

Empathic work that solves problems is critical

 By [Alayne Reesberg](#)

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"Design needs to be human user-focused instead of policy-focused."

The future relies on the youth of today, creative people who can 'make', crafts from the past and a commitment to get involved and solve problems from the ground-up, predicts Alayne Reesberg, CEO of the World Design Capital 2014, Cape Town.

These are her trends for the coming year:

1. Youth tsunami: Pay attention to the youth, says Reesberg, and find a way to tap into the exceptional potential of more than half the population of South Africa, and Africa. "Not empowering them in a paternalistic way, but meeting them where their needs are. This is Generation Y or Why Not? They will challenge everything... look at Julius Malema. Get over yourself, they will dig us out of this hole we are in, this global recession. This is a youth tsunami."

2. Rise of the maker movement: The global maker movement is gaining traction. It centres around creative people turning their hobbies and talents into businesses, inventing things. 'Makers' and the maker economy spurred on by a more collaborative Millennial generation are predicted to assist the global economy in recovering after this recession. In Africa 'making' is a way of life, Reesberg points out, and that in some ways, Africa was here first and is primed for 'maker culture'.

3. Artisan food: The reinvention of craft products and services, skills that were lost, is driven by a "deep need to live a sustainable life", Reesberg explains. Becoming a creator and inventor gives joy, releases one from the treadmill of consumerism. "In a way it is a return and remembering of the past, honouring the memory of skills and relearning. I would argue that the way it also resonates so deeply, is because politicians and governments are not going to solve problems, we have to get on with it. Self reliance is a core frontier skill. This is a frontier country."

4. Urban equality: More people are now living in cities than rural areas and the younger citizens of cities are demanding better amenities: public spaces, public amenities, etc. These new citizens want a quality of life in urban centres, and are driving the need for affordable housing, transport, entertainment and crowdsourced events to tap into that need for an enhanced quality of life in the city.

5. Urban greening: Parks, farming co-ops - where there is a patch of green land: plant something.

6. Cross-silo collaboration: Cross-silo collaboration is becoming a norm rather than an exception. "We have an active and engaged citizenry who are willing to show up. Citizens can voice their need and demand what they need."

The World Design Capital created inspiration. 2014 for me has forever banished any kind of idea about Afro-pessimism. When you focus on something at the human level, it gives you perspective," Reesberg recounts.

7. The core of good design is empathy: Design needs to be human user-focused instead of policy-focussed. It restores a sense of agency when people can act effectively, locally. It is dangerous for politicians, as an engaged citizenry is critical, Reesberg reiterates.

8. Celebrating handmade, homemade: The texture, the care, the joy... "For artists, instead of merely producing the way they do, they need to create less expensive, but affordable art."

9. Collaborations: The development of created curricula to train designers in terms of their problems solving capability, is going ahead in Cape Town, Reesberg says. "It is a combination of developed market knowledge and expertise, technology transfer, using deep knowledge, but challenging global solutions with our frontier knowledge and needs."

10. Design as a problem-solving discipline: People need to move from an activism role to an implementation role. "There is an urgency to resolve things definitively. Keep iterating on the ground and that will eventually impact up, on national government. At the Policy Design Conference last year, academic Hester du Plessis, asked the question: 'What if we took the National Development Plan and turned it into a set of design challenges?' What if, indeed.

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**[Alayne Reesberg](#) was interviewed by [Louise Burgers](#), specialist editor of Biz Trends 2015.*

ABOUT ALAYNE REESBERG

Alayne Reesberg is the CEO of Cape Town Design, NPC - the implementing agency for the World Design Capital 2014. Reesberg followed a career in diplomacy and after a Master's degree in Communication studies, moved into management consulting. She joined the Microsoft Corporation at its Seattle headquarters in 2001, where she worked for six years in Bill Gates' Enterprise Division.

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