eventings and opportunities, mainly around the Green Economy and how they can contribute to it. Wave power technology and solar film feed into the bulb/battery unit. Any excess electricity can be fed into the Green Hub power system and also into the local grid.

At midday, an audio element booms out 12 heartbeat pulses and at midnight, 12 flashes illuminate the skies. The LED lights will flash a green glow of joy across the harbour, up the uMngeni River, into the sky and out to sea at 12midnight. A 21 heartbeat salute is incorporated for significant events. A sophisticated computer system that controls the above features is installed within the Sculpture

Sky Icon. The eco-friendly Structure offers surplus energy into the local and national grid.

Linked activations to the Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icons include BunnyKats and beaded green hearts created by the Woza Moya crafters from the Hillcrest Aids Centre. BunnyKats are endearing doll-sized creatures formed using upcycled materials including cultural fabrics such as shweshwe.

The BunnyKat greenwill ambassadors create publicity in the build-up to the Green Heart Sculptures adorning the Durban skyline. A spin-off fashion label, DNA (Deco Nouveau Afrique/Durban Next Aesthetic) integrates Green Hearts in the design of culturally-evoked local fabrics, jewellery and other street-cred materials.

To catalyse dialogue around the Green Heart as a cultural symbol of Durban, beaded green hearts and BunnyKats can be included in delegate bags at conferences and goodie bags at various eventings. The imposing Sculpture will provide an iconic backdrop to exhibitions and conferences in the City linked to the Green Economy and eco-arts.

Proposed activations include:

- Construction of a Floating Entertainment Platform with a seafood restaurant and mini amphitheatre for arts and poetry performances based on ocean fables. The Floating Platform seeks to reignite a passion for the harbour and surrounds.
- ‘Words on Rails’ Reading and Writing Safaris using the narrow-gauge railway line that follows the curve of the Durban Harbour from the Point to the Bluff.

The developmental phase includes:

- A Maquette working model of the Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icon.

The Maquette operational model is based on original Green Heart landscape sculpture specifications, featuring solar film and dye solar cells (South African inventions), LED lights, and an audio broadcast facility. The Maquette will harvest energy from the sun. The prototype will be showcased to schools, corporates and at exhibitions. The proposed height of the Maquette is one metre.

- Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icon

A cutting-edge hi-tech innovation that utilises a variety of natural products, renewable energy, and cost-efficient energy storage. Surplus energy is offered into the local and national grid. The Green Heart public sculpture is a green-field electronic art piece that glows at night and switches on and off automatically depending on lighting conditions.

Much public sculpture remains somewhat remote from the general gaze of the citizen. However, the Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icon is engaging, practical and speaks directly to the minds of people and visitors to Durban.





Figure 4. The BunnyKat cultural icon of Green Heart City Durban and KwaZulu-Natal pops up around the world in the most unexpected places. ©Sanabelle Ebrahim.

The Tower of Text (ToT) experience invites the public to build a Book Tower out of contributed books that will then be gifted to Hospitals such as the Addington Children's Hospital. The future-oriented idea is for each child to receive a book when they leave for home. The ToT is structured as an attempt at the Guinness Book of World Records. A video booth will record visitors' feelings about books.

Attractive prospects of the Green Heart City Invention Framework include:

- The tourism sector (hotels, B&B's, restaurants, tour guides, crafters, souvenir and curio shops) benefits enormously from Green Heart City spin-offs
- Passengers aboard cruise liners are eager to view the Green Heart Sculpture Sky Icon, explore the harbour and visit the Embankment
- Cinema audiences will immediately know the location is Durban as the cameras pan across the cityscape and focus on a Green Heart Sculpture
- The iconic Sculpture puts Durban on the City Identity map.

Green Heart activations raise the profile of Durban on the eco-arts horizon, forefronting the City at the edge of

enviro-economics. The citizens of Durban engage with their Green Heart City, and participate in conversations around beaded green hearts, BunnyKats on the Run, and the BunnyKat motto: 'Read Write Draw... X-plaw!'

### Beacon-to-Beacon Golden Mile Epic

In line with the planned upgrade of the seafront promenade stretching from the Blue Lagoon at the mouth of the uMngeni River across to North pier at the entrance to the harbour, a route connecting the two points will be identified by marker beacons at each end. The beacons indicate the geolocation and details such as the distance and duration of a scenic walk connecting the marker points. The walk is termed the Beacon-to-Beacon Golden Mile Epic and is supported by an app showcasing restaurants and places of interest along the route.

The marker points provide a convenient and picturesque meeting space for friends and visitors and allow for photo opportunities indicating that the image is taken in Green Heart City Durban. Both marker beacons will have an illustration of the opposite beacon that will encourage people to follow the scenic route. Durban's iconic Green Heart will be engraved on each beacon. Halfway between the two beacons will stand the emblematic sculpture of Durban's very own folk hero comic book character, the BunnyKat. A locally designed shuttle bus depicting images and events along the route will run between the two beacons. BunnyKats, postcards and other Durban merchandise will be available at both beacon points.

### KulturWalk

The KulturWalk runs between the Old Fort Warrior's Gate and the Port Natal Maritime Museum. The initiative is supported by the Durban Central Community Tourism Organisation (DCTO). The KulturWalk App charts the sensual landscape of a city. Measurement factors such as happiness, forwardness, evocability, vibrancy, walkability, rhythms, visceral mood, and city image are key elements in shaping and future-fitting a great city.

Digital elements that feature in the central city KulturWalk include apps, QR codes and electronic signage that provide historical and cultural information and outline a route that draws participants into the redesigned Embankment curving around the People's Port. An outdoor screen embedded in the northern Heart at the uMngeni River depicts events taking place at the opposite end of the beachfront promenade and along the 'Heart2Heart' Beacon Route.

### Conclusion

A rekindled fondness for Durban Harbour will foster an identity for a Smart City-Port and endear the public with a sense of place attachment. A Smart People's Port enhances community engagement, tourism, leisure, recreation, career and business opportunities. City-Port activations and infrastructure featuring digital elements will transform the Embankment into a bustling locale of choice.

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## Authors Biographies

Media entrepreneur and film historian **Mikhail Peppas** holds a PhD in Visual Anthropology. He is an Honorary Research Associate in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the Durban University of Technology.

Peppas was awarded the 2017 Simon 'Mabhunu' Sabela Film and Television Award for Lifetime Achievement. Firsts for Africa originated by Peppas include: a film school called the Free Film School and a community television station, Greater Durban Television (GDTV).

He received an Academic & Non-Fiction Authors' Association of South Africa (ANFASA) Grant for the book and documentary project, 'The History of the Moving Image in KwaZulu-Natal.'

Eco-art practitioner **Sanabelle Ebrahim** is based in Green Heart City Durban. She holds a Master of Social Science degree in Cultural and Media Studies. Her interests include Deaf culture, sign language, city identity, placemaking, graphic novels, poetry, board games, shared value entrepreneurship, publishing and sustainable living activations.