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Beyond the success/failure of travelling urban models: Exploring the politics of time and performance in Cape Town's East City

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Abstract

In this paper, we highlight the importance for policy mobility research to engage with the 'multiple temporalities' of globally prevalent urban policy ideas to understand how these eventually come to shape localities incrementally, and as we show, in sometimes unexpected manners. Through the study of over 10 years of (failed) redevelopment policies in Cape Town's East City, we formulate two distinct contributions to existing urban policy mobility research. Firstly, we show that looking at the micro-politics of policy mobility in particular places, and over time, can help elucidate how conflicts and resistance to globally mobile urban models shape which aspects of a policy solutions are rendered mobile or immobile, present or absent and, finally, what ends up being implemented in the local context through specific projects. Secondly, we expand on new materialist approaches to urban policy mobility, bringing insights from performativity theory, to look at how ideas and models come to be 'enacted' in the real world through various and, perhaps more importantly, uncoordinated means. Our case study shows that policy mobility research should attend to disparate, uncoordinated, more-than-human activities, and how these end up shaping places even in the absence of purposive planning. That way, we show how changing and complex configurations of more than human networks, objects, money, buildings, etc. support the concrete performance of abstract and mobile urban models – in place and over time.

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Introduction

Urban policy mobilities research has explored how popular policy trends and frameworks emerge (e.g. Gonzàles, 2011; Hoyt, 2006; Pow, 2014; Ward, 2006), move to and land in particular places, highlighting how these mutate as they are enacted in distinct locations (Cohen, 2015; Cook, 2008; Didier et al., 2012; Fisher, 2014; McCann and Ward, 2010; Peck, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2010). In tracing the movement of urban policies and their reception, scholars have also emphasised the non-linearity and inherent messiness of 'policy transfers' (Peck, 2011; Temenos and McCann, 2013). More recently, efforts have been made to include policy failure into the analysis, addressing a salient blind spot in previous research. Studies have explored how urban models fail to move (Baker and McCann, 2018; Hebbert and Mackillop, 2013; Stein et al., 2017) or how failed policies are nonetheless put in motion (Lovell, 2019), even if only partially (Chang, 2017). Similarly, attempts to map out local resistance to mobile policies have highlighted the importance of looking at 'policy frontiers' constraining the mobility of policy prescriptions such as harm-reduction drug policy (Longhurst and McCann, 2016) and their incremental enactment through 'everyday political acts' (Temenos, 2017). Taken together, these developments generate novel insights into the conflicting and incremental nature of urban policy-making and the variety of actors – human and non-human – involved in moving, interpreting, contesting, and enacting mobile urban policies. In this article we stress the necessity to move beyond the perceived dualism between the failure to move and the successful arrival of mutating policies, in line with other recent contributions (Baker and McCann, 2018; Colven, 2020; McCann and Ward, 2015). Specifically, we argue that studying both the *historical evolution* of travelling urban models as sets of ideas that land in particular places, and their *performative enactments* through different mediums over time, constitutes a relevant entry point to understanding the continuous and unpredictable process of policy transfer, mutation, failure and rebirth. We highlight the importance for policy mobilities research to engage with the 'multiple temporalities' (Wood, 2015) of particular urban models as they are enacted through human-non-human configurations, including for instance organizations, individual actors, material objects, planning regulations, but also financial flows and real estate projects.

  Our contribution attends to the politics of time and performance to understand how different enactments of mobile urban models shape localities incrementally and in unforeseen ways, over time. This perspective advances current urban policy mobilities research by looking beyond the success/failure dichotomy (Colven, 2020), emphasizing the open-ended and conflicting nature of travelling urban models as ideas that can be appropriated and brought to life by different actors and networks at different points in time – sometimes even after their publicly proclaimed failure. In the next sections, we first explain our theoretical and methodological take on exploring the politics of time and performance in urban policy mobilities research. This requires us to look at the micro-politics that shape the reception, translation and enactment of urban models before and after they arrive in specific places (Cook and Ward, 2012; Robinson, 2015) and to trace how changing configurations of actors, institutions, regulations, objects, money, etc. support their variegated performance. We then deploy this framework to analyse how globally popular models of innovation and

design-led urban growth shaped the socio-spatial transformation of the Eastern part of Cape Town's Central Business District (CBD) (hereafter the East City) since the early 2000s. We trace how these models were locally assembled, promoted, contested, abandoned and resurrected by different actors and through various means over a period of fifteen years. Through this case, we show how attending to the politics of time and performance can help us move beyond seemingly absolute notions of policy success and failure to analyse contemporary urban transformations. We finally discuss the broader implications of our findings in a concluding section.

The politics of time and performance in urban policy mobilities research

Existing research has documented how urban models move across multi-sited and multi-scalar configurations of circulation (Cook and Ward, 2012; McCann, 2008; McFarlane, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2015; Peyroux et al., 2012), unveiling processes of mobility and mutation that characterises the non-linear evolution of contemporary policies (Peck and Theodore, 2010). Research has often focused on 'following the model' as it is put in motion, identifying a plethora of 'transfer agents' that facilitate the rapid movement of urban best practices (McCann and Ward, 2010). For instance, scholars have traced the historical movement of experts across cities, looking at how specific professions and individuals contribute to the circulation of certain urban models. Traditionally, these were engineers, planners and architects (Bunnell and Das, 2010; Cook et al., 2014; Healey and Upton, 2010; Jacobs and Lees, 2013; Larner and Laurie, 2010; McNeill, 2009; Nasr, 2005; Ponzini, 2014; Pow, 2018; Rapoport, 2015; Sklair, 2005; Wood, 2018) but with the more recent advent of entrepreneurial urban governance, management and policy consultants have also joined the flock of travelling urban experts (Prince, 2012; Vogelpohl, 2018). Other important agents of circulation include governments, such as nation states (Béal et al., 2018; Bok and Coe, 2017; Croese, 2018), local governments (Béal and Pinson, 2014; Harrison, 2015; Temenos and McCann, 2012) and city networks (Acuto and Rayner, 2016; Clarke, 2012), but also property developers (Brill, 2018; Brill and Conte, 2019; Morange et al., 2012), academics (Jacobs and Lees, 2013), as well as international donors and philanthropic organizations (Clerc, 2005; McFarlane, 2011; Roy, 2010). Additionally, research has highlighted the importance of material objects for disseminating and anchoring mobile ideas within and across places. For example, Rapoport (2015) shows the impact of visual media on promoting sustainable urbanism while Pow (2014) illustrates how the Singaporean model has been constructed and circulated through the production of "mundane urban artefacts such as scaled architectural models, glossy brochures and high-tech 'policy showrooms'" (Pow, 2014: 298). Others have looked at the role of technologies, for instance Faulconbridge (2015) in his discussion of travelling sustainable building assessment models. This large body of work has shown that though popular urban models move across different cities, the extent to which their local reception prompt concrete urban transformations is determined by the socio-material and political configurations that support their enactment. These include material interventions like buildings and place-making projects as much as discourses enshrined in policy guidelines, planning regulations, and investor briefs (Cook and Ward, 2012). Studying this process of enactment, we argue, inevitably requires policy mobilities research to account for the politics of time and performance.

Beyond fast policies

While local governments around the world are often quick to pay lip service to urban policy fads, this does not always lead to transformative interventions on the ground (Müller, 2015; Weller, 2017). Peck and Theodore (2015) have shown how compressed policy timeframes, standardised policy recipes and the deepened interconnectedness of places around the world generally accelerate the circulation of policies. At the same time, recent urban policy mobilities research has reframed this implied velocity by showing the variegated adoption and evolution of ostensibly identical urban models in different urban contexts (Didier et al., 2013; Morange et al., 2012). Comparative research on transfer agents has shown how the professional biographies of internationally mobile 'experts' can help elucidate their role in embodying, reconfiguring, disseminating and anchoring particular forms of expertise in different locations (Larner and Laurie, 2010; Pow, 2018). Attention to individual biographies brings nuance to the apparently 'fast' movement of policy prescriptions by highlighting the situatedness of experts' work and the importance of their personal career trajectories in asserting their authority in different contexts.

Authors like Söderström (2014) have highlighted the importance of adopting a historical perspective to understand how colonial and later globalised ideas of modernity have shaped urban development trajectories in Ouagadougou and Hanoi. In a paper with Geertman (2013), he also calls for a greater focus on the 'politics of reception', resonating with others who emphasise the importance of considering historic antecedents that facilitate local policy adoption (Harris and Moore, 2013; Healey, 2013). These different interventions invite us to consider the historical terrain that allows, or hinders, fast policy transfers and that shape the mutation of urban models when they land in particular places. They also force us to think beyond the rapid adoption of mobile policies to examine their capacity to spur material and social transformations over time. According to Wood (2015), historiographic methods can "reveal lengthy and protracted policy circulation processes riddled with experimentation and failure" (Wood, 2015: 568). In other words, what might superficially appear as fast and indiscriminate adoption of urban models often depends on the more time-consuming nurturing of a conducive institutional milieu for different interventions to stick. Even when mobile urban models do appear to have direct effects, research has shown they probably landed in a 'favourable' milieu that had been incrementally nurturing similar ideas for some time, thus facilitating their local anchoring (Huxley, 2013; Wood, 2015). Often, 'fast policies' are equated with rampant neoliberalisation and a lack of relevance to the place where they land, allegedly making them more prone to end up as short-lived experiments. By comparison, slower policy developments tend to come across as more deliberative and prone to effect more substantial and long-lasting urban change. While this dual typology might hold true in some cases, it obscures other important factors such as historical antecedents and the role of local politicking in facilitating or obstructing the anchoring of urban policies. This was recently highlighted by Ward regarding the implementation of tax incremental financing in the UK (2018) and Brill and Conte with regards to the selective mobilization of King's Cross as a blueprint for urban regeneration in Johannesburg and Brussels (2018).

These lines of inquiry urge us to pay closer attention to how historic socio-political and material configurations shape the local reception of urban models, even when their adoption seems at first sight relatively fast, and to analyse the open-endedness of this reception process (Colven, 2020). Contributing to this literature, we argue that accounting for the politics of time and performance in studying travelling urban models brings into view the multiple failures, partial successes and unexpected transformations that occur when urban models

progressively or repeatedly try to take root. In turn, this also allows us to better account for the messy dynamics of resistance, negotiation, unintended consequences and unforeseen circumstances that shape how urban models evolve, mutate and ultimately whether they have a socio-material impact on their 'arrival city' – or not.

Incremental model adoption, micro-politics and performance

The geographical movement of urban policies is not only historically embedded because models in motion arrive in places that have their own histories, but also in the sense that once it arrives, a model is often only selectively, incrementally, and non-linearly enacted over time. This is important to note as a better understanding of the politics of time can help us analyse how conflicts between actors and changing coalitions shape how models are adapted and implemented, and how they can be abandoned or reanimated. In turn, looking at the performativity of particular material and discursive formations supporting the local reception of urban models – "the practice of best practice" as it has been called by Bulkeley (2006) – can help provide thick description of how urban models shape places over time. Empirically, this proposition invites us to trace the anchoring of urban models through analysing the changing material, discursive and social configurations that enhance or hinder their enactment (McCann, 2011) at different points in time.

This attention to the performativity of urban models infers looking at the role of documents, plans and technologies, not only as vessels that facilitate learning or movement, but as material generators of coalitions that can bring new publics into being and anchor mobile policies in particular places (e.g. Glass, 2018; Rapoport, 2015; Riles, 2006; Watson, 2014). In science and technology studies, this concept is mobilised to explore the relationship between scientific knowledge, scientific tools and the real world. An influential body of work has looked at the performativity of economic ideas and the (re)production of markets, showing how abstract economic concepts are enacted by individuals themselves, as much as by the law, or particular objects (e.g. Callon, 2007, 2009, 2010; Callon and Muniesa, 2005; MacKenzie, 2006, 2008; MacKenzie et al., 2007; Mitchell, 2002, 2007, 2009). Read in this way, abstract urban models are rendered concrete and mobile through bodies, spatial configurations, material inscriptions, norms and institutions, both explicitly and implicitly (Glass and Rose-Redwood, 2014; Fijalkow, 2018; McCann, 2011; Robin, 2018). Larner and Le Heron (2002) have discussed how a situated understanding of calculative devices and benchmarking practices can help us elucidate how global imaginaries are reconfigured in distinct ways across locations, and how global subjectivities emerge from engaging with material inscriptions such as indicators and rankings (see also Robin and Acuto, 2018). This attention to the material, discursive and symbolic power of technologies of comparison – in this case benchmarking – is insightful for our purpose. Indeed, it highlights how the micro-politics of engaging with particular tools shape the performance of abstract models. This resonates with Healey's (2013, 1515) prompt that policy mobilities research should attend to 'micro-practices', to unveil the changing configurations of actors-things that allow or prevent policy models to move and be enacted in certain locations. McCann and Ward (2015) have also stressed the need to pay attention to the minor 'p' politics in policy mobilities research, further echoed by Peck and Theodore (2015, xxvi), who invite research to connect

> *"the (rarely pristine) places of policy invention not only with spaces of circulation and centers of translation but also with the prosaic nether worlds of policy implementation, in all their diversity [...] as the sphere in which policies and programs 'become real'."*

The array of actors and things enrolled in articulating a model in place and over time includes spatial plans, financial models, marketing brochures, investment strategies, the creation of new governing bodies, implementation agents etc., providing a diverse set of empirical inroads to studying the place-specific performance of urban models. Hence, a focus on performativity has a lot to offer to policy mobilities research for it allows us to look at how different material, human and social components are brought together to facilitate the real-world enactment of abstract urban models (see also McCann, 2011).
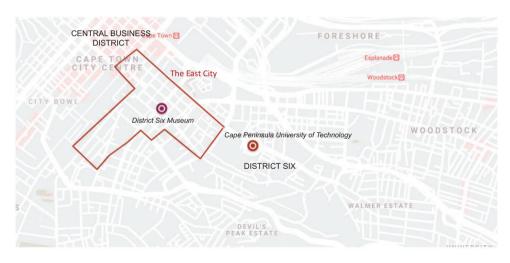
In the next sections, we scrutinize fifteen years of successive attempts to turn Cape Town's so-called East City into a science park, design precinct and creative district. We focus on the performativity of traveling models and the politics of time to further unpack the micro-politics that shape their concrete, non-linear enactment.

Methods

Our analysis focuses on the political evolution and spatial transformation of the Eastern part of Cape Town's CBD into a creative-cum-design precinct, from the early 2000s to 2018. We explore how the area's transformation was shaped by the messy mutation and selective enactment of different yet discursively related urban models promoting innovation-led regeneration. Methodologically, this requires a thick description of seemingly technical policy procedures, to explore the many human, material, including financial and legal mediums, through which urban models move, land in and affect specific places, including outside of formal policy-making processes. Our data pool derives from our individual PhD researches, which we conducted between October 2010 and April 2014 (Nkula-Wenz) and April 2017 and December 2018 (Robin). Our analysis is based on 60 interviews with key stakeholders – from the business, policy, academic, cultural and community sectors – involved in the process of regenerating the so called 'East City' since the early 2000s. In addition, Nkula-Wenz participated in and analysed a total of 25 events between October 2010 and November 2013 – a high-time in efforts to brand the area as 'The Fringe – Design and Innovation District'. Our analysis also draws on the review of key strategic policy documents, reports and spatial plans, produced by various entities including consultants, municipal and provincial governments, and the public-private Cape Town Partnership. Finally, we reviewed news coverage for the various iteration of this creative/design neighbourhood project since its inception up until December 2018 and considered some of our respondents' personal archives. Our analysis of interviews, documents, news coverage and personal archives aimed to a) trace how different concepts (science park, design precinct, creative hub) came to be adopted and adapted b) understand which actors proactively promoted those and through what kinds of mediums, c) analyse the successive, partial and sometimes failed enactment of these concepts and d) explore how different actors perceived the impact (success/failure) of different models that had been put forward over the years. This methodological approach allowed us to trace how urban models landed, mutated and transformed Cape Town's East.

Cape Town's 'East City' – A 'forgotten' or 'historic' precinct?

South African cities, particularly Cape Town and Johannesburg, have already featured prominently urban policy mobilities research (Brill and Conte, 2019; Wood, 2014, 2015, 2019b). In particular, research has looked at how travelling urban models are enacted through real estate investments (Ballard and Harrison, 2019; Brill, 2018), and international events (Nkula-Wenz, 2019; Wood, 2019a). Our analysis expands this body of work,

Map 1. The East City.
Source: Author.

exploring the various attempts to turn Cape Town's East City into a hotspot for designers and creative entrepreneurs. The Eastern part of Cape Town's CBD (Map 1) had long been regarded as" lagging" and "under-developed" by major stakeholders of the Cape Town Partnership (hereafter the Partnership), a once powerful public-private partnership organisation established in 1999[1] to oversee the creation and management of the Cape Town City Improvement District (CCID) (Boraine, 2009). While the Partnership and its investors primarily saw the East City as a run-down area, marred by scrap collectors, illicit liquor trading and C-grade buildings (Boraine, 2009: 25), for others, most notably the local District Six Museum, the area was part and parcel of commemorating Cape Town's history of forced removals. In 1966 District Six, a diverse and vibrant working-class neighbourhood (Rive, 1986), was declared a 'whites-only' area by the apartheid government. Throughout the late 1960s over 60,000 people were forcibly removed from their houses, their businesses and community facilities destroyed. Since the end of the apartheid in 1994, a land restitution process has been under way to facilitate the return of forcibly removed families across South Africa. Yet, this process has been particularly slow in the case of District Six, due to various institutional, political and administrative blockages (Beyers, 2007a, 2007b). It is against this deeply contentious historical and political backdrop that plans were developed in the early 2000s to establish a new design and innovation precinct in the East City. The area earmarked for redevelopment effectively overlapped with an important historical part of the former District Six area (Map 1).

The Partnership, together with the City of Cape Town, the Western Cape Provincial Government (hereafter Province) and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (hereafter CPUT) sought to "bring this historically and culturally rich area on a par with development activity in the rest of the Central City" (Cape Town Partnership, 2009: 66). As we show, this broad ambition took very different forms over the years, bringing together different coalitions and types of interventions. In total, we distinguish five phases of the East City development from the early 2000s until 2018, tracing the original idea of a science park, its progressive mutation into a design-led regeneration initiative all the way to its eventual collapse and selective re-appropriation by different sets of actors, particularly real estate investors, local businesses and the media. Table 1 offers a summary of these five phases,

Table 1. Five phases of urban model mutation and enactment in the East City.

Phase 1 (2003–2008)	Phase 2 (2008–2010)	Phase 3 (2011–2013)	Phase 4 (2011–2013)	Phase 5 (2014–)
Landing of competing models in the East City	***Model mutation*** into consensual 'design precinct'	***Local anchoring*** through 'The Fringe – Design and Innovation District' project	***Official Failure*** of 'The Fringe'	***Organic emergence*** of a creative district
Micro-politics: silent competition between a science park model (promoted by the Western Cape Provincial Government) and a creative/cultural district approach (promoted by the Cape Town Partnership).	*Micro-politics:* coalition-building driven by the Cape Town Partnership and including the Western Cape Government, City of Cape Town, Cape Town Peninsula University of Technology & other area-based stakeholders	*Micro-politics:* attempts to broaden local buy-in and enroll property sector through hard-branding and marketing; attempts to unlock further project funding from the provincial government	*Micro-politics:* lack of buy-in from the property sector, public opposition from District Six Museum, municipal and provincial governments withdraw from the project	*Micro-politics:* individual property investments and upgrades; media buzz around the East City as new real estate hotspot
Socio-material enactment: creative industries mapping study of the East City.	*Socio-material enactment:* Proclamation of the 'East City Design Initiative' as key stakeholder forum; provincial and municipal funding invested into scoping research	*Socio-material enactment:* 'Charette'; the Fringe Urban Design Framework; Business Feasibility and Property Studies; Fringe website and social media presence, demarcation of the area on maps	Project collapse and official 'de-branding'.	*Socio-material enactment:* location of creative entrepreneurs and small companies; influx of property investment; wave of new high-end residential and 'trendy' gastronomy products (new coffee-shops, bars etc.).
East City made 'model ready'	*Discursive and symbolic transformation of the East City*		*Physical transformation of the East City*	

Global forms: 22@Barcelona Creative City Cluster theory

Local policy window: Designation of Cape Town as World Design Capital 2014

showing how distinct yet related urban models landed, competed, mutated, and were selectively enacted over time. It also highlights which actors and mediums were mobilised in these different phases. In the next section, we draw on interviews and documents analysis to explore this evolution and show that looking at what appears to be a rather short temporal window – a mere fifteen years – reveals how mobile urban models are interpreted, reconfigured, selectively appropriated, contested and stitched together by distinct socio-material configurations, leading to the progressive and incremental transformation of a place.

Five phases of urban transformations: From science park to property hotspot

Phase 1: The genesis – Making the East City 'model ready' (2003–2008)

Soon after its creation, in the year 2003–2005, the Partnership started to expand its role in the regeneration of Cape Town's CBD, deliberately "shifting beyond the clean and safe urban management narrative and to start looking at the redevelopment of the precinct" (Interview Partnership 1). Responding to wide-spread criticism that its urban management approach had aided the reproduction of racially exclusionary apartheid logics in the CBD, merely 'revitalizing' the space for the white and wealthy (Miraftab, 2007), the organisation sought to mitigate this critique by strengthening its focus on social development and cultural promotion. The organisation quickly identified the potential of the CBD's eastern edge as a favourable location for its new ambition, as highlighted by a former employee

> "In 2004 – we held an East City Development conference. [...] The East City then was lagging behind, with no investment from the public or the private sector. And so we deliberately started focusing on the East City." (Interview Partnership 1)

From then onwards, the Partnership started to explore what regeneration in the area could look like. At the time, global urban policy debates were animated by the popular creative city notion, which promised to generate positive place-making and local economic growth by attracting and spatially clustering an ever so elusive 'creative class' (Florida, 2002). Resonating with this global trend, in 2006 the Partnership launched its Creative Cape Town program – a networking platform "focused on communicating, supporting and facilitating the development of the creative and knowledge economy" (Boraine, 2009: 10). At the same time, the Partnership also "started realising that the creative industry was clustering to the central city: a lot of traditional businesses had moved out. But creative industries were replacing them" (Interview Partnership 1).

Coincidentally, Florida's creative city ideas drew squarely on Michael Porter's cluster theory. The American economist's concept of stimulating economic growth through co-location had already become "a big fashion" amongst Cape Town's local and provincial policymakers (Interview provincial government manager 1), not least due to a country-wide series of roadshows by the Department of Trade and Industry in the early 2000s. Conceptual spin-offs of the cluster theory, such as the 'triple helix model' or 'science park' emphasising government, industry and university collaborations to spur innovation-led urban development had already been actively embraced by the Western Cape Province. As the same provincial government manager divulged:

> "[...] we believe in the cluster approach - this actually is a geographic thing, it's like Silicon Valley. It allows for geographic clustering of the design industries, to try and provide support

both in hard infrastructure and soft infrastructure for the nurturing of the industry and the intersections that exist within."

The presence of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in District Six further marked the area as a favourable location for a science park (Map 1). At the same time, to further substantiate their focus on the creative economy as a driver of growth and innovation, Creative Cape Town initiated a cultural and creative industries mapping exercise, which confirmed that a number of small and micro cultural and creative enterprises were already clustered in the East City (Creative Cape Town, 2009). According to the Partnership's former CEO this "GIS-enhanced database enabled the Partnership to build a case for a creative sector support strategy" (Interview Partnership 1). The mapping study acted as a key device for linking the Partnership's emerging creative city ideas to existing local economic development thinking and to justify development plans. From a scholarly perspective, this affirms three points. Firstly, the role of 'learning events' such as road shows, study tours and fairs in circulating urban models (e.g. Guironnet, 2019; Wood, 2014), the importance of inscriptions and enumeration in shaping their spatial representation (Larner and Le Heron, 2002; Patel et al., 2012; Rapoport, 2015; Riles, 2006), and finally the polysemic nature of travelling urban models that facilitates their local adoption (McArthur and Robin, 2019).

The identification of the East City as a site for regeneration by the Partnership and the Province in the early-mid 2000s meant that it became 'model ready'. At the same time, which model and whose vision would prevail remained uncertain. Whilst innovation-led growth appeared to be at the centre of both the Partnership's and the Province's visions, how both entities defined innovation differed. Here, the professional biographies of transfer agents also played a role (see also Larner and Laurie, 2010; Pow, 2018). After all, Zayd Minty, Creative Cape Town's first director who would soon become the project manager for the Fringe Design and Innovation District, had already curated several notable post-apartheid public art interventions in the former District Six/East City area in the late 1990s and, from his position as a well-known cultural policy expert, had repeatedly made the case for arts and culture as key drivers of inclusive urban development (Minty, 2006, 2008). While Creative Cape Town under his leadership supported a broader focus on the local cultural and creative sector, the Province's approach focused more explicitly on university-industry-government collaboration for innovation in the ICTs sector (CHEC, 2010).[2] As a result, for several years two models – the science park/triple helix and the cultural precinct – were in "silent competition" (Interview Partnership 3). In the late 2000s, these two visions found common ground in the notion of a 'design precinct', enacted in a series of strategy documents.

Phase 2: Enacting urban models – from the 'East City Design Initiative' to 'The Fringe' (2008–2010)

From 2008 onwards, the discourse around innovation-led growth in the East City was progressively reoriented towards the creation of a 'design precinct.' This 'reconciliation' of two different visions occurred through the *East City Design Initiative* (ECDI), a stakeholder forum convened by the Partnership and comprising the City of Cape Town, the Western Cape Provincial Government and CPUT, as well as "key role players" from the higher education and design sectors (ECDI, 2010: 5).[3] The ECDI acted as an institutional device bringing together different actors – public and private – and material and symbolic resources to produce a joint vision that could be performed in the East City and that would

productively merge and retrofit the science park and cultural precinct models. During the ECDI Symposium organised in 2010,[4] the local salience of the science park model was heavily debated. An interviewee involved in the process criticized that the discussions at that time were very much drawing on science park ideas from elsewhere, particularly "to copy the Barcelona Science Park model" (Interview Local Business Owner 1) with little considerations of how this would address specific post-apartheid realities such as high structural unemployment and socio-spatial segregation. The 22@Barcelona innovation district model has already been the focus of previous policy mobilities studies (Gonzáles, 2011) and the final ECDI report abounds with references to how 22@Barcelona was successfully leveraged to improve the urban fabric of the city, notably through its focus on design. In the report, the 'Barcelona model' is used to advocate for a transition from traditional science parks – which had at best recorded mixed results in South Africa (Chan et al., 2010) – to a design-led approach that was framed as more responsive to the local context of the East City (ECDI, 2010: 16). This illustrates how the 'Barcelona model' was mobilized as a bridging device, a "technology of performance" (Bulkeley, 2006) that allowed the Province as key financial backer of the process to hold on to its science park plans while giving the Partnership some leeway to insert their focus on cultural and creative industries through the concept of a 'design precinct'. Here the Barcelona model played a key role in enrolling actors with divergent interests in the transformation of the East City. This event also highlights how written documents can enact the multiple comparative imaginations of the individuals involved in their making, as already observed by Cook and Ward (2012) in their analysis of Cleveland's waterfront redevelopment plans.

The analysis of the ECDI reveals two fundamental aspects concerning the micro-politics and materiality of urban model mutation and adoption. On the one hand, using broad and polysemous signifiers such as 'design' can prove instrumental in bringing and holding together heterogeneous coalitions of actors with different visions (see Lieto, 2015, McArthur and Robin, 2019). In this case, it served to rally together science park-focused actors as well as proponents of cultural and creative-led regeneration behind a collective project (see summary in Table 1). Documents play a performative role in materially inscribing shared visions and goals and in formalising coalitions that can *enact* travelling urban models, through concrete spatial interventions, aligning organizations, places and resources (Cook and Ward, 2012). On the other hand, while the ECDI's initial impetus was to forge broad-based coalitions, when it came to proposing implementation strategies, conflicts around definitions and strategic directions nonetheless arose. Thus, in order to move the ECDI from a conceptual idea to a formal, physical shape the Partnership needed to enrol actors with money – local and provincial governments, as well as property owners – into the project. A prime opportunity for this presented itself in 2009, when the Partnership secured the mandate from the City of Cape Town to drive Cape Town's bid for becoming Africa's first 'World Design Capital' in 2014 (Author, 2014, 2018). Presented in the final bid book as the socio-spatial anchor of Cape Town's 'cutting-edge' design and innovation activities, this was a catalytic moment for the transformation of the East City. Not only did the area feature prominently in photos, with renders of its envisioned streetscapes and in testimonials by creative practitioners but it also received a new branding: "The Fringe – Cape Town's Design and Innovation District" (City of Cape Town, 2011).

Phase 3: Local anchorage – Building the brand, performing the vision (2011–2013)

Five years after the East City was first earmarked as a space for innovation-led regeneration, the promulgation of a commonly acceptable model in the form of a design precinct and the

opening of a political window of opportunity through the World Design Capital bid finally unlocked a first round of substantial financial resources. The Partnership swiftly channelled these into a range of consultancy products, which were deemed crucial for enrolling the local property sector and materializing 'the Fringe'. From 2010 to 2013, a small project team within the Partnership together with a group of local consultants produced a series of technical documents that would provide evidence of the impact of 'The Fringe' and testify of its feasibility (e.g. economic impact assessment & business case, social impact assessment, innovation support strategy, urban design and landscaping framework, property reports, transport study). Taken together, these material-discursive devices created an important performative moment to affirm political buy-in and animate public and private investments in the area. In other words, it was a key moment to land the abstract model of a 'design district' through a fully-fledged *spatial* strategy for the East City, one that could be collectively materialised by public authorities, creative businesses, property owners and investors, eventually effecting concrete spatial transformations. Explaining the rationale for renaming the area and building a new 'brand identity', the Partnership noted that "the Fringe brand was born as a way to talk about and market this particular area in order to unlock its economic potential as a design hub" (Cape Town Partnership, 2013). The team was led by Zayd Minty and a newly appointed project manager, a *"property guy"* (Interview Local Business Owner 1). Their mission was "to convince the Province this project should go ahead, showing its value for the city" and to "engage with businesses, creatives and of course the property sector" (Interview Partnership 3). In other words, they were tasked to act as transfer agents whose embodied knowledge provided legitimacy and promised to ensure its context-relevance (Larner and Laurie, 2010).

As the Fringe's primary objective was to finally bed down the polysemous ideas developed by the ECDI in a series of concrete spatial interventions, the Partnership organized a so-called 'Charrette' to "develop [...] thinking around the future urban design work, architectural interventions and other urban changes into distinct elements and tangible projects" (Cape Town Partnership, 2011). In mid-February 2011, over 40 participants from different municipal and provincial departments, academics as well as planning and urban design professionals came together at the Cape Town City Hall to work through a series of interventions that could bring the idea of a design precinct to life. This included strategic frameworks, financing plans, cultural events, networking and partnership building as well as physical interventions, all devised to support the material and social enactment of the design precinct model in the East City (see Table 2). Taken together, these different interventions

Table 2. Mediums supporting the socio-material enactment of the design precinct model in the East City.

Intervention type	Actions
Strategic frameworks	Contextual (spatial) development framework; Business plan and operational model for the Fringe; develop heritage codes and guidelines; incubator business plan
Financing plans	Creation of a property fund
Cultural events	Fringe festival
Networking and partnership building	Tenants/brokers forum; blogging and organisation of meets and greets; District Six interface creation to engage with District Six community; partnership with the Cape Town Peninsula University of Technology;
Physical interventions	Shared office facilities/incubator; streets greening, parking and lighting; fibre optic access; Harrington square redevelopment; Longmarket redevelopment and pedestrianisation; urban branding rollout throughout the area; street art

Source: Charette report.

followed a few key goals central to performing the vision through material transformations: to attract creative businesses and more tourists to the area, to incentivise local property owners to adapt their buildings and tenancy strategies to the creative sector (e.g. creation of incubators and co-working spaces) and to 'improve' the character of the public realm, notably through cultural events, pedestrianisation and greening.

A Charette report was produced, presenting the different mechanisms by which 'the Fringe' could come to life. In addition to the Charette report and commissioning of various consultants' reports, the Partnership also started to use online media platforms to publicly demarcate and promote 'the Fringe', with reference to other travelling urban models from across the globe:

> "From boutique bakeries and furniture design galleries, to independent bookshops and trendy nightclubs, the East City is rapidly turning into the creative hub of Cape Town. It's in no small part due to the efforts of the Cape Town Partnership, which has focused their efforts on rebranding this corner of Cape Town as 'The Fringe – Cape Town's Design and Innovation District'. This ambitious project, which is key to Cape Town's bid to be named World Design Capital for 2014, aims to create an 'urban science park' based on projects in Barcelona, Toronto and London. If all goes according to plan, 'The Fringe' will position the buffer zone between the CBD and old District Six as a hub for design, media and tech start-up companies" (Boraine, 19 June 2011, 'Look East for Innovation', blog post)

Overall, this phase illustrates how the performance of the design precinct model was specifically conditioned by its aim to enrol a wider range of actors – beyond local policy makers and professional consultants - including local businesses, 'creative entrepreneurs' and property investors (see Table 1). During this time it became clear that the vast range of interventions recommended in the different consultancy studies could not be funded with the limited financial resources committed by local governments. Hence, the Partnership would have to rely on the property sector's financial resources to turn 'the Fringe' from an elaborate concept into material reality. In turn, to garner more private sector interest and investment, the Partnership decided to brand the area and engage in a range of place marketing efforts, for instance setting up a quarterly market called 'Fringe Handmade' to draw visitors into the area.

However, some organisations located in the newly proclaimed 'Fringe' reacted initially sceptical and eventually openly oppositional to the project, not least due to the language with which it was marketed and promoted in the local media. The most vocal opposition came from the District Six Museum and its membership base of former residents. Their concerns were threefold. Firstly, they strongly criticised the re-naming of the area, which was perceived as offensive to people that had been pushed 'to the fringes' of Cape Town by the hand of apartheid's forced removals. Secondly, they also took issue with the new geographical imagination promulgated through the project, with official press statements regularly describing the area as situated *between* the CBD and the former District Six, rather than acknowledging that it had historically been an integral part of the latter (see Map 1). Thirdly, the Museum objected to the broader promotional language used around the Fringe, which repeatedly suggested that the area had been historically deprived of any creative energy or innovative capacity, criticizing this view as ahistorical considering the rich cultural and creative legacy of District Six.

Phase 4: 'De-branding' and collapse (2013)

In May 2013, the District Six Museum organised an public panel discussion to under the headline *District Six on the Fringe: The absence of memory in design-led urban regeneration.* The event openly criticised the way in which the design precinct was framed as a primarily property-led initiative, drawing on best practices from global cities "as if nothing was happening, as if there was no design and it was just an empty space" (interview District Six Museum). As the director of the District Six museum further contended during the panel

> "[...] the notion of the Fringe is a lovely one, it can be edgy, it can be quite trendy, it can be stimulating, and it can be cutting edge [...] when one becomes too established and comfortable with the status quo. But in other contexts, [...] it signals something that is very exclusive, something that is really a battle against invisibility. So when the District Six community hears about the notion of the Fringe and the area that is at the heart of their lives, it's been at the heart of the struggle, when they are asked to comment on an area called the Fringe, of course there's lots of anxiety because all of their lives and their formation has been a lifelong battle against being relegated to the fringe. [...] Our challenge is to create a city from the ruins of apartheid that embraces all its citizens and that does that in respectful and dignified ways. This requires patience and is much more than a marketing and a public relations exercise." (Event transcript 29.03.2013)

Following this widely publicised and substantial backlash from one of the most influential custodians of Cape Town's public memory, local and provincial governments abruptly moved to reconsider their respective financial commitments to the project. After all, they were particularly averse to bad press of this kind in the run up to Cape Town's year in the global spotlight as World Design Capital 2014, with its key messaging evolving around design as a tool for building inclusive – not exclusive – cities (Nkula-Wenz, 2019). Thus, in December 2013 both decided that they would not allocate the Partnership with any further public funding for the Fringe. In light of this rapidly waning support – both for the project and, as it would turn out, for the Partnership as a whole – Zayd Minty, the Fringe's agile and well-connected project manager, also threw in the towel, thus withdrawing his 'embodied knowledge' (Larner and Laurie, 2010). Finally, local property owners' reluctance to buy into the project and mobilize their investment capacity was also reinforced. As one argued:

> "With this kind of initiative, many people thought 'let's wait and see what happens'. People were not in a rush to sell or redevelop. They thought that if the City or the Province were to do something in the area, then the property prices would rise anyways, so why rushing into selling or investing?" (Interview Local Property Owner 1)

The Fringe's then project manager, who had deep connections with the property sector, confirmed this analysis, highlighting the inertia of local property actors at the time:

> "The thing was, you had many local property owners in the area who had owned these buildings for a long time and they could sit on their assets wait for the values to go up. That's what anyone would do." (Interview Partnership 3)

In other words, instead of invigorating the (local) property sector, the initiative encouraged a 'wait and see' attitude, with expectations that initial public funding would bring

improvements, increase property values and stimulate investment in the long run. In turn, without sufficient financial resources, managerial capacities and commitment from private capital, the idea of 'the Fringe' as 'Cape Town's First Design and Innovation Precinct' was effectively immobilized.

Finding its reputation as Cape Town's 'good urbanists' besieged, the Partnership soon reneged on the project. In December 2013, in a piece published on its website the Partnership posed the rhetorical question *Where to for the Fringe?*, euphemistically noting that over the past months the project had undergone a phase of deep "reflection, re-evaluation and re-prioritisation" (Cape Town Partnership, 2013). The article further acknowledged that "the aggressive branding and promotion of a 'future vision' for the area, and the defining of a loose grouping of organisations and micro-enterprises as a 'district'" had been problematic, adding ruefully that "meaningful participation and engagement take time and cannot be rushed; and that history and memory provide the foundation for future visions" (Cape Town Partnership, 2013).

In sum, while the heavy public critique spearheaded by the District Six Museum was not the only factor that led to the dissolution of the Fringe, it nonetheless had dealt a fatal blow to its brand value, ultimately leading the CEO of the Partnership to publicly announce a full 'de-branding'. Up to this point, the story of 'the Fringe' might look like a classic story of how mobile urban models fail to materialise. The Fringe presented a concerted public-private partnership effort to fold international science park and cultural district models into the development of a local design and innovation precinct in the East City. But while best practice narratives and models were extensively mobilized, private capital investments would not (yet) follow suit. Coupled with civic backlash and shifting political priorities, this precipitated the end of the Partnership's urban redevelopment initiative. In turn, many observers promptly concluded on the project's abject failure. However, interrogated about more recent 'organic developments' in the area, the District Six Museum Director also noted that

> "if you walk around the area, the Fringe is happening anyways. Small businesses, people who fit the brand are actually locating here. It feels to me . . . a Fringe by no name!" (interview District Six Museum).

Thus, the latest developments in Cape Town's East City reiterates the importance for policy mobilities research to look beyond official project timeframes and policy moments (as already observed for instance by Colven, 2020). Rather, considering the politics of time more broadly and attending to seemingly disjointed events and actions can help us understand how failed urban modelling interventions can still be enacted and performed in unexpected ways beyond coordinated public place-making efforts.

Phase 5: Organic rebirth – When the money flows anyway (2014–2018)

Between 2014 and 2018, the Partnership slowly disappeared from the local political scene, and was ultimately dissolved in 2017.[5] At the same time, the 'design and innovation district' vision for the East City continued to be enacted, bar any overarching programmatic direction but – as we show – still performed through various socio-material arrangements. Following what had been advocated for by the Partnership, local property owners gradually adapted their tenancy strategy to target the creative industries, for instance through setting up co-working spaces, developing more street interfaces etc. They also worked with local community organizations and the Central City Improvement District (CCID) to make the

area 'safer and cleaner', further contributing to attracting creative entrepreneurs and small businesses to the East City, where rental prices were still more affordable compared to the rest of the CBD. Increasing in number and frequency from 2016 onwards, local media, blogs and real estate news outlets promoted the East City as a new hotspot for investments. For example, *City Views* a free news outlet published by the CCID, framed the East City as "the precinct of possibilities" in its cover story (Winter 2018 Edition: 4). This sentiment was echoed by another influential property news outlet, which fathomed that *"with R1.6 billion worth of construction under way or planned over the next few years, the East City precinct will undergo a dramatic transformation."* [6] The announcement of the Publicis Groupe Africa – an advertising and PR consortium with 500 employees and 14 agencies – to relocate their offices to the East City in August 2018 shows how the area continued to evolve into a 'creative hub', however with the main driver being property investments rather than concerted branding or official place-making efforts. At the same time, the narrative used by a representative of Publicis Groupe Africa to explain the firm's decision to set up shop in the East City shows how the former Fringe narrative still reverberated, albeit subliminally:

> *"For many years, the East City Precinct has been regarded as a less desirable fringe of Cape Town's CBD, but in recent months this has seen a massive shift with upgrades to offices, retail, restaurants and residential spaces. We are proud to be part of a movement which is breathing new life into this diverse area."* [7]

Paying attention to these organic material changes (through property investments, business location strategies, changes in building tenancy strategy) forces us to look beyond the success/failure dichotomy of mobile urban models to understand their contingent, non-linear and time-sensitive enactment in the real world. The Fringe initiative, although failed as a Partnership-led government-sanctioned project, still left a legacy in the form of disparate discursive and material anchoring points, that allowed property owners and investors to strategically latch and capitalize on narratives of design and creativity. For example, while the branding itself was contested, the project nonetheless initiated the development of a somewhat intangible yet powerful neighbourhood image that drew in new businesses and investors enthralled by the promise of a burgeoning 'creative hub'. Ultimately, our exploration of the performative micro-politics in Cape Town's first 'design district' highlights both the historical contingency of localizing global urban models, as well as the open-endedness of this reception process.

Conclusion

Through a case study of urban transformation in Cape Town's East City, this article focused on the politics of time and performance in urban policy mobilities studies. Shedding light on the micro-politics and material enactments that shaped the iterative and non-linear local translation of globally pervasive innovation and design-led urban development models, we sought to show how including a performative optic into our conceptual repertoire can help us to further understand the 'multiple temporalities' (Wood, 2015) of particular urban models. Our analysis of the different (per)formative phases in the East City's transformations helped us to unsettle seemingly absolute notions of success and failure, showing that while urban modelling interventions might sometimes fail on the official project level, they can nonetheless still succeed as decoupled forms of urban interventions, leaving floating urban models to be performed by non-policy actors, enacted in a constellation of residual practices, norms and material objects. Examining the transformations of Cape Town's East

City since the early 2000s reveals the complex and dynamic networks of relationships that shape the real-life enactment of urban models. Since the East City was first singled out by the Cape Town Partnership as an area for regeneration, making it 'model ready', powerful government and university actors were enrolled the production of a vision for the area, borrowing broad concepts and global urban development forms from elsewhere (Phase 1 and 2). This coalition then strategically expanded to include actors that could corroborate this urban vision and trigger its implementation – that is its local enactment through physical interventions, documents, investments, events (Phase 3). However, public opposition by the District Six Museum and the subsequent withdrawal of financial support from public authorities as well as lack of buy-in from local property owners precipitated the apparent 'failure' of the official redevelopment project (Phase 4). Despite the project's sudden folding and the resulting absence of a stable institutional driver, previous efforts to put the East City 'on the map' as a place of design, innovation and creativity had generated a sufficiently stable launching pad for anchoring individual investments, communication and business location strategies. Taken together, these still led to the organic transformation of the East City as a gentrifying 'creative precinct'. Our case is instructive for contemporary policy mobilities scholarship as it traces how seemingly failed urban projects can come to life anyways, thus highlighting the need to move beyond absolute notions of failure and success to better understand the concrete local enactment of globally mobile urban policies (Baker and McCann, 2018; Colven, 2020; McCann and Ward, 2015). In studying the politics of time through performative moments of socio-material enactment, we emphasized the conceptual value of performativity in analysing the local translation of mobile urban policies at different points in time. In doing so we address previous calls to look beyond project time-frames in urban policy mobilities research, bringing in conceptual frames that help explore how ideas are enacted through multiple (often uncoordinated) actions and mediums. In sum and based on our analysis we argue that attending to both the temporality and performativity of travelling urban models can shed light onto the complex processes through which fragments of globally mobile urban policies are enacted by means as varied as urban management strategies, fluctuating actor coalitions, hard-branding and targeted investments. This highlights the need for future research to explore how assemblages of actors (governments, journalists, business owners, property developers, consumers etc.), calculations (e.g. property investments predictions), documents (news articles, online platforms, spatial frameworks) and norms evolve over time, shape the socio-material production of the city and ultimately bring different urban visions to life.

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Notes

1. Discussions between CBD property owners, businesses and the City of Cape Town started in 1996 and led to the establishment of the Cape Town Partnership in July 1999 (Boraine, 2009; Didier et al., 2012).
2. The Cape Higher Education Consortium Report *The Development of a Conceptual Model for Driving Innovation in the Western Cape* (2010) highlights a series of locations across the Province suitable for the implantation of science parks, amongst them the East City.
3. Listed partners are: ECDI Symposium (convened by Zayd Minty): Cape Peninsula University of Technology (Faculty of Informatics and Design); College of Cape Town; African Centre for Cities (UCT); Cape Higher Education; Consortium; Cape Craft and Design Institute; Cape IT Initiative and Bandwidth Barn; Cape Town Fashion Council; City of Cape Town; Accelerate Cape Town; Design Indaba/Interactive Africa; The Loeries; Woodheads; Furnspace; The Cape Town Central Library; The District Six Museum.
4. East City Design Initiative Symposium, 11–12 May 2010: Conference Report *A proposal for the Development of a Design Precinct*
5. Various interviewees met during this study also indicated that leadership at the Partnership had been a long-standing issue, with some suggesting that this had also been a key factor for local government in deciding to pull its funding for the Fringe and the organisation altogether. The fatal blow for the organisation was dealt in May 2015, when the Central City Improvement District separated from the Partnership to become an independent organisation in its own right, effectively removing the Partnership's urban management function and thus its salient *raison d'être*.
6. Property24, 2017, *Cape Town's East City Precinct Now the Place to Be,* https://www.property24. com/articles/cape-towns-east-city-precinct-now-the-place-to-be/26766
7. Fisher T., 2018, *Cape Town's Design and Innovation District Gets Creative Injection, https://10and5. com/2018/08/07/cape-towns-design-innovation-district-gets-creative-injection/*

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