

# The everything of nothing

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Destination: South Africa

“Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing”

Lord Henry, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

Often when people think about richness they think about material things, a big house, a brand new car, a lot of zeros in their bank account or other things, but after visiting the Langa township people may start to think differently. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of January the South Africa group went to visit the township and the way it operates, not only economically or socially, but ethically. We arrived at the Guga S'Thebe Arts and Culture Centre, place that didn't quite fit into the idea i had of a township, it was a big building full of beautiful colors on the walls, everywhere you looked there was art, music and people smiling, after a talk of how this place helps local young people adquire skills that are going to be useful for a lifetime, we went on to walk through the township, our guide seemed to know everyone, he said hello by name to every single person that walked passed, nonetheless he had grown up with them. We kept walking and went into a house that had one living room/kitchen/, one bathroom and 4 bedrooms, I imagined a family of 6 or 7 might leave there, couldn't have been more wrong, it was four different families, with 4 or 5 people each, one in each room and some sleeping in the floor of the common area, which was next to the little kitchen, they explained that this type of houses were used to hold black people during the apartheid, people weren't allowed to go outside their houses, and to make sure of that the military used to roam the streets 24/7.

The tour continued through the township and we got to little huts made out of recycled materials, wood pallets made up the walls and some tarpaulins for the roofs, they told us that this huts came up as a solution for the lack of privacy that families suffered from in houses like the first one, a question since we got there

arouse inside my mind and probably in the mind of others, “How can people live like this?”. There was mud everywhere and tons of empty cigarette packs and broken bottles of vodka, kids were playing around broken glass barefoot. The guide took us to my favorite part of the trip, Happy feet, a dancing group for local kids that was created with the aim of setting them away from all those bottles of vodka and tons of cigarette packs, to make sure they don't fall on a path that wouldn't be good for them, these kids started running out of their homes as soon as they heard the bus arriving, they jumped around and hugged us from the moment we got off.



KIDS RUNNING TOWARDS US AFTER THE MUSIC STARTED PLAYING

They seemed so happy even though they didn't have much, they performed some South African dances and kept smiling during the whole thing, it was hot, it was incredibly sunny, but they seemed like they were having the time of their life's, after they danced we gave them some toys that we got in Denmark, their smile was the most priceless thing, they had no idea they were going to get something, and yet they where nicer than most people ever get to be.

Another thing that amazed me was the contrast with the environment of the day before, we went to a beach in one of the rich zones in the city, brand new cars, expensive hotels and fancy restaurants were everywhere to be seen, the one thing you couldn't see that many of, was kids having fun, all (or at least most) were sitting next to the road in some café, on their phones, while being surrounded by an amazing view, and their families, they seemed fine, but not even near to happy. This kids got to choose what, where and when they wanted to eat, something completely normal in our day to day, but after seeing kids that may be busy thinking if they are going to get to eat, you see it in a different way.

People have a saying for almost everything, but one that I now understand differently is "You don't know what you have until you don't have it anymore". People in the township were happy, friendly and full of love to spare, they have been through things we couldn't even think of, since they were born some of these kids know nothing but a lifestyle of making the best out of what they get, and being happy doing so. On the other hand some kids in Cape Town were born with their future secured, a good house and life ever since they were born, a job in their parent's company that they can get for only being who they are, and yet they don't seem to acknowledge what they have, this may sound like an exaggeration, especially coming from a Mexican 15 year old kid living in 9,288 km from his home, but sometimes you don't need to have much to feel like you have everything.



Township kids organizing to get a toy



Restaurant near to the beach