



MAPPING WARD 3

By Hancu Louw

Auntie Bessie* sits squarely on the plastic children's chair, its legs digging into the grey soil. She and her sister have been living here most of their lives. "Ons is local hier," [we are locals here] she says as Auntie Jasmine* chuckles, nodding in agreement.

We're sitting in the small, muddy playground of Rainbow Kids Pre-School, the two teachers watching over their noisy flock as the kids rush over and around the once brightly coloured jungle gym.

"Ons ken onse mense, en hoe dinge hier werk, ons kan vir jou al die stories vertel," [we know our people and how things work here; we have all the stories] says Bessie, pointing across the makeshift parking lot and decaying sports field to the low-lying area stretching out in front of us.

The settlements follow the natural geography of the region, modest brick, mud and corrugated iron homes hugging both sides of the two little valleys. Neighbourhoods almost arbitrarily divvied-up by two streams, both contaminated to a gurgling grey sludge – sewage and household runoff that's been left to flow freely, "Sjoe, for many years now!" says Bessie.

Abandoned by the current local government, the estimated 5 000 inhabitants of Ward 3 regard themselves as pawns in an ongoing DA-ANC squabble in a now thoroughly-defunct municipal council and governing structure.

"People are angry, always angry because there are few opportunities here and the quality of life is very bad for some," says Bessie, giving me some background on the social well-being of the communities to which she has dedicated most of her life.

"People have it hard here, most of them live on grant money or rely on piece-jobs to make a living," says Jasmine, affirming the cold, statistical data I pulled off the most recent document of the Makana Municipality Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for the 2014/2015 financial year: 3 314 registered voters and their subsequent families, subject to life in conditions similar to much of the socio-political and economic tensions experienced by marginalised communities in the Eastern Cape; high poverty levels, low employment and an almost complete lack of basic service delivery.

Ward 3 has an unemployment rate of 25.8%.



However, despite the rigidity of ward boundaries and the administration governing how, why and by whom basic services are rendered, the inhabitants don't think in terms of municipal wards here. The administrative boundaries are as arbitrary as the visits from journalists and organs of state.

"Kyk, ek bly in Scotch Farm, daar onder langs die opsigter se huis by die Oval," [Look, I live in Scott's Farm, down there next to the janitor's house by the Oval], Bessie says, pointing to her home about a kilometre away. "Jasmine bly in Ghost Town en meeste van die kinders hier is van die ander areas." [Jasmine lives in Ghost Town and most of the kids at the school come from surrounding areas.]

Most of the inhabitants of Ward 3 and 4 self-identify as culturally coloured, black or "mixed". People here live in "areas" loosely defined by streets and other prominent geographic features; churches, established taverns, schools.

Each area has a distinct character and history; membership is gained through birth, family ties or an arduous process of naturalisation.

Ghost Town, Central, Sun City Squatter Camp, Scott's Farm, Hooggenoeg, Vergenoeg and Polla-Park Squatter Camp.

Seven areas loosely bound by municipal administration, history and geography.

Civic mapping as a journalist – methods

For a period of three months as the first phase of a potential three phase action research project, I have been using civic mapping methods to uncover within the context of a specific hyperlocal area, Ward 3 of the Makana Municipality, "who talks to whom about what?"

This approach draws on Harwood's (2000) typology of civic life which organises civic/community life into five layers: "the 'official' layer of local governmental institutions; the 'quasi-official' layer

of local municipal committees, civic organisations, and NGOs; 'third places' like community halls, places of worship, and taverns/shebeens; 'incidental' encounters on sidewalks, at food vendors' stalls, and in backyards; and the 'private' spaces of people's homes (Harwood 2000 in Haas 2008: 5).

Through these methods, civic mapping allows journalists to identify and cultivate a range of civic actors: official leaders (elected officials, school board members, CEOs); civic leaders (religious leaders, ward committee members); catalysts (people who have wisdom, know-how and historical perspective about issues and places), and connectors (people who move from organisation to organisation, like pollinating bees spreading ideas and social norms).

By exploring these relationships between various members and groups in a community defined according to their position in relation to the layers of civic life, I have been using civic mapping as a research tool in a number of adapted ways, with the aim of improving my journalistic understanding of the people and communities of Ward 3 and surrounds. I elected to employ this approach strategically over time as it seeks to improve how and for whom journalism is produced, as the underlying rationale of civic mapping methods is the cultivation and production of journalism that improves the public's understanding of its own problems and ultimately contributes to the overall health of public life.

Observations – phase one

Seeking to integrate myself and get to know a hyperlocal space has been a challenging process thus far.

After my first three, two-hour-long visits comprising a set of observational walks through the ward I realised the arbitrary nature and influence of administrative structures on the daily lives of the people I chatted to.

Communities are small, bound to streets and blocks. People live



their lives on the street as daily life plays itself out on front-door steps and small, fenced-in yards – weather permitting.

Living as beneficiaries of the state welfare system and expanded development policies and projects, inhabitants share the burden of collective social issues, yet are forced to face these as small insular groups strictly policed by class and culture. “The problem here is that us coloureds don’t have ubuntu like the blacks, so even if we wanted to, communities struggle to lift each other up,” says Jasmine while herding the kids back into the little square classroom after break-time.

There is little sense of unity between people here, resulting in a general lack of initiative with regard to social upliftment projects endogenous to the ward. “Someone will start a soup kitchen for the needy, do it for a couple of weeks and things will go well, then all of a sudden someone else also starts a soup kitchen down the road because they see it brings respect in the neighbourhood, and just as suddenly, the first person will stop because they say the other person stole their thunder,” says Bessie, illustrating the nature of civic activism in the area.

People rely on outside intervention and have been for years now: “Many of our people don’t understand that they need to take responsibility for things like their homes, they think if any little thing goes wrong the council must come help,” says Jasmine as she helps one of the pre-schoolers choose crayons to give colour to a picture of a Disney princess.

This general sense of mistrust and social policing has resulted in high levels of mistrust dominating the relationship between the inhabitants of Ward 3 and the ward councillor. As head of a bifurcated ward committee split along racial and class lines, the councillor has been able to maintain a state of stagnant politics only spurred into action close to election time or when things reach boiling-point over long-standing social issues, such as the allocation of council homes.

As such, it has been quite a challenge attempting to gently pry open the history and context of the politics of the ward and various areas comprising it, hoping to tap into the civic life and consciousness of the hyperlocal area.

Heading into the second phase of my research, positively-burdened by an ever-growing source list and book of potential story ideas centred on civic issues, the first phase of my research comprised a tiresome back and forth between sources and tit-bits of information

As an exercise in mapping a great deal of what the work requires is a continuous process of connect-the-dots between people, places and issues within the context of the highly-fraught civic lives and social identities of the individuals and groups of people who call areas in Ward 3 their home.

To do this kind of journalism requires a great deal of patience and even more, luck, all premised on the notion that the most effective way to get to the realities of civic life in Ward 3 is to walk the streets.

**names have been changed at request of participants*



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