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"Cultural development" in Mangaung: reflections on the discourse of a development agency

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This study investigates the 12-year involvement of the MUCPP in "cultural development" in Mangaung. Since "development" and "culture" are highly ramified concepts, their application is first explained. Next, since the stance adopted by Ferguson (1990) towards development is particularly useful when considering development discourses, his discussions on development will serve as the theoretical and methodological basis of this article. Thus, the main objective of this study will not be to survey or explain the success or failure of the institutionalised production of "cultural development" in Mangaung. Instead, the article will strive to understand, explain and analyse the "cultural development industry" of the MUCPP in terms of its dominant ideas and its discourse. This will be done within certain constraints, including the paucity of written information. The findings will thus depend largely on interviews conducted to supplement the documentary information. Finally, conclusions will be drawn, raising questions that may inform any future cultural interventions in Mangaung on the part of the MUCPP.

"Kulturele ontwikkeling" in Mangaung: refleksies op die diskoers van 'n ontwikkelingsagent

Die MUCPP se betrokkenheid die afgelope 12 jaar by "kulturele ontwikkeling" in Mangaung vorm die tema van hierdie bydrae. Aangesien "ontwikkeling" en "kultuur" begrippe met allerlei implikasies is, word die gebruik daarvan eerstens verduidelik. Wat die teoretiese en metodologiese vertrekpunte betref, word in die tweede plek aansluiting gevind by die standpunt van Ferguson. Die hoofoogmerk met die studie is nie om die geïnstitusionaliseerde produksie van "kulturele ontwikkeling" in Mangaung in oënskou te neem ten einde te bepaal of dit suksesvol of onsuksesvol was en die redes daarvoor uit te wys nie. Die kerndoelwit met die artikel is die verstaan, verduideliking en ontleding van die "kulturele ontwikkelingsindustrie" van die MUCPP in terme van dominante idees en diskoerse en dit word derdens gehanteer. Ofskoon voldoende inligting nie altyd beskikbaar was nie, word vierdens 'n ontleding van die diskoersindustrie van die MUCPP oor "kulturele ontwikkeling" gegee en laastens word gevolgtrekkings wat bepaalde vrae laat ontstaan, gemaak.

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The Mangaung-University of the Free State Community Partnership Programme (MUCPP) is often referred to as one of the university's community flagships. Established in 1991 as a development agency to assist the community of Mangaung in becoming a "still greater dynamic self-ruling unit",[1] the MUCPP (1996: 2, 13) contends in an unpublished document entitled "Health for all: building our nation together" that it has succeeded in building "something special, a unique model". This unique development model (known as the Practice Model of Development):

• is based on certain "development principles" such as sustainable development, institutional development, capacity-building, integrated development, longitudinal development, representation of all partners, sharing of information and responsibilities, and joint decision-making processes (Wessels 2002: 35-6; MUCPP 1996: 9, 12, 16, 47);

• is professed to be in line with the vision, mission and objectives of the Free State Development Plan (2002/2005), as well as the broader frame of reference of the African Union (Wessels 2002: 2-3);

• accommodates "complex functioning systems" (MUCPP 1996: 9-10) at the national (that is, South African), African and global levels, and

• strives to make the community, the region and South Africa "winner[s]" (MUCPP 1996: 9-10).[2]

The MUCPP has implemented a management system centered on various development portfolios, of which the Arts and Culture Portfolio is one:

> The idea of starting cultural activities at MUCPP was born out of the realisation that the people's way of life (their traditions, knowledge and skills, beliefs and customs) influences their perception of health/sickness, as well as the rate and direction of community development. Development implies change, but with certain elements of culture forming an anchor for supporting nationhood. The intention, therefore, is to engage young people in particular in the learning and re-inforcement of important aspects of their culture; to get young people off the streets; to teach them self-discipline; to help them de-

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1   <http://kiewiet.uovs.ac.za/community/mucpp/index_t.htm>
2   Elsewhere in the same document (p 2) the idea is repeated: "In order to develop a strong and powerful South Africa, it is very important that we develop strong and powerful communities and regions".

> velop leadership skills, and to let them enjoy being young and feeling good about themselves. […] Through the cultural activities, it is hoped that the MUCPP and its health mission will spread far and wide, and also that an investment is gradually being made for future culturally stable and health-conscious adults (MUCPP 1996: 24-5).

The fact that the MUCPP indeed practises development interventions in the field of culture can be gleaned from various MUCPP documents (Wessels 2002: 22, 37, 92; MUCPP 1996: 24). The discourse constructed by the MUCPP on its involvement in cultural development freely and uncritically uses terminology such as "self-help", "partnerships", "system analysis", "holism", "matrix structures" and "community".

Given the context described above, the present study is about the operation of the "development apparatus" (the MUCPP) in a particular setting (the community of Mangaung). It is not specifically about the people or the community of Mangaung, or about how the culture of Mangaung has changed or "developed". The research question here concerns the cultural "development industry" of the MUCPP. By focusing on the language that the development agency employs to articulate its practices of development intervention, this study investigates how specific ideas and discourses about "cultural development" were generated and how they were put to use, as well as demonstrating their ultimate effects. The analysis of the development discourse will not strive first and foremost to rectify or to falsify the "development thinking" of the MUCPP. This should, nevertheless, not be understood as a sign of some sort of neutrality, but as indicative of my view that ideas and discourses have real and important social consequences. Ideas and discourses may themselves be analysed, irrespective of any value claims to "truth" made through them or by invoking them.

The data to be presented here was collected from official documents obtained from the erstwhile chairperson of the Arts and Culture Portfolio and the administrative co-ordinator of the MUCPP. For unknown reasons, only limited information was available from these sources and it was therefore decided also to conduct interviews with the person responsible for Cultural Development. During these interviews the major findings of the study were also clarified. The insufficiency of the information unfortunately hampers the methodological approach of the study somewhat and tends to impose an inductive aspect on the research process.

1. The politicisation of development and development discourse

According to Escobar (1991: 658), relations between industrialised nations and third-world countries have, ever since the end of the Second World War, been largely determined and mediated by the discourses and practices of "development". In posing the question: "What is development?" Ferguson (1990: xiii) states that it is a peculiarity of our time that the idea of development is central to so much reflection about so much of the world. Development is, in his view, a central organising concept which acts as a central, unquestioned value and forms the very framework within which argumentation takes place. Development is, in other words, not only the name of a value, but also of a dominant problematic or interpretative grid through which the impoverished regions of the world are known to us. Third world nation-states and starving rural communities are seen as sharing a common "problem" — both lack an essential "thing": development.

The idea championed by many developmentalists from industrialised nations is that third-world countries are poor because they have underdeveloped, backward economies, and if they would only pursue the proper political and economic policies, they could become developed, like Western countries. From this perspective, these countries and cultures simply have to transform their traditional practices in order to develop. Development, therefore, is used to mean the process of transition or transformation toward a modern, capitalist, industrial economy. The key words of the discourse include "modernisation", "capitalist development", "the development of the forces of production", "quality of life", "standard of living" and "reduction of poverty". It is quite clear that the alliance between liberal economic values and conservative political ones has established, first, a development hegemony, and secondly, what I shall term a "development racism". After all, the idea of colour is immediately triggered when concepts such as "third-world nation-states" and "Western countries" are mentioned — generally in mutual opposition.

To say that development has become a buzz word and a dominant theme in modern discourse does not, of course, suggest that everybody holds the same beliefs on the issue. Authors like Escobar (1991: 663-5), Lubeck (1992: 522-4), Gardner & Lewis (1996:3-24) and Coetzee

& Graaff (1996: 2) point out that there have recently been significant shifts in world-political systems, in theoretical debates, and in development policies, and that all of these have had a substantial influence on how we think about development. Different people mean different things by "development", and it is entirely possible to have oppositional or diverse views on the issue. According to Ferguson (1990: 9), the literature on what development means is divided along sharply ideological lines. In one camp we find those who (either as participants in development processes or as sympathetic outsiders) see "development planning" and "development agencies" as part of a great collective effort to fight poverty, raise standards of living, and promote some version of "progress". In literature generated from this perspective, the "development apparatus" is scrutinised with the aim of identifying what has gone "wrong", why, and how it can be "fixed".[3]

The radical critique associated with neo-Marxism and dependency theory (cf Coetzee *et al* 2001: 142-52, Ferguson 1990: 11; Leroke 1996: 225-8) adopts an entirely different approach. The issue of development is generally treated in the context of a political denunciation along the following lines. If capitalism in the third world is not a progressive force but a reactionary one (for instance, if capitalism is not the cause of development but the major obstacle to it) then capitalist-run development projects are built on a fundamental paradox. If they are meant to promote imperial capitalism, they cannot at the same time be instruments for "real" development.

Having read most of the literature on the "development industry", Ferguson (1990: 13) has become dissatisfied with both the liberals and the neo-Marxists, thus coming to represent yet another school of thought regarding development. He argues that the first group's only concern seems to be to direct or reform development institutions whose bene-

3   According to Seymour-Smith (1992: 75), contemporary anthropology has become increasingly critical of the concept of development. It has become common practice to investigate exactly who benefits from the development process, and whether technological or economic "progress" signifies any overall improvement for the whole population, or merely increases profit for a national and/or foreign elite. Most anthropologists who have explicitly made development agencies or projects the focus of their research probably fall into this category (cf Ferguson 1990: 10; Wassermann & Kriel 1997: 25-43).

ficence they accept unquestioningly, while the second seems satisfied with simply having established that the institutions of development are part of a fundamentally imperialistic relation between the centre and the periphery. Ferguson's own approach takes as its primary object not the people to be "developed", but the apparatus that is to do the "developing".[4] To take on the task of examining the development apparatus anthropologically is, for him, to insist on a very particular approach. He refuses to assume that a structure simply and rationally "represents" or "expresses" a set of "objective interests". To him, official discourse on development becomes important insofar as it either expresses "true intentions" or, more often, provides an ideological screen for other, "hidden intentions". Romm (2001: 145-6) draws our attention to the relevance of Habermas's discussion on genuine discourse in the "ideal speech situation" where the interacting parties are orientated towards developing a consensual understanding of the issues under consideration. In such a situation, claims to both truth and rightness are opened to validity checking, as are claims to sincerity and authenticity on the part of the speakers. The orientation of speakers is, in other words, towards discursive validity checking of any claims presented.

Although many involved in development might argue that much of its discourse is in any event not true, this is no excuse for dismissing the analysis thereof. In line with Foucault (1971 & 1973), Ferguson (1990: 18) believes that discourse is a practice; it is structured and it has real effects which are much more profound than a simple "mystification" of the development process.[5] Ideas and discourses have important and very real social consequences. Leroke (1996: 235) and Little & Painter (1995: 602), for example, suggest that discourse is a practice in which power relations are exerted, and that the notion of development's effects anticipates its outcomes, which limits both our analysis and our participation in development.

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4   In this regard, Ferguson (1990: 14 & 17) refers to anthropological studies in "rural development" which have contributed significantly towards understanding development agencies, not in terms of what they do or do not do, but in terms of what they are; that is, not in terms of their self-advertisement, but as social institutions or constructs that may be analysed in their own right.

5   Cf Babbie & Mouton (2001: 495-8) for more information on discourse analysis.

Ferguson's study is, in effect, an examination of the generation and implementation of ideas about development. In analysing ideas and discourses, one should not interrogate them simply for their "truth" value, but also for what they do, and for what real social effects they have. The question is not "How closely do ideas and discourses approximate the truth?" but "What effects do they bring about?" After all, as has been pointed out by Little & Painter (1995: 605), no matter how important it may seem to study the "text" and the "institutionalisation" of development discourse theoretically, issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, political oppression, and other material systems of under-development are more important than the reflections of hegemonic texts and ideologies to which they give rise.

In this introduction, reference has been made to the MUCPP's claims to have brought about "cultural development" in Mangaung and the issues concerning hegemony in development and power in discourses have been discussed in detail. The next section takes a closer look at recent cultural development in Mangaung.

2. Making cultural development happen

According to Escobar (1991: 659) and Wright (1998: 7-8) the notion of "culture" has only recently entered discourses on development.[6] Schmidt (1998: 42) notes, however, that the term culture very rarely appears in the grand narratives and practices of development agencies. It is as if agencies see development as something independent of culture; as a purely technical and neutral phenomenon. The report entitled *Our*

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6   Since anthropology is often described as "the comparative study of culture" one should like to think that there would be a general agreement among anthropologists about the concept of culture. More than fifty years ago Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) noted the confusion as to a generally accepted definition of the concept and identified several hundred different definitions. Although most recent anthropological handbooks (Haviland 2002: 34, Kottak 2000: 62; Nanda & Warms 2002: 72) probably still refer to the definition given by E B Tylor in 1871, it may be said that anthropologists generally see culture as a dynamic, changing system of knowledge, norms and values, embedded in the experiences of individuals and self-defined groups as well as in their interpretations and creations, in terms of which they give meaning, substance and expression to their lives, relationships and both their concrete and their non-concrete creations.

creative diversity (UNESCO 1995) comes to the same conclusion and further suggests that neglecting to take cultural issues into account causes many a failure in development efforts (Wright 1998: 12).

Understanding the process of "cultural development" is, according to Haviland (2002: 416), complicated by the cultural bias of most modern Westerners, which predisposes them to see it as a progressive process, leading in a predictable and determined way to their own position. So pervasive is this notion that Westerners are often led to view any culture different from their own as "backward" and "underdeveloped". To many people, this means that change has become necessary for its own sake, since whatever exists today is, by definition, not as good as what will materialise tomorrow. Whatever is old is inadequate by virtue of that fact alone and should be abandoned, no matter how well it works.

In South Africa, the previous regime used development to extend its control over the African population. According to Fischer (1988: 126), the nature of power relations in South Africa allowed the state to proceed with unusual determination in implementing its racial policies through development programmes. Apartheid also produced a specific interpretation of, and discourse on culture. In essence, ideological interests were served by promoting "high" culture (read: "white culture") as "enriching" and worthy of emulation.[7] This occurred largely at the expense of "low" culture (read: "black culture"), since the "culture of the masses" was seen as inherently inferior and as a threat to "high" cultural standards. This state of affairs is acknowledged in an RDP (1994: 69) document:

> [U]nder apartheid the culture of the majority of South Africans was neglected, distorted and suppressed. Freedom of expression and creativity were stifled. People and communities were denied access to resources and facilities to exercise and develop their need for cultural and artistic expression.

First, in assessing the development ideas and discourses of the MUCPP in terms of the framework sketched above, it becomes clear that one of this initiative's most important ideological gains was the recognition of the real status and value of the previously neglected worker

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7   There is a general impression that culture resides in elevated values such as those of the arts. Thus a person is described as cultured when s/he is educated, widely read, and well grounded in the arts.

culture, community culture and mass culture of the people living in Mangaung.

The impetus for what we term cultural development may come from within a society or from outside (Ember & Ember 1996: 205). Anthropologists generally argue in support of an approach "from the inside" and that development should not be undertaken without in-depth knowledge of the culture involved (Schmidt 1998: 41). In the case of cultural development in Mangaung (and this is the second point that I would like to emphasise) the MUCPP recognised the importance of inside knowledge and development from within. For example, once it had been decided to start cultural activities, consultation with various community members and organisations took place, and the MUCPP Youth Choir was accordingly established in 1996. The choir attracted young people from local secondary schools and was organised by K L Mafata, a primary school teacher. The youth choir's relative success[8] stimulated the vision of a cultural centre where various aspects of culture such as arts and crafts, traditional dances; storytelling (*ditshomo*), praise-singing (*dithoko*) and an "Afro-band" using primarily African sounds like the marimba, drums and pennywhistles, could eventually be accommodated. These activities were intended to extend beyond the proposed centre and to offer assistance and support to similar initiatives elsewhere in the Mangaung community (MUCPP 1996: 24-5).[9]

If nothing else, the end of apartheid meant that cultural contact among the various communities of South Africa, and therefore the rate of cultural change, increased dramatically. The third important point about the cultural development apparatus of the MUCPP relates to its decision to take up the cultural challenges of the new South Africa. At a meeting held at the MUCPP on 7 November 1997, it was decided to establish a forum "that would make inroads into the promotion of a multicultural society".[10] A ten-member steering committee was appointed with the following tasks:

8   The MUCPP Youth Choir won the national Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging Youth Choir competition on 24 October 1998.
9   According to Mrs T Bendile the envisaged "cultural centre" was supposed to be accommodated in the MUCPP's complex, but although sufficient facilities were available, it never materialised (interview conducted on 20 May 2003).
10 Minutes of the MUCPP Cultural and Arts Programme 1997.

Table 1: Cultural activities

Name of group	Category	Main activities/focus
Successive Group	Drama	AIDS drama Child abuse
Super Success	Ballroom dance	Competition Development
Twins Production	Drama	Manager Street Kids
Artistic Group	Fine arts grooming	Drawings Personal development
Tse Ntle Tsa Mangaung	Traditional dance	
Saraphina Dance	Modern dance	
Lonely Ladies	Traditional	
Mokopu Dancers	Traditional	
KODF	'RAP' music	Competitions Beauty contest
MUCPP Youth Choir	Choral music	

On submitting the provisional 1997-1998 cultural development budget, totalling R20 000 on 29 June 1998, the then portfolio co-ordinator stated that an arts and culture festival in Mangaung was "necessary to create more awareness in the community and more solidarity among the different groups". Although the steering committee held several meetings (),[11] the portfolio co-ordinator was of the opinion that there was "very little practical happening on the ground [*sic*]" towards realising these planned objectives. The reasons given by the then portfolio co-ordinator during an interview (conducted on 20 May 2003) were the inexperience of the committee members and the fact that the "cultural" groups only performed during important MUCPP functions, such as for overseas visitors. Whatever other reasons there may have been, the failure of the MUCPP to involve the community surely puts the declared principle of sustainable (cultural) development in question[12] while the situation does not accord with the motto of the MUCPP

11   Cf Minutes of the Cultural Festival Task Team, 24 May 1998.
12   Cf Behera & Erasmus (1999: 3-6) where a critical examination of the concept of sustainable development is presented in the context of rapid globalisation.

(1996: 11) of "meeting the challenges of the past". The situation worsened in 2001 when the chairperson of the Arts and Culture Portfolio resigned and the Arts and Culture Committee assisting her was also disbanded (confirmed during an interview on 20 May 2003 by Mrs T Bendile). Since then, the activities of the Arts and Culture Portfolio have fallen under Youth Development where it is not believed to receive the necessary attention.

Members of communities lacking infrastructure, services, education and training know what they need but often find there are too many items to choose from, which makes it difficult for them to determine their priorities. According to Schmidt (1998: 44), it is therefore necessary to find a way to "measure" the relative needs of a community. This was the fourth important action which the MUCPP took. In accordance with its declared "operating philosophy" of acting within the bounds of "consensus and democracy",[13] a needs analysis was done during September 1991 which

> [...] gave the beneficiary community of Mangaung the opportunity of stating their case [...] Such an opportunity was highly exceptional [...] and they [the community] accepted it with enthusiasm (Wessels 2002: 19).

To the MUCPP (1996: 14), "[i]t was clear from the beginning that relationships of trust would have to be established prior to the establishment of partnerships".[14] The needs analysis, therefore, was "not a once-off process"; new needs were continually identified and the activities of the MUCPP were re-structured accordingly. It is clear from the failure and disintegration of the Arts and Culture Portfolio, however, that this statement is not applicable to the development of culture.

3. Mobilising development — concluding remarks

Twelve years after the inception of "a sound developmental approach" by the MUCPP (online) and the "improvement of the quality of life of the people in Mangaung", the community of greater Bloemfontein/

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13   MUCPP 1996: 19 & <http://kiewiet.uovs.ac.za/community/mucpp/index_t.htm>
14   This "wonderful project" of building partnerships is labelled a "unique triumvirate partnership" (MUCPP 1996: 19, 21).

Mangaung still remains divided between the "haves" and the "have-nots". There are many reasons for this.[15] However, the determination of developmental success or failure depends primarily on what the evaluator decides to measure. If one thinks of development in terms of economic growth, for example, one needs only to look at the Gross National Product (GNP) or at *per capita* income. But growth in the GNP alone is not a particularly good indicator of development in general and does not in itself result in increased prosperity. Standards of living cannot be measured in monetary terms alone and I believe that in terms of health, education and cultural issues the measurement of developmental progress may look entirely different. For example, the acknowledgement of the cultural status of the people's experiences, interpretations and creations, and the empowerment of the previously powerless, vulnerable, voiceless, post-apartheid Mangaung represents a far more holistic approach to development. The MUCPP has played a role in acknowledging the right of ordinary people to be heard, to participate in decisions concerning their lives and to have their values and preferences respected, and it must be given credit for its achievements in this regard.

Intervention philosophies underlie all economic development plans and the basic belief in respect of interventions has remained more or less constant over the past century. The general belief is that industrialisation, modernisation and westernisation are desirable evolutionary advances and that development schemes promoting them will bring long-term benefits. As indicated, different, or "unique" "development models" and "development principles" embody the intervention philosophy of the MUCPP. This organisation seeks to convey its vision and "influential leadership" to the planners of the Mangaung region, South Africa, Africa and the world. The MUCPP obviously has a vested interest in "development" and it has undoubtedly produced its own "development discourse". From the vantage point of "development", the MUCPP's discourse industry lends credibility to its enterprises.

"Development" has its counterpart "underdevelopment". As we have seen, development and underdevelopment are not neutral or simply

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15 The contributions of Lubeck (1992) and Mansuri & Vijayendra (2004) provide interesting perspectives in this regard and can be consulted for general background information.

descriptive terms; their use has political implications,[16] while their under-lying assumptions, prejudices, stereotypes and value judgments ulti-mately say a great deal more than planners/developers mean when using them.[17] When the MUCPP refers to "cultural development" it endorses the notion of there being two "worlds" and consequently puts a conve-nient label on a highly complex series of variables, various sets of interests with a range of different needs, and different types of power relations.

Escobar (1991: 674) writes: "Development institutions are part and parcel of how the world is put together so as to ensure certain processes of ruling". Gardner & Lewis (1996: 188) emphasise the continuous ques-tioning of the processes, assumptions and agencies involved in develop-ment. The question which demands critical examination in respect of "cultural development" in Mangaung is: Who benefits from it? Is it the MUCPP itself (its listing on official documents undeniably impresses donors), or is it perhaps an elite group within the community (since the whole community does not seem to benefit — "very little practical [is] happening on the ground")? In other words: Did the well-articulated terminology and phraseology of the MUCPP on "cultural development" do anything for the ability of the poor in Mangaung to change the re-lations (social, political, and economic) that control and limit them?

16 "Underdevelopment" is not an original condition, but a disability which has been visited on the "underdeveloped" by the terms of its historical relationship with the "developed".
17 Implicit in the "development/underdevelopment" hierarchy is the evolutionary notion that societies "progress" and "improve", and that certain societies are more or less advanced than others along the path of "development". According to Gardner & Lewis (1996: 121), the notion of "social development" as deployed by deve-lopment agencies can at times be dangerously close to the modernisation-type thought in terms of which communities are judged, according to a variety of ill-defined criteria, to be either more or less developed.

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