



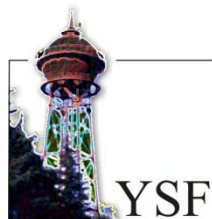
*South African City Studies Conference – Cape Town, 7-9 September 2011*



Street trading pilot stalls – design workshop, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Architecture Students, 25 August 2011

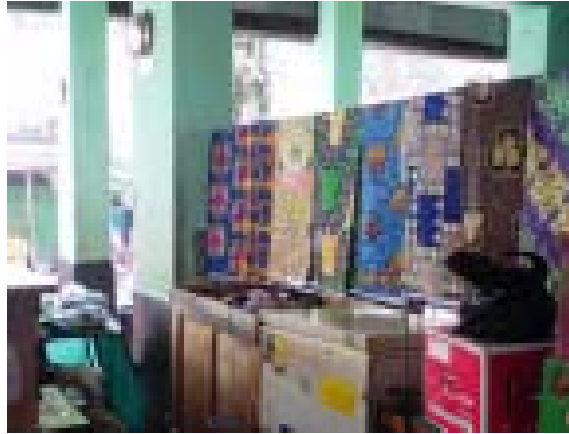
# The politics of community engagement – the case of Yeoville Studio

Dr Claire Benit-Gbaffou  
Yeoville Studio coordinator  
Senior Lecturer: School of  
Architecture and Planning



# Outline

1. Research – a special focus on trading
2. Entering the political arena
3. Ways forward?



# Outline

1. Brief presentation –  
Yeoville Studio
2. One short story of  
engagement
3. Lessons learnt?



Masters students present their design model for the soccer field to a group of residents, April 2010.



# 1. What is Yeoville Studio?

A partnership  
between  
academia and  
community  
organizations

A teaching  
and learning  
initiative

An academic,  
multidisciplinary focus  
on a very local space  
(2010&2011)

Inaugural workshop, Yeoville, 28 February 2010



To empower communities to have a say in their environment:  
-with **socially relevant** research / **locally adapted** design or policy solutions;  
-as **crystallizing debates** on local issues  
-**exploring and imagining alternative** urban futures with residents

## How?

1. Monthly strategic meetings with local leaders
2. Participation in monthly ward meetings, YSF meetings
3. Publication in Yeovue News (local), website, Library office, Newsletter
4. Community workshops (data collection/ feedback)
5. Public events (exhibitions, installations)

## Four (jointly defined) themes:

1. Yeoville Stories
2. Public spaces/ trading
3. African Diversity
4. Housing

## Scale of the project:

2010: 15 staff members involved for one year / 20 courses / 200 students

2011: 13 staff members / 10 courses / 130 students



## 2. One short story of community engagement



Street trading illegal(ised) but present in RR  
(Street trading perception survey)



Market governance survey – Market not  
working as trading solution

### a) Engaging into localised and practical research on trading in Yeoville



Shopkeeper: 'Without them Yeoville is a  
ghost town" (trading video)

-(*expected*) complaints  
about street trading's lack  
of management

-(*surprising*) support to  
street trading as 'part of  
the street vibe and  
activity'

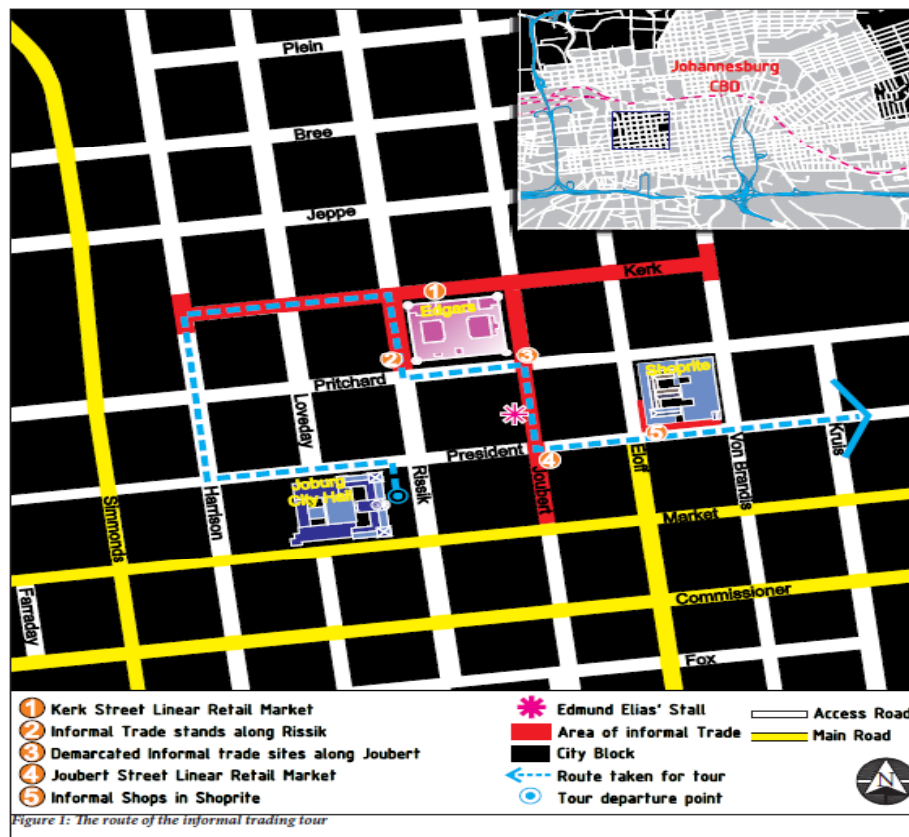
-(*expected*) lack of  
economic attractiveness of  
the market

*...Findings challenging  
dominant discourses and  
policies*

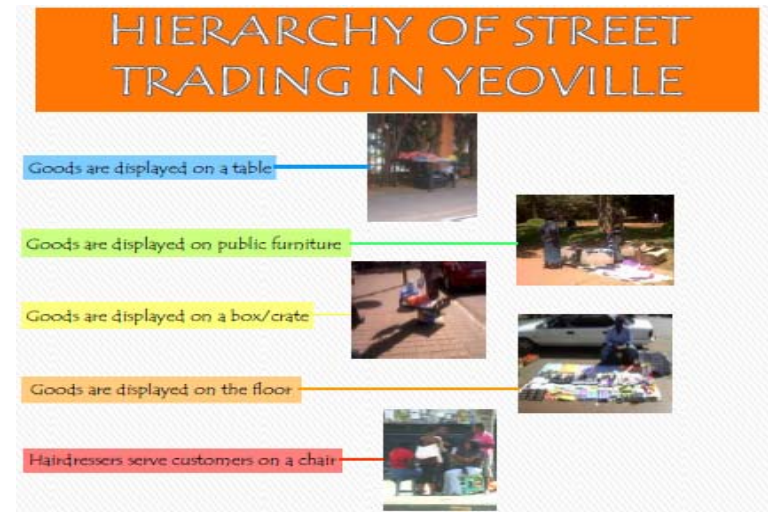
-(*surprising*) this is an issue  
of market design rather  
than street trading  
competition

... Proactive, empirical, solution-oriented research

- Looking for alternatives elsewhere in the city – towards integrated trading solutions



Integrated trading solutions – examples from the inner city



Typology of street trading stalls – towards designing locally adapted and street-friendly stalls

- Basing recommendations on knowledge/ workshops: ex- designing locally adapted street trading stalls



Street traders stalls – design workshop with 2nd year students (in progress)

## b) From research to politics

### Publicising and debating our findings in various platforms:

- YS participates in Trading Task Team meetings (Dec 2010-March 2011)
- YS facilitates a workshop with street traders towards a street traders position paper (March 2011)

- YS publishes findings and 'recommendations' in the local community newspaper (Yeovue News)/ our partner.



Yeoville Studio facilitates workshop for street traders' position paper, with YS partner (March 2011)

➔ *Divided partners: where to stand?*

**Informal trading in Yeoville Bellevue - a study by Yeoville Studio, Wits University**

Yeoville Studio reports on the results of research they did in Yeoville Bellevue on street trading. This is being published as a contribution to the debate about the future of street trading. Yeovue News does not necessarily agree with or support the findings and views contained in this article.

**Introduction**  
Our conclusions on (formal/informal) trading are based on several Yeoville Studio projects:

- Second year planning students: Survey on perceptions of street traders (street traders, pedestrians, shop keepers) (quantitative survey: sample = 30)
- Masters thesis in Development Planning (Willy Claude): Relationships between formal and informal traders in Rockey-Raleigh (quantitative survey: sample = 30)
- Third year planning students: Survey with the market traders on the theme of the market governance and politics (qualitative and quantitative survey: sample = 18)
- Senior researchers' (Aly Karim, Margaret Kibbe) survey on informal traders in Yeoville (quantitative survey: sample = 30)

**Survey results on street trading in Rockey-Raleigh**

- Street trading does offer a specific service to Yeoville residents and users: it is convenient, it is quick and easy, it is cheap, it is there.
- Street trading is seen as contributing to street safety and security, as street traders are always present, they are the eyes of the street, they have an interest in street safety.
- Street trading is also seen as contributing to culture, due to the extent it is an illegal activity, essentially because there is no regulation or control over the goods sold.
- Street trading contributes to street vibrancy and local identity, it is seen as attracting customers in the area, and being generally good for business.
- Street traders are not able to diversify their products due to their illegal status (all selling bananas - not costly if confiscated). This also limits business partnerships with formal shops.
- Street trading is seen as generating litter and sometimes blocking pedestrian traffic, mostly because it is not managed.
- Street traders are ready to pay a fee for the right to trade in the street.

**Survey results on Market traders**

1. Many market traders are struggling and complaining about the lack of business in Yeoville market.

**What is Yeoville Studio?**

- A partnership between academics and community
- An academic, multidisciplinary focus on a very local space
- A leading engineering initiative

**Objectives and principles**

- To produce socially relevant research / locally adapted design or policy solutions
- To train students to real life situations (guidance from academics and community members)
- To stimulate debate on local issues, explore and imagine other future forms with residents
- Because Planning and Architecture are not only for the people they need to be with the people - Yeoville Studio works in partnership with the YSP and the YCCT in Yeoville Bellevue

**Conclusions - suggestions based on research results so far**

- It does not make economic sense to ban street trading (that works business-wise and works for the poorest) and expand the market (that does not fully work as business and cannot accommodate the poorest).
- The problems with the lack of business in market cannot be reduced to street trading competition - it is very likely that chasing away street traders won't solve the market issues.
- The problems with street traders relate mostly to their lack of management (due to their illegal status). Legislating them would contribute to their own growth, diversification and to Rockey-Raleigh development as a vibrant retail street.
- There is not ONE solution to trading issues in Yeoville but a variety of solutions that can accommodate different types of buying (impulse, on the street / pre-mediated, in the market) and different types of traders (curiousities / entrepreneurs). Only this diversity can lead to making Yeoville both a vibrant and inclusive trading area, that can grow, diversify, attract new customers.

**Suggestions - enhancing the overall commercial attractiveness of the area**

**Short term: restructure the market to attract more customers especially INSIDE:**

- Open more circulation paths inside the market (internal streets, not main) to increase the number of 'external' stalls
- More light needs to come in the market (roof windows? retractable roof? internal 'ventrators') to make it less dark
- Organize regular cultural events inside on track ends to attract customers / install children play area or other attracting activities / services
- Better advertising of the market (of restaurants)

**2. Average of market traders interviewed:**

- All vegetable traders ON EXTERNAL STALLS were happy;
- All traders of non-specialized items (groceries, beauty products, clothing) ON INTERNAL STALLS were not happy;
- Some traders of hyper-specialized items (African food products) ON INTERNAL STALLS were happy.

Although some traders say lack of business in the market is because of street trading, it seems it is also linked to the type of product sold (specialized or not) and the stalls' location (internal / external) in the market (like in MOST African city markets).

**3. Most market traders were concerned about the security of their loans and saw themselves as long term traders in the market (a socio-economic investment). This contrasted with the management view who saw the market as a temporary place for traders, from which market traders should graduate so as to leave stalls for other traders (political solution to unemployment facilitating the trading list)**

**4. Some market traders were happy to have several stalls and to be able to sub-out their stall (business development and sustainability). This contrasted**

Page 2:

Yeoville Studio publishes its findings for debate in *Yeovue News*, March 2011

"Yeovue news does not necessarily agree with nor support the findings and views contained in this article"



# Challenging the dominant views, proposing alternatives for debate = making enemies?



YS writes to market traders, refuting accusation and offering debate, April 2011

- Divided YS partners (different agendas YSF-YBCDT-SANTRA)

- Implicitly / explicitly stressing past City policy failures (to avoid making them again)

- Market traders' attack on Yeoville Studio

*Difficult post-electoral context :*

*Trading steering committee meetings suspended after the elections*

*No-one driving the process publically and collectively (individual initiatives) – fragmented Yeoville community*



# Elaborating responses to political challenges



- Divided YS partners  
(different agendas YSF-YBCDT-SANTRA)

- ➔ Dialogue with each partner
- ➔ Outlining / consolidating common positions and interests (e.g. a management structure for Yeoville trading as a whole.
- ➔ An unlikely but necessary 'local coalition'

- Implicitly / explicitly stressing past City policy failures (to avoid making them again)

- ➔ Engaging the Dpt of Economic Development (CoJ) (presentation April 2011)

- Market traders' attack on Yeoville Studio

- ➔ Official letter
- ➔ (reiterated) proposal for market workshops: debate on findings / market design
- ➔ Continued engagement (other YS activities)

Continuous engagement:  
Responding to requests for support /  
Being available: not pushing

Publicisation of YS activities –  
bring in the broader picture

**Classic, minimal response**

Local coalition building – idea of a 'Pilot Yeoville Trading solution'

Provoking public debate? Final Yeoville Studio exhibition 2011 on trading

**A more proactive involvement?**



## Conclusion - some reflections on the way

### **1) Community- which community?**

We knew that knowledge is power... so we wanted to empower our community partners with knowledge. Which partners? (the initial partners? The partners who ask for support? The partner we feel needs the most support? The partners that 'deserve' (?) it?...)

### **2) Where to draw the line? Can wits be 'neutral' in highly political processes?**

Wits became a political player in a hot/ contested political debate, willingly or not... Issue of exploring new avenues, challenging existing/dominant representations: it is political.

### **3) Self-reflexivity and positioning**

Having accepted that it is important to be self-reflective and try and be consistent with one's position. A difficult balance in times of rapid urban/ political change and obvious inequalities (learning through trials and errors)

### **4) Local level partnerships versus city-level engagements**

Initially we wanted to restrict our direct engagement to 'the community' level. While this remains the main focus it is often untenable.

*... To be followed!*