Sondela ukuzodala kanyekanye.

Drawing people together in order to co-create.
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A RESEARCH QUESTION:

To what extent can models of collaboration inform future co-creation projects?

INTRODUCTION:

The title *Sondela ukuzodala kanyekanye* is written in the expressive South African language isiZulu. The use of isiZulu recalls the catalyst for this research project: *Cascoland*, a collaborative initiative that took place in South Africa in 2008. The meaning of the title phrase can be extrapolated from the follow three descriptive words:

- *sondela* – to come closer, draw near for understanding, the imperative to approach;
- *dala* – to create;
- *kanyekanye* – togetherness, all together, all at once.

The phrase does not simply denote gathering of people in order to produce something. *Dala* is distinct from making or producing, the word suggests creative practice in thought and action. A sense of unity is expressed by *kanyekanye*. The repeat of the root word *kanye* is common isiZulu practice that adds meaning and emphasis by generating rhythm when spoken. *Sondela* is perhaps the most important word here. It resonates with *dala*’s idea of creative thought. More than a get-together it implies an intimacy and openness amongst the participants. They have not assembled by
chance, but have been called to gather for a specific purpose, thus loading the phrase with expectancy.

The evolution from user-centred design practice to participatory experience demonstrates a mind shift and consequent practical application of designing for people to designing with people. Workable frameworks to facilitate collaborative design processes will need to be continually devised and refined. It is especially significant if ordinary people become increasingly involved in design projects. Tools will be needed for them to negotiate the design process effectively and for the project to extract value from them.

This essay explores the meaning of the isiZulu title in relation to collaborative creation (co-creation) in the context of design thinking.

**CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

The world is marked by rapid technological advancement that increasingly aids the ability to collaborate cross-culturally, trans-locationally, inter-institutionally and interdisciplinarily. The global zeitgeist is characterised by democratisation, flattened hierarchies, an emphasis of togetherness and the idea of ours and with. It is a culture where the wisdom of the crowd is valued above the opinion of the individual.

It is remarkable that this paradigm shift is corroborated by its influence on faith and religion. On a macro level there is engagement between world religious leaders to seek common ground in collaboration and shared problem solving. The ideology is that the world’s most pressing problems
cannot be solved by unification of a global government and a global economy alone, but requires the involvement of people of faith and their religious institutions – a global interfaith movement. This three-pronged strategy towards world peace is particularly promoted by protagonists, the Pope, former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair and author of America’s best-ever selling book and prominent evangelical church leader, Rick Warren (World Economic Forum, 2008).

On a micro level the phenomenon of the Emerging Church illustrates the far-reaching influence of the new paradigm. It is characterised by dominant Christian church denominations moving away from a scripture-based faith in favour of experiential practices. These include and are not limited to: contemplative mysticism, ancient monastic disciplines, meditative practices, conversations instead of preaching and discussion replacing dogma. Its ecumenical theology traverses denominations and is reshaping Christian liturgies and doctrines on a global scale. It proffers the unification of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and further fosters interfaith compatibility in accordance with the aims of global political strategists (Oakland, 2008). The willingness to embrace divergent theologies is testimony to the already changed global culture and mindset, which from the Christian perspective is attributed in part to a relativist, postmodern worldview (Ligonier Ministeries, 2007).

The Institute of Noetic Sciences (2007), quoting Willis Harmon in their report on the evidence of a world transforming confirms the mind shift:

We are living through one of the most fundamental shifts in history – a change in the actual belief structure of Western society. No economic, political, or military power can compare with the power of
a change of mind. By deliberately changing their images of reality, people are changing the world. (p. 2)

Renowned organisational theorist Thomas Malone offers an insight into how the culture of democratisation, networking and collaboration came about. In his book The future of work (2004), he identifies correlations between societal and business patterns and demonstrates that the way in which human societies have been organised since early times foreshadows the pattern of how business has changed. He tabulates the progressive societal pattern of the organisation of people from bands (independent) to kingdoms (centralised) to democracies (decentralised). He then mirrors this with the pattern of how businesses have been organised through history, viz., from small businesses (independent) to corporate hierarchies (centralised) to networks (decentralised).

A similar pattern has been identified in the notion of successive economies. The world is currently characterised by the experience economy, which was preceded by the agrarian economy, the industrial economy and most recently, the service economy. The experience economy is associated with the creative industries, which have been touted as the economy of the future and is defined by Copenhagen Business School’s Daniel Hjorth and Monika Kostera (2007) as, ‘invented through the translation of ideas and the subsequent invention of new practices, resulting in concrete new organisation’ (p. 21).

It fosters an entrepreneurial organisational environment which connects experience with economy, which in turn enables a prosumer culture, a term coined by Alvin Toffler in his 1970 book The Third Wave. Prosumer describes the future consumer who would be involved in the production
(design and manufacture) of products. An article in *The Financial Express* titled *Enter, the consumer* (2007) sums up the impact on business and society where the author discusses the implications of this trend:

The implications are inescapable. If the content and its value are going to emanate from prosumers, then the traditional hierarchical corporate structure will soon come under pressure. Prosumers are both a reflection of the market as well its influencers. They are also its best communicators. Nor is this merely an act of the consumer flexing some muscle, but a creative break. If this implies the onset of an era where the consumer is also the creator, what then of the elaborate corporate edifices that for centuries have told the consumer what’s best for her? (para. 2)

The experience economy manifests in many areas, the most relevant to this research being the *creative economy*. International best-selling author Richard Florida (2008) promotes the idea of a rising creative class and asserts that ‘in today’s creative economy, the real source of economic growth comes from the clustering and concentration of talented and productive people’ (p. 9).

If there has indeed been a global paradigm shift towards democraticisation the study of models of co-creation is significant as it enables the shared creative output made by the coming together of creative concept and craft.

Thomas Malone (2004), the prolific academic researcher, author, speaker and inventor posits that ‘decentralisation has three general benefits: (1) it encourages motivation and creativity; (2) it allows many minds to work
simultaneously on the same problem; and (3) it accommodates flexibility and individualisation’ (p. 114). The Internet and particularly the advent of Web 2.0, the new interactive phase of the Internet has allowed this decentralisation and democratisation to grow exponentially and itself promotes the idea and facilitates the framework of networks. A pioneering precedent of how this is already affecting the communications industry is the case of Unilever UK’s Peperami meat snack range. On that particular brand account Unilever recently dispensed with their incumbent advertising agency, LOWE London in favour of the creative collective, Ideabounty, an online network of around 5,000 independent creative practitioners (Unilever turns to crowdsourcing, 2009). Unilever hopes this experimental model will prove strategically sustainable for more of their brands. Unilever and their communications partners (LOWE being one of many) are multinationaly networked, therefore their dismissal of the prevalent advertising agency business model signals a paradigm shift that will have a global effect on business thinking.

Quite telling is how LOWE London (2009) currently promotes themselves via their website: ‘We enjoy solving problems collaboratively ... we also firmly believe that none of us is as good as all of us’ (para. 1 & 5). Whether this is a reaction to the Unilever move is unknown, however it sums up the rapidly changing culture in which communication companies find themselves.

Tim Brown of IDEO, a prominent international design and innovation consultancy, takes a different view of design thinking. IDEO looks less at the designing of an object and more at the thinking around design as it impacts the needs of humans. It heralds the emergence of design thinking where design has moved from the industrial object and function-centric to
being human-centred. According to Brown, design practice is evolving into a discipline of learning by making i.e. ‘instead of thinking about what to build, designers are building in order to think’ (IDEO, 2009). Designers are thinking through the process of design as opposed designing after thinking. Brown argues that ‘design might have its greatest impact when it is taken out of the hands of designers and put into the hands of everyone – because design thinking is no longer about ergonomics, aesthetics and marketability – where design was a tool of consumerism’ (IDEO, 2009).

Research into how these concepts are being experimented within education helps broaden the context and significance of this topic. Frederick Burrack and Tammy McKenzie’s experiments with student collaborations across the areas of history, literature, music and visual art suggest that education curricula typically segment learning and knowledge into separate disciplines, i.e. the traditional notion of boxes or silos, the consequences of which are a lack of deep understanding on the participants’ part. Burrack and McKenzie advocate seeking opportunities to make connections that lead to deeper understanding. A significant insight gained from their work is that through cross-disciplinary engagements students can become problem solvers and critical thinkers who understand how other creative practitioners use the tools of their disciplines to explore and depict the human experience (Burrack & McKenzie, 2005).

Countering to some extent the above position, Martin Davies & Marcia Devlin (2007) in their research into the implications of interdisciplinarity in higher education courses point out that ‘an education that is too broad might not allow for sufficient expertise in the home discipline to allow an
adequate appreciation of when interdisciplinary work is needed and when it is not’ (p. 4). They further argue that all viable interdisciplinary collaborations require a key idea, without which a project is liable to fail.

John Rousseau, design director at the brand design firm Hornall Anderson was quoted by Venessa Wong (2009) in a recent BusinessWeek article on China’s new focus on design thinking and education as saying: ‘Because many schools have focused on the craft of design, with little interaction with business, communications, and computer science, design graduates often are ill-prepared to collaborate with other professionals’ (para. 8). It then follows that we see the reorganising of design education to become interdisciplinary and cross-faculty. There are at least thirty institutions that have formally established hybrid curricula that aim to use design for strategy rather than aesthetics. To name a few: Parsons The New School for Design – MFA Transdisciplinary Design; California College of the Arts – MBA in Design Strategy; Tongji University – College of Design & Innovation; Delft University of Technology – Master’s in Strategic Product Design; University of Gothenburg – Master’s in Business & Design; Illinois Institute of Technology – Dual degree Master of Design and MBA, and others.

It is the view of Elizabeth Sanders and Jan Stappers (2008), the two foremost thinkers in co-creation thinking and design research, that this transition from a user-centered approach to co-designing is changing the landscape of design practice from individual to collective creativity. They contend that the ‘implications of this shift for the education of designers and researchers are enormous’ (p. 1).

Sanders and Stappers distinguish co-design from co-creation. Whereas co-
creation is a broad term referring to any act of collective creativity, co-design is a specific instance of co-creation. It connotes collective creativity applied over the spread of a design process, usually by collaborating designers. Sanders and Stappers use co-design in a broader sense to refer to the ‘creativity of designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process’ (p. 2). They argue that ordinary people have a role to play in creativity and creating. This stems from the belief that all people possess a creative capacity.

An insightful point Sanders and Stappers make is where this proposed research will fit in to the topic, i.e. they point out that the role of the researcher has evolved from the translator to the facilitator.

**PROPOSED FUTURE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY:**

It is intended that this research will be approached in the following ways: Firstly, analysis of the literature on the subject of collaboration and co-creation and those areas that support this topic. Secondly, retrospective analysis of particular case studies which will in turn influence future scenarios, viz., *Cascoland Durban 2008* – an international collaborative initiative that took place in Durban, South Africa in early 2008; *BOXbox.09* – a collaborative student project due to take place in early November 2009. These two projects will inform the design of a third – an exploratory exercise in co-creation through the collaboration of pottery practitioners. The pottery scenario will then be analysed as a third case study.

Cascoland Durban 2008 (Cascoland) was an interdisciplinary public art
project initiated by Dutch artist Fiona de Bell, involving the collaboration of over 40 international and South African creative practitioners, as well as university students, local urban communities and stakeholders in general. Cascoland explored a series of art interventions in public space to engage and create awareness of urban issues and the possibilities of activating public space through creative interventions.

Mobility was the theme central to all interventions, consequently Cascoland was situated along the route between the Durban market hub and the nearby informal settlement of Cato Manor. The interventions engaged with the public in their residential neighbourhood as well as the public spaces along their daily pedestrian route into the city. Cascoland connected the township and the inner city.

In close collaboration with Vega the Brand Communications School, Durban campus, student involvement and participation was central to the educational component of the Cascoland project. The author was involved in Cascoland in the capacity as a Vega lecturer in visual communication design. Over the five-week live project, third year Vega students developed radical and progressive on-site ambient communication solutions to create awareness of Cascoland. Students were grouped into interdisciplinary teams of six to eight people comprising majors in graphic design, art direction, copywriting and digital media.

Cascoland gained acclaim with the success of architect, Doung Jahangeer’s intervention called *Spaza-de-move-on*. This design response to the need for an efficient, easily transportable vehicle for street vendors won the inaugural South Award 2009 at the international Design Indaba festival held in Cape Town, South Africa (Design Indaba, 2009).
The significance of Cascoland was that its model of collaboration successfully enabled multi-faceted outcomes through a broad cross-disciplinarity. It included participants from the disciplines of architecture, writing, jewellery design, furniture design, visual art, sculpture, engineering, illustration, graphic design, industrial design, theatre, fashion design, film making, photography. Cascoland had multinational representation with participants from South Africa, The Netherlands, Lithuania, Israel, Sweden and France.

Following on from Cascoland is the BOXbox.09 (BOXbox) student project. Certainly inspired by Cascoland this project differs considerably in the architecture and purpose of the model. The intention here was to design a framework for students to engage in collaborative thinking and implementation. The participants are all students from College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington campus and represent the following disciplines: advertising design, graphic design, fine arts, industrial design and fashion design. Euan Robertson and the author, in the capacity of senior lecturer and lecturer in advertising design respectively, designed the model and are currently engaged in steering the project with the assistance of other academic staff.

The project’s purpose is to expose students to working collaboratively in interdisciplinary teams within set parameters, in order to create shared design outcomes. The students have been tasked with designing interventions in public spaces to create engagement with Wellington’s community. The aim is to mobilise students and audiences to participate in the temporary shaping of designated public spaces relevant to a theme. Students will explore the theme of ‘escapism’ through the medium of
packaging boxes. This is the rationale behind the project’s name and together with the acknowledgement of Cascoland’s inspiration use of isiZulu word repetition has been employed.

The intention for the third case study is to analyse and critically assess the frameworks employed in the Cascoland and BOXbox models. Evaluating these precedents against the theoretical background a potential future model will be formulated. Pottery is a broad field encompassing many disciplines and offers potential as a creative practice to enable collaborative creation. This future experimental ecosystem is at this stage named the *Sondela Model*.

The Sondela Model will be tested to ascertain how it facilitates creative practitioners in co-creating a shared outcome that would otherwise not have been possible by them working individually.

**CONCLUSION:**

It is expected that this research will result in speculation on how the three models that have been engaged in might enhance creative practice through multi-disciplinary co-creation endeavours.

The Sondela Model will enable the gathering of people together for collaborative creation scenarios. It forms the scaffold that provides a reason, a theme, a space, and a shared creative output for participants. Its architecture, methods and process will contribute value and proposals that might benefit endeavours in social meaning, creative or craft practice,
commercial enterprise, design pedagogy, advertising campaigns or design studio practice.

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