

**‘Muddling-through’: urban regeneration in Johannesburg’s inner city<sup>1</sup>**

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On the afternoon of 11th July 2000, a funny thing happened in Newtown, Johannesburg<sup>2</sup>. An artistic event, staged during the international *Urban Futures* conference and aimed at ‘interrogating the spaces left behind after Apartheid’, found itself derailed by a strong gust of wind – and in the process, revealed something of the unpredictability and heterogeneity of the hosting city. The event ‘Under Heaven (Alien/Native)’, orchestrated by Marlaine Tosoni, was to see delegates attending conference proceedings in the imposing Electric Workshop building, bombarded during their tea break by 1 500 postcards from a small aeroplane, flying three hundred meters above their heads. But the wind, at four o’clock on that crisp winter’s day, was to decide otherwise and propelled the postcards a couple of blocks east, to the adjacent business district. Arguably the most poetic and spectacular event of the conference went by, unnoticed. A couple of minutes later, a group of street children descended on the delegation from Diagonal Street, selling for R5 each (less than 1 Euro) the handfuls of *Alien/Native* postcards they had picked up on the street. Commenting on the episode, Johannesburg-based artist and curator Stephen Hoobs remarked how ‘a project whose original meaning was about citizenship and xenophobia became about an unearthing of very real social and economic needs identifiable at ground level. [...] Effectively, the city had redefined the meaning that Tosoni had intended for her work’<sup>3</sup>.

The poignant irony in such re-appropriation of ethereal images by some of Johannesburg’s most vulnerable inner city residents was hopefully not lost on the delegates of this multinational urban gathering, aimed at evaluating sustainable urban growth in the context of rapid globalisation. No doubt, it served as a stark reminder of the challenges facing their fraternity in this ‘urban century’ (UNCHS 2001). But more subtly perhaps, it hinted at the difficulties of planning for, acting in, and making sense of, this ‘axiomatic 21<sup>st</sup> century city’ (Beall, Crankshaw, and Parnell 2002). For in Johannesburg, as in other cities of the South (and of the North<sup>4</sup>!), all is not necessarily what it seems, and there, as elsewhere, the city appears ultimately to find ways of impressing its own reality on any visions and hopes of a different urban future.

It is to these shadowy spaces, these spaces of in-between, and the hybrid apertures that emanate from them, that I want to bring attention to in this paper. As urban regeneration gets underway in the inner city of Johannesburg under the banner of metropolitan ‘African World-Class City’ ambitions (GJMC 2001), I argue that the future of the inner city remains a complex, ambiguous and uncertain outcome. Prestige projects, slum-clearings and broader attempts at formalising the informal in an attempt to ‘extract value from the city’ (Weber

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<sup>2</sup> Newtown is situated on the western front of Johannesburg’s inner city, adjacent to the ‘old’ Central Business District. Various waves of regeneration initiatives, starting as early as 1904, have sought to redefine this original brick-making area. The latest such endeavour is aimed at bolstering its status as a cultural centre for the city (see: [www.newtown.co.za](http://www.newtown.co.za)).

<sup>3</sup> For more details about the *Alien/Native* event and other artistic contributions to the *Urban Futures* cultural programme, see (Hoobs 2001). For an account of the overall *Urban Futures* conference, see (Mabin 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Note on the need to bridge the gap between literatures that speak of the developmental South and the developed north – clearly inappropriate in the context of Jhb. ???

2002) undoubtedly characterise activities of the present-day City Council, and in the process seemingly brings it into the fold of international homogenising practises in the realm of urban development. But reading such developments as merely another expression of neo-liberalism's victory over the city (ICF 2004) has the unfortunate effect of hiding long-standing structural accommodations as well as a multitude of intricate and often furtive compromises engendered on the ground, on a daily basis. Most fundamentally perhaps, explanations that stress the implacable logic of capital fail to address the context of chaos and confusion within which decisions are made and purportedly implemented. In this paper, I argue that current urban regeneration initiatives in Johannesburg's inner city are not so much the result of a deliberate neo-liberal policy agenda being pushed forward in a purposive and effective manner but rather, that they are the unfortunate effect of un-imaginative responses to (desperate attempts at times at) dealing with contingency - in a highly complex, fast-changing, and chaotic (let alone violent) inner city environment.

### **Making the World City in inner city Johannesburg?**

In a move reminiscent of cities across the globe, Johannesburg's city managers have opted to conceive of the future of the city in terms of a well-trodden imagery, that of the 'World City'. The city's unquestionable 'command and control' functions in the regional sub-Saharan economy have, undoubtedly, helped to bolster such ambitions. But the adoption of this urban vision has arguably a lot to do, also, with the allure that 'World/Global cities' concepts have come to exert in the world of policy-advocates and city managers (Robinson 2002). Rather indiscriminately derived from World/Global City literature and its offshoots (Friedmann 1986; Sassen 1991; Sassen 1994), this powerful strand of urban policy work, has emphasised the value of "going global" and the normative requirement of 'moving up the hierarchy of world cities'. That is, in spite of the relatively well documented polarising tendencies of such development patterns (labour-market segmentation, class and ethnic conflict, socio-spatial polarisation)<sup>5</sup>. In its wake a plethora of policies have been devised emphasising the kind of, and location of, investment expenditures required to render cities more competitive 'in a globalised economy'. Writers of 'wannabe world cities'<sup>6</sup> in the South have remarked on the parallelisms between techniques of 'world-class-city-isation' and boosterist urban policies long developed in the cities of the North (Harvey 1989). More recently, the work of urban scholars on the 'neo-liberal' city have proved particularly useful in highlighting city governments' active role and active engagement in transforming the city into a potent productive node in the global economy – at the expense, largely, of its social reproduction functions (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Nicholls 2004; Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002).

In Johannesburg, urban regeneration in the inner city seems, at first glance, to be following rather blindly in these footsteps. After all, the Inner City strategy's stated objective is to 'raise and sustain private investment leading to steady rise in property values' (CoJ 2003):84). Accordingly, the prestige projects of Mandela Bridge, the Newtown Cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, polarised cities are not exclusively post-fordist, global cities (Hamnett 1994; Marcuse 1989). The literature on colonial cities, on cities in the Third World, on southern megalopolis, also points to polarised urban experiences. Nor are all 'cities in globalisation' equally as polarised. There is thus an inherent danger in these rather broad sweeping comments and concepts such as 'world cities', 'post-fordist cities' that need to be eschewed in favour of more precise characterisations for specific cities.

<sup>6</sup> The expression is from (Stanley 2003).

Precinct and Constitutional Hill, fit the bill of city-marketing and image-making, characteristic of boosterist urban strategies (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002). Meanwhile, the encroachment of City Improvement Districts on the Eastern side of the inner city, the development of bunker-blocks in the banking district aimed at protecting capital's stake in the city, or again, the attempt to foster close relationships with business through investment breakfasts, etc. - all point to a certain cosying up of Council with private interests in the city. Such developments, coupled with evictions of residents/squatters from downgraded and slum-like and 'obsolescent' buildings' (Weber 2002), the apparent attempt to toughen up on city by-laws, and it is hard to avoid the feeling that 'World Class' imageries are in Johannesburg's inner-city, as elsewhere, helping to recast urban spaces in the interest of dominant elites (ICF 2004; Smith 2002). The current buzz around falling office vacancy rates, increasing rentals, new property developments and the embryonic emergence of 'loft living' in the erstwhile CBD ([www.joburg.org.za](http://www.joburg.org.za)) would indicate that such initiatives are in fact starting to bear fruit.

For writers such as Lindsey Bremner, these policy directions indicate a shift from more inclusive forms of imagining the post-apartheid central city (Bremner 2002a; Bremner 2002b). She points to the 1997 'Myivuke' vision for the Inner city, developed in the context of transition and a protracted, often painful, metropolitan institutional transformation process, as an ideal of regeneration focused on "stabilising decline and promoting neighbourhood organisation as a precursor to growth" (Bremner 2000). Borne out of three independent consultation processes conducted simultaneously by (local and provincial) government officials, business and community groupings, producing surprisingly similar outcomes, the inner-city vision was coined as (op.cit):

"The Golden Heartbeat of Africa. A dynamic city that works.  
Liveable, safe, well managed and welcoming.  
People centred, accessible and celebrating cultural diversity.  
A vibrant 24 hour city. A city for residents, workers, tourists, entrepreneurs and learners.  
Focused on the twenty first century, respecting its heritage and capitalising on its position in South Africa, Africa and the whole world, a truly global city.  
The trading hub of Africa thriving through participation, partnerships and the spirit of ubuntu".

Plans devised and studies conducted in the ensuing month tried to capture something of the extraordinary changes that the erstwhile centre of Apartheid economic power had undergone<sup>7</sup>. A concerted attempt to think differently the changed economy of the inner city, emphasising its heterogeneity, its extraordinary potential for dynamism and growth, in spite of white capital's flight and the withdrawal of international head-quarters (interview with Neil Fraser, August 2002). Urban researcher and consultant Richard Tomlinson, urged for capitalising on the particularities of the inner-city, its emerging African-ness, and the potential that turning to different readings and geographies of economic flows might present for regeneration, instead of turning to American precept on overcoming inner city blight (Tomlinson 1999).

So why then are we seeing the successful implementation of the prestige, place-making projects on the Eastern side of the CBD? Why are the residential sections of the inner city not benefiting from similar attention? Why are community projects struggling on the ground? And why are people being evicted without necessary compensatory mechanisms, hawkers' wares confiscated? Why is a Mandela Bridge built, and not an improved bus system to ferry Soweto children to the various education institutions scattered across the inner city?

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance (GAPP 1999; Tomlinson and Rogerson 1999).

For Ish Mkabela, long-standing community organiser and consultant to many inner city regeneration initiatives, stating the question in such dichotomic terms is ‘a very simplistic approach. The choices are simply much less straightforward than they appear’. I am inclined to agree with him. Consider this:

### **What you see is not necessarily what you get<sup>8</sup>**

19 May: I leave the room feeling intrigued, flustered. This guy<sup>9</sup> knows the city so intimately – with a knowledge that few can contest, borne of so many years of living and treading the city’s darkest corner - those that somehow reveal the essence of a city. He talks of his job as implementing the inner city vision, in a way that is particularly South African, that builds on the dynamics of Joburg, its uniqueness – ‘not those US or UK models that outsiders want to impose on us’. He talks of the need to start with the basics and that means, simply, addressing ‘the total chaos out there’ – a chaos made of 25 years of decay. He talks of the need to negotiate, talk, engage – with taxi organisations, with drug barons, with residents...But what of that ‘war room’<sup>10</sup>? Hardly a conciliatory environment to think out inner city regeneration. And those ‘red ants’<sup>11</sup>... Renewal as warfare? But against whom and for what? The messages seem so conflicting... And somehow his legitimating of evictions on grounds of health and safety hazards leaves me uneasy. Does he think I will buy it unflinchingly? Undoubtedly these are dangerous conditions but what next? Displacement of intractable problems simply? And what of developmental obligations, the right to decent housing – let alone the right to being treated decently? Ma, it’s gentrification, simply – ‘cleaning up means cleaning out!

I step outside. It’s cold and bright; the light is almost aggressive. I feel bewildered and out of place, shaken in my surface knowledge of the inner city by the words I have just heard – Nigerian drug barons offering to buy up and clean-up Hillbrow in exchange for a blind eye and the ceasing of police harassment; excrement falling out of balconies; buildings in such dire conditions that cleaning exercises unveil cars buried deep under three meters of shit; pacts with illegal tenants to spruce up the appearance of buildings; stories of rural migrants being ‘intercepted’ at Park Station<sup>12</sup> and led to ‘vertical squatting’ accommodation (office blocks converted into informal residential) by organised rental slumlords; an old lady, trying to light up an electric oven with coal; people selling baths for R2(check) while no money is being paid into Council accounts; buildings as no-go areas because of the presence of too many AK47 and threats to Council officials; migrants evicted in during clean-up operations, back again, grinning and smoking dope just three weeks later; children stacked in their rooms, with a terrible stare, because the road to Joubert Park is simply too unsafe for them to tread... And images of my quintessentially Joburg official sitting amongst Karoo farmworkers, drinking with them around a fire and telling stories of iGoli, of the city of gold, of the gangs of Hillbrow and Berea, the hard, dangerous city life, the life of legends – eyes raptured...

I decide to take a drive. I stumble on Joubert Park. I’ve forgotten just how close it was, how compact it is. High rise buildings, impossible traffic, taxis conjugating an alternative grammar of sign languages and traffic regulations. And people in the streets, everywhere, standing, walking, women carrying such heavy parcels on their heads I wonder they do not collapse, trim looking professionals,

<sup>8</sup> Title inspired by the article of (Swilling, Simone, and Khan 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Martin New, Inner City Task Force coordinator and manger. Interview conducted in Johannesburg on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

<sup>10</sup> The ‘war room’ is the Inner City Task Force meeting room. On the walls, spears, shambock?, and photos of the squalor and filth found in some of the ‘reclaimed’ buildings. I learn later that the spears and other such weapons are part of the booty found in buildings during clean-up operations –those that the Council has allowed to be displayed. AK47s and other firearms are still in the Evidence department.

<sup>11</sup> Workers of a private security company (Wozani Security), dressed in red uniforms and hired to carry out the Council’s ‘clean up’ operations. There have been many complaints of violence and looting during evictions.

<sup>12</sup> The main railway and bus station in Johannesburg, converging flows of people from South Africa’s hinterland and beyond into the inner city.

rough and tired old men, ‘totsis’. Life and chaos - as if anything could happen anytime. A real city at last? No whites.

Suddenly, commotion. A fire has broken out in one of the buildings. I see the flames coming out. People screaming, people joking, a mass assembling far too close to the building until the fire brigade arrives pushing drivers into another flow of traffic. I am forced out.

I feel bewildered and out of place.

20 May I read in *The Star* that the building was an illegally converted office block. A creche with more than 60 children on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor. No one was killed.

15<sup>th</sup> June Open meeting on housing organised by Councillor Mathoma – Ward 59, in Joubert Park’s Green House<sup>13</sup>. I’m back again in Joubert Park. Night is falling and as I park I am accosted by a man, looking for the meeting place. He mistakes me for a Council official. He tells me hurriedly he owns a bakery in the basement of the building that was on fire the other day and is trying to buy up the building from the absentee landlord. ‘Water and electricity have been cut off you see. How can you run a business like that?’ So now people are paying in his account and things are getting sorted. They’re slowly upgrading the rooms. No, he’s ‘not trying to con the tenants like so many of these gangster slumlords here, otherwise he wouldn’t pitch at the public meeting’. He wants to know how he can get help from Council.

As we walk to the Greenhouse, we come across one of ‘his’ tenants in the park. He’s the organiser of the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor. He’s not coming to the meeting; better off trying to sell immortalisation of dreams to passers-by with a click of his camera<sup>14</sup>.

We wait at the Green House. Few people. As we wait, I ask about inner city living. Tales of precariousness, of unemployment, of hard living, of HIV/AIDs. And foreigners, foreigners...ah these Nigerians, these Ivorians, Mozambicans, Zimbabwean! So many of them! I hear xenophobic remarks; others that empathise for immigrants’ precariousness in the face of a corrupt police force and home affairs department. There seems to be a general wrath against crooked management agents. ‘See, we pay our rents, our water and electricity. And then one day, they come to cut all that off, say we haven’t paid. But that’s rubbish. We’ve been paying all along. Why doesn’t Council do something about them instead of cutting our water off?’

The meeting starts. Few people<sup>15</sup> – mainly women, some with toddlers, old ladies, a couple of young well-dressed men, a worker in his blue overcoat, old men. The Councillor plays quite an impressive act of juggling exhortation to his electorate, conveying Council policy and the call to pay for services. The discussion heats up quickly as my baker clumsily intervenes. He wants to stake out the claim that not all middlemen, not all landlords are corrupt and profiteering. He wants to find out how he can spruce up the building and make viable. But he is confronted with an implacable logic. Who does that building belong to? You can’t just take over the management of it, even if the landlord has abdicated his role. More discussions, more exasperation and demands. The general call, it seems - after jokes of wanting to live Sandton style, some more serious demands for RDP housing - is for Government regulation. Can’t the Council bring order to the chaos? Why can shebeens<sup>16</sup> be left to open just anywhere? What will happen to children then? And these middle agents?

The councillor closes the meeting, calling for more participation and involvement from the residents, calling for more vigilance, calling for payment for services. He promises he will take up the complaints to the Council.

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<sup>13</sup> The Green House project is a community environmental programme, operating on a shoe-string in Joubert Park, heart of the smallest and most densely populated ward in the country.

<sup>14</sup> I later learn that there are about 45 ‘park snappers’ in Joubert Park, specialising in ‘make-believe’, creating and recreating identity of city dwellers. Their portraits were recently exhibited at the Johannesburg Art Gallery as part of The ‘Park Pictures’ exhibition is a project of the Joubert Park Public Art Project. See

<sup>15</sup> Later, I am told that people are disillusioned about Councillors’ ability to effect change.

<sup>16</sup> Informal bars.

People walk out into the darkness. It's buzzing outside, chaotic, vibrant – as if anything could happen anytime.

## Managing chaos

In Johannesburg's inner city, as the street kids from Diagonal Street mentioned at the start of this paper teach us, what you see is not [necessarily] what you get. Hopefully, these extracts from field notes taken from my last field trip in Johannesburg's inner city (May and June 2004) convey something of the confusion on the ground, the contradictory pulls and, fundamentally, the basic problems of governance that such a context confronts us with. As I progressed in my research, talking in turn to inner city residents, hawkers and taxi associations, property developers, social housing associations, lawyers, NGO workers, unionists, business groups, businesses and City officials, an overriding question came back at me, persistently: what does it mean then, to try and construct more inclusive ways of living the city, in such a context of disorderly-ness?

For the dimension of dis-orderly-ness hardly features in writings on the neo-liberal city. Too often, this very hard question of day-to-day management in such fluid, risky and volatile conditions are ignored. And yet, for Graeme Reid, ex-manager of the Inner City Office, this is *the* fundamental issue:

'the 1997 Vision for the city, for sure, talks of *Ubuntu*, of Johannesburg's link to Africa... But what is striking is that the three sectors going away and doing their visioning came back with one central concept: that of orderliness. And that's the significant thing that people often lose sight of. White business had started leaving for a lot of different reasons before that, but in the 1990s, when it became very disorderly – there was no management of the inner city, whatsoever! – they could pack up and leave. But poor people can't and they need to find ways of trying to survive within that disorder.'

The rapid pace of inner city change, from the erstwhile heart of apartheid economic power to just one of many large business areas of the Greater Johannesburg conurbation is hard to appreciate for any contemporary visitor. A multi-faceted process, the fate of the inner city has been inextricably tied to the moral collapse of apartheid in the context of Johannesburg's (glibly stated) 'post-fordist' economic transition (tertiarisation of the economy and shift from import substitution to export-led growth model). The social and spatial repercussions of such developments are commensurate with post-fordist urban transition in the industrial North. Over the last twenty years, it has undergone most of the developments typical of inner city decline in other parts of the world: relocation of most of the city's formal sector international and national company headquarters, as well as much of the medium manufacturing enterprises, downgrading of the retail industry to serve the mass market (central city workers and Sowetans largely), de(re)segregation of the residential population from white to majority black, rise in crime, physical decay, evidence of homeless people and street children, etc. (Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell Forthcoming; Guillaume 2001; Morris 1999; Tomlinson 1999).

The rapid change in the socio-economic function of the inner city, the institutional vacuum that emerged there, has also – lest we forget – provided an unprecedented opportunity for many previously barred through Apartheid legislation, from an official right to reside in the (white) inner city. Migrants from rural areas, migrants from townships fleeing the violence, promiscuity, or surveillance of elders have flocked into the inner city, just as

minority groups searching refuge from the scrutiny of the ‘orderly’ family (gays and lesbians, prostitutes, etc.) or the state (Guillaume 2001; Morris 1999; Oelofse 2003). New kinds of activities have taken up the vacated office space, including small and medium enterprises (garment, printing), black professionals, NGOs. Informal traders dominate the streets, and the inner city has become the residential and trading home to an increasing African migrants population (JICO 1999).<sup>17</sup>

But such a sense of opportunity, in some undeniable ways reification of the victory of the anti-apartheid struggle for urban space, is being threatened by chaos, violence and exploitation of the kind described earlier. In an unmanaged environment, illicit activities have thrived, drug trafficking, scams, prostitution, child trafficking (Gotz and Simone 2001; Morris 1999; Simone 1997; Woolbridge 1999). While this provides a means of livelihoods for some, most formal businesses have had to close down, and many are struggling to survive the onslaught of ever more sophisticated and heavily armed robbers (Cohen 2004). In such an environment, trust evaporates, people live in fear, too often left at the mercy of opportunists. Opportunists that racket naïve or vulnerable residents:

‘people here, they listen to the loudest mouth, it’s all about power. And I know that there are some of these guys with the biggest mouth and they can walk into a building and take over and not one resident will say anything or report it to the police. And they will live in fear, and they will pay this guy exorbitant prices. Because you see, they make examples in these buildings. The one across the road, the caretaker was thrown in the lift shaft and he’s in a wheel chair today – to make an example of him. I’m running the building now, and you’ll pay me directly’. There’s massive exploitation going on in there. (interview Martin New, June 2004).

Opportunists that racket elusive communities:

‘The difficulties we have of mobilising? Well see, you’re dealing with different people in the inner city – there are plenty of nations in the inner city. Some buildings that are totally Zimbabweans, they don’t know anything about what’s going on. It’s difficult to mobilise and teach them. And in the other building next door, it’s Congolese, but they’re afraid that if they say anything, they are going to be deported. And there is so much ignorance of the problems and people wait until it falls on them to mobilise, because there are so many different people here. If you know too much in a building, the landlords can just kick you out’ (interview with Thulani Mahome, June 2004).

And opportunists that simply do not pay:

‘The Seven Buildings<sup>18</sup>? That’s truly a lost opportunity. You see, when disagreement erupted over affordability, we embarked on a very careful and intricate study of the issue. And we

<sup>17</sup> Johannesburg has always been a city of migrants. In his song ‘Stimala’, Hugh Masekela portrayed in such simple but poignant words the plight of miners coming from all over Southern Africa to work in Johannesburg’s mines. The Inner city was also the home of European migrants in the ...[check] (Morris 1999). But since the fall of apartheid and the opening of South Africa’s borders, a new wave of immigrants has descended onto Johannesburg, dominated by Africans from West and Central Africa (Landau 2004).

<sup>18</sup> The Seven Buildings Project, combining seven different buildings in Hillbrow and Joubert Park into one upgrading initiative, was the first and most important tenant-based project in the Inner City. The project was meant to provide accommodation on a non-profit basis, enabling the poorest of its tenants to find secure tenure in the Inner city, while empowering them directly to exercise choice over how Government’s housing subsidy was to be utilised. The project collapsed after months of bitter internal management disputes, the accumulation of huge arrears as rental payments plummeted and service payments ceased altogether. Rumours of corruption and mismanagement further undermined the project’s credibility (Oelofse 2003)

came up with a whole range of solutions that were carefully discussed and were explicitly devised with social equity concerns. But ultimately some tenants did not agree with this kind of equity. Those in particular whose rental increased because simply their flats were twice as big as their neighbours'! And then gradually, animosity increased, and there were charges of corruption. And you had these guys who were calling for non-payment. And it's an easy call, you know, people will easily follow. Some because they genuinely are struggling to pay – unemployment is high. But many because there is this complete disdain for the other side of the social contract. You have rights, but responsibilities, well, that's another story!' (Interview Michael Oelofse, May 2003).

The result if of course, major exploitation, a dangerous environment for residents, for users of the inner city, a degeneration of the built environment and a stifling sense of insecurity.

### Neoliberal choices?

Few in Johannesburg actually contest the need for some degree of upgrading and renovating in certain parts of the Inner city. The health and safety hazards are too real<sup>19</sup> and only a minority profits from such situations of chaos. But critics argue that regeneration is being done in order 'to attract capital, and favour the generation of higher profits' – at the expense of poor residents (ICF 2004): 188)<sup>20</sup>. The claim, certainly, has much validity, although it fails to fully acknowledge the larger role that the Inner city plays within the metro-wide economy, and the need to preserve, indeed bolster its functioning. Given the ongoing legacy of the apartheid city's political economy of space, whereby swathes of the city were barred from any productive assets, the inner city still represents a (if not the) major contribution to the city's overall rates base. For a city almost exclusively self-financing, the cost of letting the built environment slip any further into decay is simply too high a price to pay (interview with Lael Bethlehem, quote Gotz). But if the argument I have been trying to make has any weight, the dynamics of decision taking are marked, as well, by considerations of another kind. Crucially, then, *who* can a relatively cash-strapped Council turn to, in helping to provide the necessary upgrading resources?<sup>21</sup>

There have been attempts at developing shared-ownership and tenant solutions to tackle residential regeneration. But have (and are) proving particularly difficult to manage, for reasons alluded to earlier on, compounded by affordability issues and the difficulty of accessing loans (Oelofse 2003; Rust 2001; Rust, Gordon, and Stewart 2000). So who then ... drug barons? The potential is there. As Martin New explains:

I sat in discussion with one of the big Nigerian guys [drug dealer]. And was saying: 'Give me Hillbrow! we'll turn Hillbrow. I'm making R1.5m/month in your country. I won't tell you how. I'm not allowed to have a job, open a bank account, own a car.' But they drive the biggest Mercs and BMWs and wear the biggest gold chains. 'I'm putting that money in my own country. But let me open a bank account in your country and I'll invest there!' And that's how Chicago and places like that grew – through bootlegging, and things like that. So they [the nigerians] reckon they can clean it up, upgrade, invest,

<sup>19</sup> The fire I witness in Joubert Park is one of the many that break out in the inner city during the winter months. During my previous trip, during the South African winter of 2003, a fire erupted in the Drill Hall, an imposing building, home once of the Treason Trials and then squatted by over a hundred families. The fire claimed the life of 2 residents and acted as an impetus to tackling so called 'Bad buildings' in the inner city (interview with Paul Jackson).

<sup>20</sup> Further exemplification of this approach can be found on the following websites: [southafrica.indymedia.org](http://southafrica.indymedia.org); [www.afp.org.za](http://www.afp.org.za); [www.zabalaza.net](http://www.zabalaza.net) or again in (McKinley 2003).

<sup>21</sup> The fact is that arguably, much more pressing needs are experienced in the townships and sprawling informal settlements.

make it safe. How they'de get there? We could never work that close with them... Because their money is not clean money... we can't become partners with that when they don't tell us where it comes from and we can't allow them to do it either. But there sure is a problem with our legislation that doesn't acknowledge the presence of these people. They're coming and they're going to stay here. So what do we do?'

Well the answer is quite simple for most City officials – you court the private sector. You try and bring them back in. For Lael Bethlehem, head of the City's Economic Development Unit:

'The main point for me is this: what drives a city? it's private investment. I wish it wasn't like that, trust me. But unless you have a very large state sector with very large resources - and that only happens if you have an economy that can feed that sector, the life blood of most economies is the private sector. Check the inner city: private sector started pulling out. And the public can step in to an extent, build Mandela bridge, Metro Mall, Newtown, and pour the kind of money we have poured there. But that money is starting to dry up and go elsewhere. The only thing that really sustains a city, an area is private people putting their money there – individual households maintaining their property or corporate owners. So... if we declare ourselves to be un-interested in private investment then we are failing to take responsibility for future generations'.

Courting the private sector, for these City officials then, has more to do with a desperate response to an highly intricate situation of spiralling decay, a pragmatic response to the disorderly city, to disorderly civil society. These claims, when lodged in the unstable and chaotic terrain of on-the-ground (attempts at?) implementation cannot, it seems to me, be entirely dismissed.

Perhaps though, such a perspective needs to be tempered with a more critical (even if empathetic) look at Council's initiative, in particular the tools with which it attempts to navigate this highly complex and volatile environment. For why, in this urban regeneration process, do we see the grand prestige projects coming off the ground first? Undoubtedly because the financial resources have been made available by a Province preoccupied with upping Johannesburg's Inner City's contribution to Gauteng 'smart Province' ambitions<sup>22</sup>. But perhaps also because such heavy investment projects, with their heavy weight of symbolism are simply the best way the Council can conceive of showing its control over the disorderly city? Of showing that it is now in charge, working for the city as whole? For Executive Mayor Amos Masondo certainly, Newtown, Mandela Bridge, Constitutional Hill are not purely targeted at international capital. The re-imagining of the city is very much aimed at his electorate – the thousands of Sowetans and other citizens living in the sprawling settlements to the South of the city. For them, the Inner city is the point of access to the economy; and they need to be shown that Council cares about their city (interview with Sandy Lowitt). A point with some degree of legitimacy<sup>23</sup>, but not entirely convincing as the most adequate response to decay and disorder in the city...

And yet, the infrastructural response to the management of chaos remains a notable characteristic response by Council (with the varying help of Province). In the face of

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Sandy Lowitt, May 2003. Blue IQ's website: [www.blueiq.co.za](http://www.blueiq.co.za)

<sup>23</sup> The rationale is not entirely devoid of legitimacy. Prestige projects have their role to play, certainly, in fostering the sense of the city as 'collective actor' (Le Gales 2002). And I am reminded of the comments by a Lenasia-based caterer, organising sustenance at a book launch in the brand new Constitutional Hill: 'This place you know, it's wonderful. It's so good that people can have a place to talk freely now.' – And you think it's good that it is in the Inner city and not say in Soweto or Lenasia? 'Yes man, the Inner city is where it all began. We can't just let it go down the drain. And Mandela bridge... I look at it and it gives me goose pimples!'

sprawling hawkers, invading informal taxis, Council's response has been to build taxi ranks as well as hard structures for hawkers to park their wares in and trade from. Certainly the approach stems from an attempt to deal with the undeniable conquest by hawkers of public space in the wake of the transition and appended institutional vacuum<sup>24</sup>. At its most ambitious, it is also an attempt at fostering something of an entrepreneurial class in a sector that counts many survivalists/too easily homogenised. In the case of the taxi industry, the rationale has been to organise and limit the potential deleterious effects of a highly dangerous industry on both passengers and the immediate environment/vicinity. But ongoing confrontations between taxi associations and the Council<sup>25</sup>, the occasional violent displays of anger and frustration by hawkers (often couched in xenophobic discourse), shows that raising hard infrastructure is not only easier to implement, but also insufficient, in dealing with such complex and little understood economies. Graeme Reid, not averse to the infrastructural response /solution to urban management, readily concedes:

[Government's] inclination is to respond with: it's going to be like that, it's going to be great, etc. and it fails to recognise that there's a lot of other things happening, that people have to survive and that they're going to create ways of surviving, and how do you incorporate that into your own processes. The failure possibly at Jack Minster<sup>26</sup> was, [...] having engaged with the associations, being quite good in trying to understand the businesses and designing the facility to accommodate the way taxi associations run their businesses, making it more efficient... When it came to managing the business on an ongoing basis, we stopped doing that, we just assumed that it would run on its own. And I think that having gone through this whole *intense* process of engaging with traders, to come up with this notion of market places, and all of that, it was almost an assumption that everybody would then go on and be happy and everything would be all right, and we weren't geared up to continue some form of engagement. (interview, June 2004).

Clearly the demands are too complex, the needs too great - and demand to be met with a multi-faceted approach. Rolling out more taxi/trading complexes as is prefigured in the Council's budget (CoJ 2004) will do little to address the situation, when the operational budget fails to follow suit (interview with Keith Atkins, May 2004). But even then, the issue remains unsolved. How does one try and engage constructively with a taxi industry (with undoubtedly legitimate grievances) that receives no official support when it carries up to (check)% of the population? (interview with Graeme Reid, Martin New). And how does one engage indeed, when the industry is highly organised in its destabilising capacity<sup>27</sup> but incapable of proposing any constructive way forward in its desire to engage as a 'Black Economic Empowerment' partner of Council (Interview with Ish Mkabela, June 2004)? As for hawkers, how does one manage to provide differentiated support in such a sea of need? How does one support emerging entrepreneurs while not undermining the livelihood

<sup>24</sup> Rather ironic that public space is to no small degree, captured by hawkers on the one hand or the private sector through Business Improvement districts on the other!

<sup>25</sup> The argument (as in other confrontations), has ostensibly been over the very low contribution demanded of taxi drivers for using the new facilities, as well as over the management of these facilities.

<sup>26</sup> Jack Minster taxi rank was the first rank constructed by Council and aimed at providing facilities for taxi ranks, etc... *decrire plus*. For more details, see: (Gotz and Simone 2003; Gotz and Woolbridge 2000)

<sup>27</sup> During my 2004 field trip, a major lock-out of taxis was organised at the central MetroMall taxi rank and traders' complex, risking to endanger the economic viability of the complex. Meanwhile, Faraday Taxi Rank has been sitting for nine months un-occupied because of the non-cooperation of taxi associations. A white elephant in effect... (interview with Ish Mkabela, with Sicelo Mabaso).

strategies of the survivalists? And how does one find interlocutors when most of the posturing associations seem to have but a tenuous link with ‘members’ on the ground (idem)?

Faced with disorderly, fluid and often ambiguous counterparts, it seems, Johannesburg officials are still struggling to find their voice. To an important degree, the less than successful policies of Council towards these (and other) informal sectors of the economy are not so much the result of a disinterest with engaging with such communities, but rather the failure, at times, to explore and expand difficult and time-consuming alternatives<sup>28</sup>. Muddling through then...

## Conclusion

This paper has tried to argue that inner city regeneration in Johannesburg has less to do with the whole-hearted application of neo-liberal precepts, than to rather desperate attempts at reaching some kind of control in an inordinately confused, fluid and chaotic environment. Faced with limited resources, City officials are forced to partner up with inner city constituents in their quest to put a halt to urban decay - but the choice of working partners is proving, on the ground, disappointingly narrow and painfully difficult. Attempts to engage with ‘civil society’ in order to devise more inclusive and neighbourhood-based approaches to dealing with the urban environment, have shown to be highly frustrating more often than not, leading to numerous dead-ends. Drug barons, unsurprisingly, do not provide a legitimate alternative. In such circumstances, the courting of business interests seems perhaps, an unpalatable, but unavoidable recourse.

## Interviews

Daya – Inner city resident and baker

Dominique Woolbridge – Urban development and local government consultant

Graeme Reid – Ex-Inner City Office Manager; Chief Executive Officer: Johannesburg Development Agency

Ish Mkabela - ...

Keith Atkins -

Lael Bethlehem -

Marc Swilling – Spiers Institute

Martin New –

Neil Fraser -

Paul Jackson -

Sicelo Mabaso – National chairperson of Top Six Taxi Management

Thulani Mahome - inner city resident and at times, activist with the Inner City Forum.

Yael Horowitz -Programme Manager: Johannesburg Development Agency

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<sup>28</sup> Of course, the fact that it is much easier to motivate for and receive budget allocations for *visible* infrastructural development than it is for training and capacity building activities, is not entirely innocent to such developments. The problem is further compounded by the recent adoption of performance management tools whose impact seems, at this stage, to be stifling government innovation (general personal observation and interview with Yael Horowitz, May 2004).

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