Abstract: This article aims to illustrate the relationship between museum success and community engagement within the broader field of the intersection of memory-space-healing and national traumas all over the world. Museum success is in this case defined as a functioning museum which engages with content and receives a large number of visitors, and is accepted by and engages with its community. We have included an analysis of two South African museums that focus on elements of the apartheid past, in order to explore the architectural, institutional and social dynamics that are at play when a museum has to deal with difficult subject matter in a complex physical context. We look at relevant literature from South African architectural and museum publications, as well as work by international cultural heritage authors. We also include visual and descriptive analysis.

1 Lina Emilia Bysell is a Master’s student at Uppsala University, Sweden. Her main research interest is house museums with a specific focus on Russian author museums. (Email: lina.emilia.bysell@hotmail.com)
2 Wanda Verster is a PhD candidate at the University of the Free State in South Africa, where she is also a part-time lecturer. She is also a professional architect. She is interested in gallery and museum spaces and the architectural implications related to thresholds. Email: versterw@ufs.ac.za
3 Anders Magnusson is a Master’s student at Uppsala University, Sweden. His research interest focuses mainly on cultural landscape and the relation between nature and culture. Email: anders.magnusson87@hotmail.com
of two case studies. The focus is on the District Six Museum in Cape Town and the Red Location Museum in Port Elizabeth and their roles, as institutions and buildings, in post-conflict reconciliation. Additional examples are investigated in terms of architectural design, display design, and institutional culture. We draw conclusions based on the complex post-apartheid context wherein these museums function. The main conclusions are first linked to how a museum is introduced into a community and second, how the engagement with the community is managed. We argue that these two factors may impact directly on the survival of the museum. The Red Location Museum serves as an example of a breakdown of these relationships.

Keywords: South Africa, Cultural heritage, Museums, Reconciliation, Commemoration, Post-apartheid, Red Location, District Six, architecture

Introduction
What expression does cultural heritage take in the form of physical space? How does the built environment reveal our attitudes to cultural heritage and preservation work? This paper aims to discuss the relations between the District Six Museum in Cape Town and the Red Location Museum in Port Elizabeth, the communities they represent, and the specific memory of a space in the minds of community members. In the South African context, memory is often referred to and debated (and with good reason). But it is also vulnerable. Vicky Leibowitz (2008, 17) focuses on memory in the post-apartheid South African context in her Master of Architecture thesis. She highlights the role it plays as a meaningful term: “Memory exists as a living entity within contemporary South Africa and as a result is particularly susceptible to manipulation as it can change shape and emphasis over time”. Therefore, the roles of museums dealing with the recent past and its memory are especially relevant, and the way these museums engage with their communities as institutions of formalised memory can play a significant role in contemporary society.

In this article we explore the role museums play in the rec-
conciliation process in the aftermath of a politically and ideologically driven conflict, especially as it may have relevance in the global understanding of healing national trauma as it relates to the built-environment. Apartheid involved the relocations of people, as was done in District Six and Red Location in South Africa.

In the first case, the District Six Museum is highlighted as a complex example of a museum which is well engaged with the community, but with various complexities. The District Six area in the city of Cape Town was demolished in 1966 as part of the Apartheid government’s enforcement of the Group Areas Act nr 41 of 1950. The existing community was removed by force, in line with the ideologies of keeping certain racial groups separated. Today the museum is located close to the original site of District Six, but the district remains largely open and unused. This part of Cape Town is still affected by the aftermath of the apartheid regime and in that sense it is a contested area, even twenty-three years after the National Party lost power. Although the violence of forced removals did not directly lead to the deaths of the individuals at the specific site, the erasure and relocation is a form of violence and trauma and the loss of a specific place is relevant to the museums that form the focus of this paper.

In the second case of New Brighton (Red Location), Port Elizabeth, the forced removal of history is not the main narrative. However, the township spaces are products of apartheid era planning policies and the introduction of a museum here also reveals strategies of how museums are perceived and accepted.

Our research question that develops from these examples is:

How can a museum successfully engage with its community in a post-conflict situation, and what kind of factors could lead to the breakdown of museum-community relationships?

In the light of this question, we also address questions such as: How could/does the museum assist the community in remembering and commemorating the past? How should museums as buildings and institutions engage with communities?
Method and research material

This article is a continuation of an assignment that the three authors wrote as part of a Master’s course in ‘Museums and Cultural Heritage in Conflict and Disaster Areas’ at Uppsala University. The examination of that course also included an oral presentation followed by an open discussion between the authors and the audience. The article further expands upon the discussion about the museums’ role in the reconciliation process and an additional focus on the theoretical standpoints highlighted by the selected reading. This is done within the scope of Pierre Nora’s (1989) conceptualisations regarding memory and recorded history.

Our method has consisted of establishing a background, based in cultural heritage and architectural texts. Additionally, the article is the result of a literature study consisting of both general research about reconciliation and post-conflict situations as well as case specific texts about post-apartheid museums in South Africa (Du Plessis 2016, Ernsten 2015). Specific texts referring to architectural design and architecture theory (Woods 2012, Crysler 2012, Marcus and Cameron 2002, Harries 1997) have also been included.

Additionally, we engaged with the analyses of the layout and physical structure of the museums, how the museums are perceived by the communities, and how the museums engage with communities. This was done in terms of a review of architectural publications (Steenkamp 2006, Leibowitz 2008) and cultural heritage texts that serve as background literature to the study (Rankin 2013, Rassool 2006, McEachern 1998). We also include plan and photo analysis of the case studies, as well as the personal experience of one of the authors (Verster 2007). The websites of the relevant museums were consulted to gauge how these institutions are marketed and communicate their focus.

The article is structured around the two main case studies, the District Six Museum and the Red Location Museum. The Apartheid Museum is used to highlight the difference in approach at both the District Six and the Red Location Museums in the way the narrative is brought across to the visitor.

We first focus on spaces of memory and the District Six Museum as it compares to the Apartheid and Red Location Museums. We then focus on how these spaces attempt
to comment on the apartheid past. We discuss the way the selected case studies were accepted or rejected by their communities. Finally, we draw conclusions on the role of museums, as physical institutions, in reconciliation.

Spaces of memory and their museums

THE DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM

District Six was declared an area for white use only by the apartheid regime under the “Group Areas Act” 4. The act assigned different racial groups to specific urban areas. Coloured and black inhabitants of District Six 5 were forced to move and their homes destroyed. Today, the space is still vacant and many debates have been held on the question of heritage and memory in this area (Image 1). Questions such as whether land should be returned to ex-residents, and how it should be redeveloped were key elements in these discussions that began at the fall of apartheid and still continues.

The District Six Museum was opened in 1994 and is housed in the Buitenkant Methodist Church. The exhibition is a combination of various elements installed at the ground floor. It includes photographic panels, street signs, press clippings and other personal artefacts. The exhibition is not organised in a chronological order and the main focus is the map of the former district painted on the museum floor (Image 7). The museum exhibition is described on the museum website and has been visited by Verster (2007). Our analysis is based on experience, basic diagrammatic images of the museum layouts and photographic evidence.

The role of architecture in the experience of museum exhibits is once again mentioned by Leibowitz (2008, 1), and the complexity of revealing and displaying something as ethereal as memories comes to the fore:

The traditional palette of the architect: materiality, site, aesthetics and form all contribute to creation of new national

5 And across South Africa in general.
narratives and in so doing, reveal the difficulties in revising existing memories as they are articulated through architecture. (Leibowitz 2008, 1)

Image 1. District Six in Cape Town (Red) with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology near the centre of the area (Blue). Note the open areas in the otherwise dense city. (Photo: Google Maps 2015, adapted by authors)

THE RED LOCATION MUSEUM

When we discuss the District Six Museum, two other South African museums are also relevant: the Red Location Museum of Struggle in Port Elizabeth, and, to a lesser extent, the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. Both of these museums highlight aspects that the District Six Museum addresses in a different way and they will be analysed in the following pages.

The Red Location Museum is especially relevant and forms the comparative case to the District Six Museum. The Red Location Museum is an example of how the input of the community and the ideals of the museum as an institution were not in line. The museum is designed around the concepts of memory and commemoration, but also becomes what Harries (1997, 242) would describe as a ‘structure that seeks to defeat the terror of time with images of permanence.” It is through this very image of permanence, contrasted scale and in a reflection of perceived uncaring authority where this museum fails. It is in a sense the antithesis of the permanent, but seemingly temporary informal structures of the area around it.
Even though the building has received several architectural awards and critical acclaim the community response has not been as positive\(^6\). The museum was closed in 2014, with residents saying that the authorities built "a house for dead people", while they continue to live in poverty (News 24, 2014). Based on the literature (Steenkamp 2006) and wider readings of popular news sites (News 24, 2014, Sobuwa 2016, online, Matavire 2014, online), we argue that this could have been handled differently. It is our argument that by building a large and extremely expensive museum in an area where housing and basic services remain an issue, the authorities contributed to the reaction of community members, many of whom struggle to make ends meet. The way architects and museum authorities engage with the local context is vital to the success of such a public project. Following from this argument, we see that the District Six Museum, on the other hand, has been much more successful in engaging with the community. It continues to function with changing exhibits, community projects and research projects, as we will see in the following sections.

Image 2. Red Location Museum (Photo: Google earth street view From D Avenue 2010, adapted by Verster, W. 2016).

**The Apartheid Museum**

As a similar large scale project, the Apartheid Museum\(^7\) is relevant because of the way its exhibit is designed in a typical

\(^6\) The architects were Jo Noero and Heinrich Wolff in 2009. Awards include the EICA Award for Architecture, the SAIA Award of Merit, and Excellence and the RIBA Lubetkin Award.

\(^7\) Designed by GAPP Architects, Mashabane Rose Architects, Linda Mvusi Architecture and
chronological structure. It is on a slightly smaller scale than the Red Location Museum, and fits the context in a more subtle way.

The Apartheid Museum fits well into the Johannesburg built-environment through the use of red brick and an integrated design which engages with the views over the city and links with the natural slope of the site. The industrial elements of the building are in line with the mining history of Johannesburg. It is designed without the typological elements of most museums. It does not have a foyer for instance, and visitors are introduced at the entrance, to the linear narrative. Visitors are issued with tickets that classify them at random as either white or non-white (in reference to the racial classification of the Apartheid government) and they immediately enter the museum at different entrance doors. The museum focuses on the narrative related to the rise and fall of the apartheid system.

The Apartheid Museum creates a clear narrative for visitors, in contrast to the District Six Museum, which exhibits are not organised in a classified or logical order. What partly contributes to this is the fact that the museum is not housed in a purpose built, new building. It is housed in a building which

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8 Typology here is in reference to the architectural use of the term, where a building may be recognised due to certain features. A church is recognised by a spire for example.
during apartheid served both as a church and a meeting place for families to exchange information about friends and relatives in prison (Rankin 2013, 91). This fact strengthens the connection between history and memory. Steenkamp (2006, 252) also reiterates that “Memory and the right to articulate and integrate into history a previously unrecognised narrative has become a powerful medium of representation in the new South Africa.”

Image 4. The Red Location Museum in relation to the neighbouring buildings (note the difference in scale). (Photo: Google Maps 2016, adapted by authors, AfriGIS 2016)
TWO ATTEMPTS TO COMMENT ON THE APARTHEID PAST

The District Six Museum, housed within an existing building, creates a suitable space of memory, even though it is not located on the site where the demolitions took place. Although the building is no longer a church, it keeps its connection as a community space and meeting place. In this sense, the District Six Museum challenges the usual institutional models of museums. It functions as a community centre with a memorial and archival component rather than an institution that safeguards, classifies, and orders artefacts and historical data. In a metaphorical sense it becomes a space of memory in the way Harries (1997, 80) interprets the views of Gaston Bachelard on how our homes and houses carry meaning. Harries states (1997, 80) “...the way building spaces speak to us is tied to quite specific personal memories, memories inevitably tied to a particular place, a particular landscape.” When the place and landscape of this place has been erased, the space that houses the traces becomes a type of home.
The exhibit in the District Six Museum is focused on being a living memorial (Kolbe 2016, online) rather than a chronological retelling of events. This is a way of dealing with history as Nora (1989, 8) describes “a memory without past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition.” The exhibits are far more interpretation based, than linked to the belief of “sifted and sorted historical traces.” (Nora, 1989, 8) The space is described as a space where identity and myth become driving factors, other than listed and recorded facts and artefacts. “Through this space we have created an arena which enables us to reaffirm our identity, celebrate our heritage and confront the complexities of our history” (Kolbe 2016, online). Again this point of view links to the museum as a home-like space, a place for the community, in contrast to the institutional view of other museums.

The previous director of the museum, Sandra Proselendis, states that the museum aims to function as an interactive public space. The museum relies on the responses of visitors as part of the total experience (Proselendis, online). Researchers in museum studies, such as Elizabeth Rankin (2013), Ciraj Rassool (2006), and Charmaine McEachern (1998) who are situated within the South African museum and heritage context, are especially positive. But they are perhaps not completely objective about the museum and the role it plays in building and acknowledging a community. Rankin states:

In some senses the District Six Museum presented a counter-culture to establishment museums; now officially recognized as a heritage site, one hopes that it does not lose its uniqueness, based on a generosity of spirit rather than a generous budget.9 (Rankin 2013, 91)

Ciraj Rassool (2006, 13) also mentioned the sentiments of Rankin earlier: “In the museum, an aesthetic arena for working with memory provided a place ‘for the community

9 It is unclear what the heritage status of the site is currently. It is not clear if the site is recognized as a national site or a provincial site by SAHRA (South African Heritage Resources Agency).
to come together and share their experiences and memories.’” His focus is also on the value of the space as a container for the discussions of the community. On the other hand, McEachern sees the museum more as a space for apartheid critique and a container of memory than Raskin’s counter culture centre. She emphasises the role the museum has in facilitating engagement with the past:

The museum is a powerful engagement with South Africa’s past, partly because it’s remembering is located in the very heart of apartheid philosophy and social engineering, the construction of the apartheid city. Not just an historical account of the harm done through this vision to people and places, the museum also provides for the active construction and performance of memory which is at the same time a critique of apartheid itself. (McEachern 1998, 500)

Both these statements, by Rassool on the one hand, and McEachern on the other, highlight how significant this difference is from the situation at the Red Location Museum. The District Six Museum and the Red Location Museum both attempt to comment on the apartheid past. But the Red Location Museum has failed where the District Six Museum has succeeded. Leibowitz (2008, 1) in her study on memory spaces classified Red Location as a “socially integrated memory”. But these early analyses of the building did not take into account the reactions and rejection the building has faced in the year since her study was done.

The new building in the New Brighton Area of Port Elizabeth is much larger than the existing building of the District Six Museum but is also located in the “construction of the apartheid city”. Unlike its counterparts in Johannesburg and Cape Town it has been vandalised and looters have stolen electrical wiring and other components as well as parts of the perimeter fence. Violence has also been directed at the museum staff with a security guard shot dead at the museum. Community leaders such as Mxolisi Nduvane continue to express their unhappiness about housing and the employment of local residents (du Plessis 2016, online).

The museum was designed as the first part of a larger cultural precinct for the New Brighton area. Ironically, the architectural brief called for a complex of buildings that could create “a window of insight into the plight of the inhabitants of these areas as well as for those who were not part of the
struggle” *(SA Architect* 1999, 18, cited in Steenkamp 2006, 252). The local community was supposed to be supported by new economic opportunities, as were provided in the form of training and other work during the construction of the museum buildings. However, as the museum remains closed, the tourist revenue and associated economic growth has not been realised. This links closely to how Chrysler (2012, 302) describes museums and memorials, not as places of engagement and community building, but rather:

> They are the proverbial garbage cans of history, places where unwanted or troublesome memories are relegated, and hence removed from everyday life and forgotten even as they are memorialized.

A recent exhibition: *Let the truth be told*, in June 2016 was held in Port Elizabeth, dealing with the reasons behind the closure of the museum. It was advertised as a visual depiction of why the community closed the museum. This further emphasises the complex contemporary memories compared to history. The museum continues to feature in the local paper (The Herald). After an agreement was reached that the museum could reopen in 2016, residents have once again protested in December of 2016 saying that demands have still not been met (Sobuwa 2016, online). This museum space has not gained the connotation of the ‘home’ in Harries’ sense of the word and thus is not cared for.

**THE MEMORY OF A PLACE**

The District Six Museum on the other hand counteracts the open space left by the demolition of the place it is named after. The museum fulfils the function that Markus and Cameron in architectural analysis (2002, 139) relates to buildings as material reminders of our place and location in time and space. Ernsten (2015, 355) also describes the destruction of District Six as a portrayal of a “violently broken history of place.” Here the museum remains the only material reminder of an erased urban landscape. In 1988 the

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10 This exhibition featured artists Banele Njadayi, Bamanye Lethu Nngxale and Zinziswa Mavuso.
'Hands off District Six' campaign was initiated in order to keep the area “open and bare, memorial scar within the cityscape.” (Layne 2008, quoted in Ernsten 2015, 247). This is only one of several community groups that have an interest in what happens to the site. Even though various other strategies have been envisioned over the years, including the rebuilding of the site, the land still remains open.

This is not necessarily a negative notion. If the site remains open, it relates to the concept of leaving a scar that has been used as a metaphor by architect and theorist in memory and space, Lebbeus Woods. This links with Nora's (1989, 7) discussion on historical turning points as a tear of memory that present the problem of 'the embodiment of memory'. Woods suggested that the image of a scar could be used to deal with the ruins of Sarajevo after the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s, especially because memory and trauma is so complex, and has to be dealt with sensitively in a post-conflict community. The tear needs to be addressed in tangible way. He states:

The only thing we can learn from the experience is how to recover from it, and that is a creative act of our choice that requires our transcending the pain, that is, not merely reliving it by remembering, but transforming the memory into something entirely new and affirmative. (Woods 2012, online)

Woods does not suggest that the scar should be preserved, or that what used to be on a site should be replaced exactly in built form. Rather, he suggests indicating the scar on the building or site. This then transforms the existing building into something new that still acknowledges the pain of traumatic events.

In the same way, the exhibition at the District Six Museum is in line with this way of thinking that is illustrated by architectural theorists, that the imagination has a powerful role to play in how we engage with the past: “If we accept that time and space are inseparable, any consideration of past times is simultaneously a consideration of material and imagined spaces.” (Crysler 2012, 290). Even though the building does not externally engage with the site of destruction, the interior exhibition engages in inventive ways. It engages with physical artefacts but also with memory and imagination.
Image 6 indicates the display boxes of the Red Location Museum. The exhibition of the District Six Museum echoes these boxes. It does not require that a linear or even logical path is followed by the visitor. Unlike the clearly choreographed route at the Apartheid Museum, a visitor can choose their own journey through the display.

Image 5 and 7 indicates the main exhibition space with the map of the former neighbourhood painted on the floor. This is not done with a logical classification system in mind, rather it is organised as one’s memories may be, without clear order but with deep meaning. The museum is described as a “hybrid space” which functions on several levels: as museum archive, as a debate space, and as a role player in restitution debates. The District Six Museum’s main focus is on the ground floor with additional exhibitions on the first floor. In this aspect, the Red Location Museum’s exhibition spaces, with the large corrugated steel ‘memory boxes’ (Image 6), follow the same concept, but here the scale and institutional elements of the space may have overpowered the narrative aspect. It has in fact not lived up to the potential described by Steenkamp (2006, 253) of engaging with all the memories associated with the apartheid past. It has not created a space which both insiders and outsiders are welcome to engage with or to share these memories. The loss remains a strong element in the District Six Museum as McEachern (1998, 507) highlights: “A significant part of this metaphorical form of District Six is in the characterising of this place as lost community”. The exhibition encourages the community to fill the loss with their memories, whether they are real or imagined. This is again, a way wherein the museum space gains the quality of a home, a place of meaning and a place that is cared for.
Neither of these examples are completely successful or unsuccessful. While the Red Location Museum failed in scale and implementation it deservedly received several architectural awards. The exhibition is aesthetically pleasing as well as effective, the rusted corrugated sheeting and the boxes, which allude to the tradition of keepsakes, perform a strong narrative device, in line with the memory concept.
At the District Six Museum there are a few problematic aspects of the museum’s self-image, and if we continue to use Harries’ metaphor, who exactly lives in the house of memory? Part of the museum staff is composed of ex-residents of District Six and they seem to have a somewhat romantic image of their former home. In the memories of former residents, District Six tends to be imagined as an ideal place where everybody respected each other and where children could play safely in the streets, and it is this image that is represented in the museum narrative.

According to Vincent Kolbe, a museum facilitator and ex-resident, his colleagues, in reconstructing their traumatised identity, only want to represent District Six as a good place and speak nothing of the slum and the rogues which also make up a part of the district’s history (Geschier 2007, 50). For these former inhabitants, there is only one way to memorialise District Six, and that is, says Kolbe, by honouring those in the community who stood up for a democratic and non-racial society (Geschier 2007, 49). It is a narrative which does not include all former residents and does not tell the complete story. Rather, it recounts interpretations of the past and defines itself around the community rather than just archival records. “The District Six Museum defines itself as a ‘community museum’ because it sees its work as a locus of social organizing and mobilization.” (Rassool 2006, 17)

It also does not include the people who might have benefitted from the removals, and says nothing about the perpetrators’ perspective. In a museum, this kind of ‘good old times’-narrative might have complicated consequences for the younger generation of South Africans who are coming to visit the museum and are getting presented with the image of an area where everyone lived in peaceful co-existence. The homely narrative is emphasised, and in this safe environment the good memories are celebrated, while the problematic or challenging memories fade.

Kolbe fears that for these young visitors, growing up with poverty, crime and unemployment, District Six might be seen as an unreachable place, and that they might get the impression that bad people only exist in their present (Geschier 2007, 50). The way the museum collection is positioned with a nostalgic slant enforces this view. It does not reveal the true complexities of good and bad, the complexities of victim-perpetrator, and the blurred lines between them are lost.
If the museum facilitators can be said to be living in a utopian past, Ernsten (2015, 358) claims that the museum management has been working according to a utopian vision of the future, when they have been expecting the homecoming of a model society composed of exemplary citizens. McEachern (1998, 501) says that the “themes and connections are played out and given form is very much in the hands of the visitors, many of whom experienced the destruction.” The ethereal quality of memory, and the difficulty of fact, when it is compared to a remembered past again comes to the fore. A political dimension is added to these experiences, there has been ongoing discussions about restitution in the area since the 1990s.

In 1998 the director of the museum said that their first priority were District Sixers, people whose history they show (McEachern 1998, 505). However, the museum was taken by surprise when it from 2006 and onwards began to realise that instead of a claimant community in unison, it had to deal with several different organizations that in some cases were competing over the same sites. These new voices that emerged were challenging the meta-narrative of the museum, that of the idea of the model society (Ernsten 2015, 361). For example, there is the group of the indigenous Khoi people who has been claiming land dispossessed from their ancestors\textsuperscript{11}. How far back in time should the restitution process reach? Ernsten says that the indigenous notions, just like the utopian visionary of the museum, are “the result of a discourse that is challenged by presenting the long-gone past of District Six on its own terms” (Ernsten 2015, 364).

As Geschier points out, the images that the former residents create for District Six “merge into an idealised place, at once a ‘lost place’ from their past and an imagined new community projected into the future” (Geschier 2007, 51). Community and the positive ideas associated with it is connected to the memories that creates:

The good connotations of ‘community’ rest in its ability to conjure up images of supportiveness; of a place of kinship ties, of rest and rejuvenation; of cross-class co-operation. (McEachern 1998, 507)

\textsuperscript{11} In accordance with the Native Land Act of 1913.
With both the utopian image of the past as well as the utopian vision for the future in mind, it might be fair to pose the question: what will people be coming back to? If they are expecting the return to the District Six of their memories there might be considerable disappointment. So far though, there is literally nothing to come back to, since the scar created by the bulldozers and the vacant neighbourhood of the former District Six still dominates the landscape of Cape Town (Image 1).

Attempts at Reconciliation
The area of District Six is still not only a vacant space but very much an open wound in the city and community of Cape Town. Negotiation between all the different interest groups has collapsed due to the fact that there is no consensus on how the open space of District Six should be used (Ernsten 2015, 351). Land restitution to the former inhabitants, as well as just leaving the area as it is, have been among the options discussed. One example of how the debate failed for the District Six Museum is in their work on getting the area appointed as a national heritage site in 2006. This process fell apart because of inadequate communication between the SAHRA\textsuperscript{12} and the city of Cape Town (Ernsten 2015, 356).

We argue that the District Six Museum and its counterpart the Red Location Museum can and should play a leading role in the reconciliation processes but they need to see beyond their own ambitions and really look to the people of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth as their first priority. As McEachern describes (1998, 500), the way South Africans remember and engage with the past is linked to complex issues of representation:

\textsuperscript{12} The South African Heritage Resources Agency.
...themes of remembering for the understanding of both the present and the future emerge as a central problematic in all kinds of representation generally but also in lives of ordinary South Africans striving to come to terms with what was done to them or in their name.

The difficulties related to remembering stated by McEachern in 1998 only four years after the establishment of a new government, have in the decades since become even more problematic. Grobler (2008) has also engaged with the politicisation of memorials and memory spaces. The foundation myth of the 1994 elections and the way museums engage with the narrative creates continued complexity. The role of the truth, memory and the overarching founding myth (that has become a driver of South African identity post 1994) are not always in line. The question arises: What does a local community need to reach reconciliation?

The museum has a role to play, but as we have highlighted, the context and stake holders add multiple layers of meaning, need and memory. The museum can assume the role of a mediator in the reconciliation process between the different actors and instead avoid pushing their own agenda. It may be possible and a museum can be a space for dialogue.

The time for truth commissions has passed in the case of District Six and now the museum, community leaders and government role players need to change their approach due to the risk of re-traumatization for the still living ex-residents (Bonita Bennett, director of the District Six museum, paraphrased in McAlpine 2016, online). The museum should in its role as mediator create a place that presents an opportunity which could set forth a different narrative to evolve and to facilitate community healing and forgiveness (Hooper-Greenhill, quoted in Gibson 2011, online). In a sense the District Six Museum already achieves elements of these ideas in its role as a community museum. The Red Location Museum on the other hand has not been able to engage in the same way. The institutional or governmental, connotation that this building has gained is evidently a driving factor in the way the community engages with it. This situation can again be contrasted to the metaphor of
home used by Harries. Even though the design addressed these concepts on the surface, at District Six we see a space that does what Harries (1997, 208) states:

“we need spaces that play the part of the subconscious, spaces where we store what we do not seem to need, spaces where the relics of our lives are allowed to accumulate, spaces where we may rummage someday to be confronted with some long-forgotten aspect of our past, spaces that provide our dwelling with a usually obscured continuity”.

The District Six Museum does achieve elements of this, but the physical site of the removals still plays a political role. Not all of the ex-residents have stated that they would like to move back, even if the city were to rebuild District Six, because they have lived in the “Cape Flats” for many years and created new lives there. According to Holtorf (2006, 103) certain actions in the name of reconciliation could reproduce the exact same feelings that they try to cure. In the scenario of District Six it could mean uprooting the inhabitants once again by moving them back from the Cape Flats.

Throughout South Africa there have been cases of museums built without a connection to the local community, such as the Red Location Museum. The building itself has alienated the public from the heritage instead of including it in dealing with the past. It has become a museum for tourists instead of being focused solely on the residents of the area (Rankin 2013, 89-90). That is not the case with the District Six Museum, it is more accepted in the community because of its incorporation in the community context. Here it is once again clear how a museum may engage as a space for the process of reconciliation. (Rankin 2013, 95-96). The District Six Museum launched a weekly Jazz Night in 2016 as well as a Supper Club and continues to strengthen its position both as a museum and community centre.

This could be an indication that the community has an increasing wish for reconciliation through a deeper understanding of the events that took place there. Museums and monuments could offer that through the moral framework of the narration of the historic events during the apartheid

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13 The area in Cape Town to where the people from District Six were relocated.
regime, and through “real contextual explanations to commemorative acts” (Rankin 2013, 95-96). But the difficulty museums face as commemorative institutions is further explained by Rankin (2013, 97):

The most demanding task in building cultural capital at memorial museums is to reconcile an acknowledgement of past iniquities with a sense of achievement and future possibilities.

We argue that if a museum in a conflicted area works with the past in an inclusive and open-minded manner, it can contribute to reconciliation. When a museum function as a community museum rather than as an institution, it could lead to the changing of destructive attitudes and behaviour within the context of its direct community. In the long run, this could help members of a specific area to reach “constructive relationships toward sustainable peace” (Brounéus 2008, 12), and in the case of District Six, to the consensus on what to do with the site. In the case of Port Elizabeth, the question on how to allow the museum to function or what to do with the building should it not, is essential. Again, the role of the various stakeholders cannot be underestimated.

Conclusions
Reconciliation remains the most challenging task for museums based in areas dealing with contested sites. In South Africa this is an ongoing challenge as new generations continue to engage with the truth, or even the perceived truth, of the past. The balance between past and present is difficult to achieve. But if a museum has a sensitive community focused approach, it could handle the various interests, memories and agendas and create a space where the contested site becomes less traumatic, where the inscription of new memories could be facilitated, a place for community gathering where a space for dialogue is created.

In the case of the Red Location Museum, the failure in the approach to the local community, the design and scale of the building and the perception of authority, all contribute to the current state of affairs. A situation like this is complex, a building with a strong exhibition, and designed by award winning architects, can still fail if it seems to be aimed at
tourists rather than at the community itself. Compared to this, the District Six Museum is successful, in practical terms, but also in the metaphorical sense discussed earlier. The community is part of how the museum forms its exhibitions. Even though there has been some critique of the museum’s way of portraying the former district using a ‘good old times’-narrative, it still has become a focus area in Cape Town and has moved away from being seen as an institution.

We conclude that museums would benefit from working closely with the conflict site, the community and governmental organisations to reach a mutual acknowledgement of shared history and all the perspectives of this shared history. Museums should try to mediate or at least become a meeting space for different parties who want to be part of the societal process to understand history in a more nuanced way, and also engage with the complex narratives.

In some cases, an award winning architectural intervention is not the best vehicle to deal with an already vulnerable community’s past. In some cases, the building and the museum as an institution may need to be re-evaluated to find their best role in a specific context.

References


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**List of figures**

Image 1: Cape Town (Google Maps 2015, adapted by authors) [accessed 2016-03-02]

Image 2: Red Location Museum. (Google Earth Streetview 2010). Online: https://www.google.co.za/maps/@-33.8982625,25.6059756,3a,75y,352.1h,88.11t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1s-
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Tidskrift för ABM | Vol. 2. No. 2, 2017, s. 36-60 | Institutionen för ABM,
Uppsala universitet

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Image 3: Entrance to the Apartheid Museum (Pieter Pieters 2012, with permission from photographer)
Image 4: Map of Red Location indicating museum (2016) (Google Maps 2016 with AfriGIS, adapted by authors)
Image 5. District Six Museum interior with salvaged street names, Cape Town 2016 (Zouna Meades 2016, used with permission of photographer)
Image 6: Sketched section of a memory box at the Red Location Museum, designed by Noero Wolff Architects (Verster, W 2014)
Image 7: Detail of the floor map in the District Six Museum (Zouna Meades 2016, used with permission of photographer).

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