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DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

TOPIC: INFORMAL CLOTHING: THE CASE OF THE INNER-CITY
JOHANNESBURG

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Abstract: This paper is concerned with informal clothing in the inner city of Johannesburg. This is done in the context of both the changing racial complexion of small enterprise development and of South Africa's economic heartland inner-city as an important incubator for emerging black manufacturers. This study builds on local research that has been carried out on various aspects of black businesses in the inner-city of Johannesburg. This study does not only confirm the importance of inner city as a hatchery for small manufacturers, it also investigates aspects that relate to sub-contracting and problems faced by clothing manufacturers. The results are presented from a survey of small black clothing manufacturers in the inner-city Johannesburg. Overall, the findings reiterates the importance of the inner-city as incubator.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1980s South Africa's urban landscape has been undergoing a period of change. This has been caused mainly by increasing levels of Black urbanization coupled with shortages of affordable land and housing for the urban poor (Saff, 1994; J, Rogerson, 1996). In the 1990s, South Africa's new democratic

government has shown commitment to the upgrading and development of the small informal business economy which has been the characteristic economic activity under suppressed conditions (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996b). Among priorities for post-apartheid reconstruction is that of building a new economic order that reverses past economic distortions (South Africa, 1995). Of central importance is a commitment to uplifting the role of small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs), through access to infrastructure and premises as one vital area for support (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a; Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996b). The White paper states that it is not only of great importance to promote small enterprise sector because of envisaged rate of job creation and income generation in the country, but it deserves attention since the sector has been greatly neglected in the past - more especially the owned enterprises. The political atmosphere of post-1994, largely that of promoting SMMEs meant that the urban poor had an opportunity not only of residing where they like, but also of operating their business enterprises where they want, hence the emergent Black owned small enterprises in Johannesburg inner-city (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a). The White paper in this regard argues for that in our recent past, local authorities have seldom played a significant role with regard to SMME promotion (South Africa, 1995).

Against such a shifting policy background, this paper builds upon a considerable body of literature that already exist with regard to changing racial landscape of down-town Johannesburg and

that of inner-city's role as an incubator. While acknowledging and confirming the presence of black owned small businesses in the down-town Johannesburg, this paper specifically seeks to investigate problems faced by informal clothing sector in the inner-city. This is done by providing an analysis of the situation of an emergent black owned informal clothing in the inner city of Johannesburg. In a wider setting, the study is located in and builds upon the context of research on developing world cities which emphasizes the role of the central cities as incubators for entrepreneurship development (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a). The discussion is organised in terms of two major sections. First, an overview will be provided on the contemporary informal enterprise economy under black domination, in this regard reference will be made to informal clothing. This section will highlight the national importance of inner-city-Johannesburg, as an "incubator" for emergent informal business economy. In the second section the focus turns away to analysing problems that faces the informal clothing sector. This section explores the development of informal clothing in the inner city and its problems.

The incubator concept

The incubator concept originated as a metaphor attributed to the authors of the New York Regional Plan who referred to the dense concentration of people, ideas and commercial linkages

found in major urban areas that would stimulate new business formation (Blakely and Nishikawa, 1992; Braun and Mchone, 1992). The incubation is known to be a by-product of urbaneness. In other words a metropolis must exist with the ideal conditions that would stimulate business formation. According to Rogerson and Rogerson (1996a; 1996b), it has been argued that large metropolitan areas of the developing world, in particular their central zones furnish a locational environment suited to the "germination" of and nurturing of small business activity. In the inner zones of cities such as Bogota or Seol, support is found for the "incubator concept", that crowded inner-city areas facilitate the *hatching* and *nurturing* of new business developments (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a).

In South Africa, with the ending of the apartheid era of racially exclusive business and residential areas, the appearance of South Africa's inner-cities has shifted since the mid-1980s (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a; Saff, 1994). Other than the shifting government policies as it relates to scraping of Group Areas Act, the process of deracialization of Johannesburg inner-city is known to have been influenced by the surplus of accommodation in its high-rise apartments. Some of these apartments have dilapidated and thus providing cheaper access to these buildings (Rogerson, J., 1996; Saff, 1994). Some studies however, points to the racial desegregation of apartments in Johannesburg inner-city as a reason for declining living standards and devaluation of buildings. Whatever the reason could

be for decreasing value of buildings, the "chaotic" condition must have created a conducive environment for informal businesses to emerge in the Johannesburg inner city, more especially those conditions that led to the decreasing monthly rentals.

Informal Enterprise Development in Johannesburg inner-city

In Johannesburg, the expanding majority of survivalists and micro-enterprises constitutes the sphere of emerging black enterprises while the existing or established formal small economy forms an area of primarily white enterprise, albeit with a strong segment of Asian-owned business and a minor component of coloured enterprise (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a). The structure of small enterprise economy clearly bears the imprint of past official policies. With the present democratic government which have shown interest not only in terms of racial balance, but also in terms of job creation and reversing the prevailing condition of ailing local economy, there is hope for small black-run enterprises (ANC, 1994; Mashigo, 1993; Manning and Mashigo, 1994; IDS, 1997; South Africa, 1995).

Despite the present interest in informal economy, it is important to acknowledge the fact that Johannesburg's informal economy is as old as the city itself. The city's informal sector is known to date back as far as the turbulent times where Johannesburg was still a mining camp (Rogerson, 1986). The washerman, riksha puller, cab driver, liquor seller, pimp, and

prostitution were some of the earliest actor's in the Johannesburg informal sector. Indeed, against the worse levels of structural unemployment and the conditions of poverty-in-employment endured by blacks under South Africa's forced labour regime, the informal sector is of growing significance (Rogerson, 1986; 1991). Following years of apartheid, characterised by physical removal of non-white races, it is no doubt that the emerging black informal economy is a significant step towards reclaiming the inner-city. The inner-city is not here reclaimed only as an area with objectives of racial remaking of the city as in the 1930s, but is now reclaimed as a vibrant area for business opportunities. This by no doubt justifies intra-urban movements, where in the case of Johannesburg an exodus of entrepreneurs from surrounding townships is experienced. This reverses the effects of Group Areas Act where the racial geography of urban manufacturing was "tidied up" by compelling the closure, or removal to township locales of all black small-scale industries functioning within "white" space (Rogerson, 1991).

Emerging informal clothing in Johannesburg inner city

Attention turns now to the context of post-apartheid Johannesburg and the issues raised both by the changing racial complexion of the inner-city and the role of the inner-city in acting as a hatchery. In this section the research methodology

is described and the findings analysed below are of the original interviews conducted on black informal clothing manufacturers.

Research Methodology

In creating a picture of the conditions and problems faced by informal clothing in the inner-city, interviews were undertaken in a variety of flats and/or apartments in the inner-city. Using a structured and open ended questionnaire, a survey conducted by the author yielded a sample of 30 interviews from unknown population of manufacturers. It must be acknowledged in this regard that such a sample cannot claim to be statistically representative sample. However, every effort has been made to make the sample representative through asking the very interviewees of addresses and location of other clothing manufacturers. Through this method interviews were conducted from a total of 14 locations largely comprising of a wide range of low-grade buildings in the Johannesburg inner-city. The target for this survey has been black entrepreneurs regardless of citizenship. Overall, the research provides detailed description of the reasons for locating in the inner-city and the problems of locating there.

Findings

The key findings of the research and interviews are

organized and presented in terms of four themes which relate to

- * the nature of activities
- * the inner city as business location centre
- * sub-contracting
- * problems

1. Nature of activities

Black entrepreneurs in Johannesburg's inner city are engaged in a host of clothing and textiles activities including *inter alia*, the production of traditional African clothing, dresses, shirts, trousers, school uniforms, curtains, duvets, wedding dresses, and making specialist clothing for women's associations and various other groupings. Among the black South Africans operating in the city is a significant number of foreigners from various African countries including *inter alia*, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana and Zaire. These foreigners work side-by-side either in the same building and/or floor with their South African colleagues.

Table 1. *Number of entrepreneurs by citizenship in Johannesburg inner city.*

<u>Country</u>	<u>#of entrepreneurs</u>	<u>percentage</u>
South African	23	77%
Foreign	7	23%
total	30	100%

Source: Field survey

Table 2. *Profile of local and foreign entrepreneurs by qualifications.*

	<u>School education</u>	<u># of entrepreneurs</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
S.A.	3-10	5	17.8%
Foreign	8-10	7	100%

Source: Field survey

A profile of entrepreneurs operating in the inner-city is presented in table 1. Notwithstanding the fact that no statistical inferences can be drawn from this table as it is, it is clear that foreigners in the informal clothing constitute a significant number. Despite being relatively fewer as compared to their South African Colleagues, what is interesting is their education level. As shown in table 2 above, local entrepreneurs have wide range in terms of school level qualifications. Some entrepreneurs have as low as standard three and there are only three entrepreneurs in this case with matric. These figures compares very poorly with foreigners who have a narrow range of between standard eight and ten, with six of the seven foreigners having standard ten. Again with post-matric qualifications, all

(100%) the seven foreigners interviewed have either a diploma/certificate in business management/administration and in sewing. On the other hand it is only 17.8 percent of the locals who have such post-matric qualifications. It is in this regard rather unfortunate that South Africans show such disparities in terms of educational qualifications. This is because qualifications go a long way in determining the professional prowess of an individual entrepreneur in successfully running an enterprise (Manning and Mashigo, 1993). For example as shown in table 3 more than 50 percent of entrepreneurs do not keep business records, either with no reason or with response like:

"I'm still very small..."; "what for? why should I keep records of two or three orders a month?"; "there is no business".

These responses do not seem to reflect the understanding as to why business records have to be kept. At the same time such responses seem to insinuate that business records can only be kept if an enterprise is prosperous, and if not, there is no reason for doing bookkeeping. These findings also show how disadvantaged our local clothing manufacturers are in terms of business acumen as a result of poor education. As Schmitz (1982) put it, poor education and skills thereof result in poor managerial ability and constitute a number of problems regarded as internal constraints which have bearing on external

constraints since the reasons for lack of education are largely external.

Table 3. *Business records*

	<u>Do keep records</u>	<u>Do not keep records</u>
South African	10	13
Foreign	6	1

Source: Field survey

As regards the employment size of enterprises, the vast majority of the informal clothing business fall into the class of "micro-enterprises". Micro-enterprises are defined as those enterprises which only involve the owner, some family member(s), or at most four paid employees (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a). However, there are exceptional cases where some entrepreneurs employ between ten and fifteen workers. This have been found in the case of a Nigerian entrepreneur who operates three small enterprises employing ten South Africans and five non-South Africans. A local case involves a wedding dresses manufacturer who employs ten full-time and five part-time workers. Also with regard to employment, foreigners are significant employers of South Africans. For example, out of 32 jobs created by the interviewed foreigners 14 people employed are South Africans. The

remaining 18 employees are non-South African who are either recruited from the same country by the owner, where the owner actively goes to his\her country of origin and arrange *Visas* for a number of people he/she wants, or where the owner finds his employees through friends who are already in Johannesburg. In contrast to this, out of 52 jobs created by the South Africans it is only one foreigner that is employed by South Africans. The only Zimbabwean who happened to be employed by a South African got a job because she was a friend of the owner from a flat they previously shared.

The gender distribution of workers and employers revealed no distinct of variation with an approximately equal share of both male and female entrepreneurs and employees. What is noticeable is the evidence of both local and international migrants taking the inner-city as the centre for business venture. Taken together, the findings from the field survey point to the rise of black production micro enterprise sector within Johannesburg inner-city (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a; 1996b). The recent evolution of such a production cluster is known to be significant for the overall urban economy more especially in the wake of the recorded decline of city's formal sector manufacturing (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a; Rogerson, 1995).

2.The inner-city as business location centre

Historically the development of black enterprises in the Johannesburg inner city took place in the early 1990s. Black entrepreneurs moved into low rental flats or apartments classed officially as C and D grade building stock (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a; Rogerson, J., 1996). The C category of buildings is officially classed as an older building but in good condition, although finishes are not up to modern standards. They may or may not have on-site parking and are unlikely to be centrally air-conditioned. The D grade category include all remaining, generally old, definitely without on-site parking and with no air conditioning (Rogerson, J., 1996). Reasons for early 1990 movements are known to be attributed to *inter alia*, violence-racked environment, worsening security, and more relaxed post-apartheid environment following hostile Group Areas Act to black businesses in the "white" city (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a; Saff, 1994).

The results of this study confirms the fact that the majority of movement to the city occurred in the 1990s. Indeed, even though some entrepreneurs started their informal clothing business as early as late 1970s, locating in the inner-city has been impossible up until the early 1990s. One respondent who started his business in 1978 replied by saying, "In those days (apartheid days) a black person was not allowed to have a business not only in the inner-city but in general". So even if this entrepreneur wanted to locate where (he thinks)

there is business for him, he would not due to the official legislative environment of the time. Rogerson and Rogerson (1996a), points out that, although township violence was the initial trigger for an influx of black entrepreneurs into the inner-city since 1993, this factor has been gradually replaced by the economic advantages of inner-city locations of small enterprises. Again the results of this study confirms this notion, where other than the international small entrepreneurs who have been reported to have come seeking business opportunities in Johannesburg, the locals have also congregated to the inner-city from various townships like Soweto, Daveyton, Alexander, Vooslorus; others from as far as Pietersburg, while others have just moved from the nearby Hillbrow and Berea. Indeed others have moved from one flat to another within the inner-city in search for cheaper rent. The reason for moving from the previous location to the present largely cite the economic concern for the well-being of a business. The largely cited reason include the following:

"down-town is where you meet every South African and foreigners, so as a business-person I meet all sorts of customers" (entrepreneur from room 106 Regent Court, originally from Alexander); "you see Berea is relatively quiet compared to the inner-city..." (Nigerian from London House); " I command respect for operating here a opposed to operating in the township" (wedding dress manufacturer from

57 Deviliers and Wanderers); "I'm here to serve the market of schools that have emerged in the inner-city.." (Track manufacturer for school children).

These findings demonstrate the point made by Rogerson and Rogerson (1996b), that the Johannesburg region functions as a vital national "seedbed" for the germination of small enterprises. Also these findings serve as indicators and further confirm the reported change that has occurred in the racial business complexion of the inner-city properties. Overwhelmingly, business owners are residents of the surrounding townships and they commute to the inner-city on daily basis. Foreigners also travel from the nearby flats of Hillbrow and Berea and various other residential flats in town on daily basis. However, there are those who at night turn their work place into home and a bedroom. Such incidences have been found of the tailoring enterprise run by a Malawian in flat 206, 64 Von Wielligh street.

With regard to spatial patterns of emerging black businesses, the results show a similar trend to the three sets of factors reported by Rogerson and Rogerson (1996a). First, the location of black enterprise within the inner-city reflects the patterns of available low-rental C and D grade accommodation. This is where the majority of black informal clothing business is found. Second, is accessibility of surplus C and D grade space in relation to key black transport termini like taxis and trains.

The glaring evidence for this is that of the trend of locating in close proximity to taxis and train routes as in Market street, Commissioner street, Bree street, Hook street and Deviliers street respectively. Thirdly, the heavy geographical clustering of black enterprises in specific zones of the inner-city is linked to a process of "horizontal" informal networking of black entrepreneurs. This has been evident from the "kinness" of the majority of entrepreneurs to be able to tell where their colleagues are located in the inner-city. This ability by no doubts go beyond knowing where the other entrepreneur is relation to the other. This ability reveals a dimension of linkages in the form of subcontracting who's nature still remain a mystery at least at the horizontal level.

3.Subcontracting

Undoubtedly, one would not expect subcontracting among enterprises that hardly employ more than four people. Despite this disbelief, there are two cases that have been found to involve subcontracting. Although done on rare occasions, the manufacturer of women's wear in flat 706, Von Wielligh street subcontracts when she gets "lots of orders" and in fact she sometimes ask friends for assistance. Also, in flat 704 of the same address, the "Italian designer" do subcontract with the reason that: "... I'm alone..(therefore) I have to ask friends.. (to help me).. and I have to pay them".

The "Italian designer" also get contracts from various societies from the township (Soweto). This confirms the relationship that exist between these enterprises by virtue of knowing each other. What is confirmed here is the case of vertical networking where the informal enterprises have found to be subcontracted by some fairly medium size and formal businesses. Although it is only three of such cases that have been found, it shows that vertical subcontracting is a reality that may also contribute in "grooming" the informal manufacturers in the inner-city, hence the desire to locate there. The "curtain and interior designer" from Milleus room 107 get subcontracted by companies "not big as such" to do interior designing of their offices. A Nigerian and Malawian entrepreneurs who manufacture African attire and pinafores responded in this way: "well, it is not big business who out-source work to me - it is small but formal business who does so" (Nigerian); "it is Indians who have subcontracted me - they give me material and they ask me of X amount of dresses. We are not satisfied with the price - we just work because if we do not work we will suffer" (Malawian).

Despite the disappointing incidences of vulnerability, exploitation and precarious working conditions as found in the latter case it is some-what encouraging to here of some pyramid-like chains of vertical subcontracting that already exist in the informal clothing sector (Rogerson, 1991). What needs to be acknowledged is that it is not all cases that are characterised

by exploitation and/or poor working conditions in the name of subcontracting. As Rogerson (1991) puts it, the development of individual enterprises is not just an outcome of pressure and constraints, but also of opportunities and initiatives created within a capitalist environment. In a similar fashion, subcontracting relationships that occur between large and small informal enterprises are neither entirely detrimental nor entirely beneficial. Their effects are specific to the type of business and individual, and are place specific (Rogerson, 1991). Against this background, focus now turns to the problems faced by the informal clothing manufacturers in the Johannesburg inner-city.

4. Problems experienced by the informal manufacturers

Over 90 percent of the interviewees in the informal clothing industry have problems. Their problems include *inter alia*, customers who do not pay in time, ever escalating prices of raw material, too little space and lack of machines, fluctuating rent, poor market, lack of confidence by the market in goods manufactured by blacks and finance. The school uniforms manufacturer has got a different problem in that, as she put it, "... my market is periodical - I'm only on business at the beginning of school term - during the middle of the year there is no business at all". The duvets and pillows manufacturer mentioned competition as a problem in that "there are so many

people in this business and that force us to lower prices to unimaginable levels. "Imagine selling duvets for R50, 00 - where is profit there?". On the other hand, the curtains manufacturer enjoys competition. This entrepreneur see competition and challenges of satisfying customers as problems that keep him going such that "there is no rest in my life". When asked what she meant by this she said "I keep on finding new ways of doing things....". This suggest elements of innovation whether through marketing or improvements of products. Overall, the problems experienced by emerging informal clothing manufacturers are no different to those that have been identified in South African small enterprise research. These include lack of access to credit, business skills as in running the business itself (Manning and Mashigo, 1993).

With regard to seeking help from government agencies, the majority of enterprises have not even attempted to engage themselves in such efforts. They largely do not know how to go about seeking any kind of help. Others mentioned that, it is only now that they have learnt of agencies such as Khula and Ntsika who give support of some sort. There is however, a significant number of entrepreneurs who do not know how they can be helped by the government agencies or the Johannesburg City Council. Those who know how they can be helped propose intervention by the Council on rent matters. In this regard the Council is expected to negotiate on behalf of the operators or at least subsidize the rent. Such problems are largely genuine given the reported lack

of support network for black-owned enterprises in the inner-city (Rogerson and Rogerson, 1996a). Rogerson and Rogerson (1996a) avers that, although the cluster of NGOs, development organizations and trade unions generally received outside financial assistance from a range of sources, the masses of black entrepreneurs did not receive any support. Most entrepreneurs in a similar situation as Rogerson and Rogerson (1996a) have pointed out have not applied for assistance from official small business support agencies. Although largely mentioning problems of illiteracy and thus unable to speak for themselves through applications, most entrepreneurs have been discouraged often by dismal experience of others. This issue overlaps to issues of applying for government tenders. A mens-wear specialist from Kings Court was asked as to why she never tried to get support from development agencies, she responded by saying, "...my friend tried to apply for tenders of manufacturing overall for Eskom - I thought I would follow should he succeed". With regard to development agencies support, tracksuits manufacturer responded by saying, "...you know what, a lot of energy is wasted trying to get support from government and... nothing succeed - so I ... choose not to go for government support".

Other than bitterness that is reflected in these responses there is an element of being discouraged by refusals and unsuccessful applications. Unfortunately, banks as well have a long history of refusing to provide finance due to enterprise lack of collateral. Hope is now vested in the newly formed

government financing house and support agency Khula and Ntsika Enterprise and Promotion Agency.

Foreigners are largely left in the cold with regard to government support. Despite having the same problems of rent and access to credit, the foreigners largely acknowledge the fact that they are not entitled to government help by virtue of being foreign. When asked how the Johannesburg Council could help them they said, "...well even if I had problems - I do not see how the Johannesburg Council can help me without helping South Africans first" (African Robes manufacturer, from Nigeria); "look I'm not trying to jump into local politics here - I think if the Council could have a way of controlling rental prices - so that landlords could not charge anything they want. Other than that as a foreigner it is difficult for me to make demands" (Kenyan, manufacturing Duvets); "If the Council can help us with machines so that at the end of the day we employ people, but we doubt that kind of help because we are foreigners" (Traditional fashion designs, from Ghana).

These responses show less interest among foreigners in accessing government services, but there is interest among foreigners in seeing the question of rent being resolved. Rent is seen as a common problem that if it is solved by the Council there are chances that it would benefit all the manufacturers irrespective of citizenship. Overall, black entrepreneurs irrespective of country of origin expressed their overwhelming need for support.

Concluding remarks

The findings of this analysis point to a picture that has already been reflected by local research. This is the question of rapidly changing landscape of small enterprise development in South Africa's economic heartland, Johannesburg. A number of important policy and planning issues can be reaffirmed from this investigation. The findings of this research confirm the vital role played by the inner city of Johannesburg as a zone of opportunity. These findings are largely documented in both local and international research. In particular, the findings confirm the importance of the inner city as potential incubator and\or hatchery for small entrepreneurs. A call for observing this policy and planning issue is reverberated in the wake among government circles of renewing the "ailing" inner-city through "operation Mayivuke". Despite being a benevolent idea to renew inner-city, "making it look nicer" in order to attract and\or keep investors, such programs if not carried out carefully may have a negative outcome of displacing informal businesses located in the inner city (Leitner and Garner, 1993; Cox and Mair, 1988). International research has shown that rebuilding reduces the supply of low-rent housing units resulting in increased rents (Leitner and Garner, 1993). The government in this regard need to be careful not to execute contrasting policies, where on one hand it will be committing itself into creating enabling environment for small businesses while on the other hand creating

a situation that would result in displacement of SMMEs in an area known to be an incubator for entrepreneurs.

Issues of concern for the local government are those that relate to the challenges of providing the essential services to inner-city manufacturers. Specifically, information seems to be of critical importance. Also, the fact that our local entrepreneurs are illiterate suggest that they will always fall short of readily knowing where to seek information or help. In this regard, local service providers should reach out rather than expect these entrepreneurs to come out on their own.

Lastly, the local government should find ways of promoting both vertical and horizontal symbiotic linkages that seem to be gaining momentum in this sector. In this regard the service providers should provide information with regard to who is doing what and where. This information as shown in the analysis above could go a long way in enhancing the already existing informal linkages and may reinforce not only the informal subcontracting arrangements as reported above, but also encourage cooperation among small manufacturers, more especially when it comes to innovation and discovery of new technology as it was the case with industrial districts of Third Italy.

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