

HARD WORK MAKES DURBAN CITY OF HOPE

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Durban is an icon of hope for other cities in South Africa, at least when it comes to preventing rapid deterioration and eventual "shutdown" of its CBD. Several exciting, bold and innovative developments have been implemented to rescue the city of Durban from urban decay and lawlessness. Street trading by-laws and the provision of tables in demarcated spots in Durban means that it is several years ahead of, for example, Pretoria, Johannesburg, Yeoville and Nelspruit.

There is chaos in the streets and pavements of Gauteng and Mpumalanga provinces, with locals and foreign nationals competing for space amid acrimonious objections, accusations and suspicion.

Formal businesses I interviewed in December last year strongly opposed the presence of street vendors. In Yeoville, there is no street-trading by-law but a proposal of R35 per month and controlled trading areas for being considered. All street traders will be confined to one area, much to the delight of formal businesspersons who hope that the dowdy character of Yeoville could change for the better.

Nelspruit will also see a street trading by-law once the "conflict" between officials, councillor and street traders' representatives is resolved. Apparently, officials put forward a proposal without consulting councillors and street traders representatives, according to a prominent councillor.

Efforts are therefore under way in other provinces to control street trading as part of its urban renewal programmes. This week also saw the launch in Johannesburg by the Bar Council to keep the area around the high court in Pritchard Street clear of street traders and to prevent loitering. The bar council has called upon accountants and other groups to embark on similar projects. Councillors and officials I met in November and December last year were impressed with Durban's street trading by-laws and its positive results. The enforcement of the by-law will prevent Durban's CBD from becoming a dowdy, downtown Johannesburg or Yeoville.

However, enforcement must be impartial and consistent; the demarcation in the West / Smith street precinct differs significantly from the Grey Street CBD. This has resulted in Durban officials being accused of applying double standards by overcrowding the pavements in one area (Grey Street CBD) while ensuring the West / Smith street precinct is aesthetically and spatially "correct". Also, the "mafia" and big businesses trading by proxy must be stamped out urgently to enable the by-law to be applied successfully and equitably to those who are genuine street vendors forced to eke out a living on the streets.

Foreign nationals and locals who are trading illegally should be accommodated in designated areas similar to fleamarkets so that the city can prevent clashes and conflicts characteristic of Johannesburg, and simultaneously dispense with a politically correct solution to both locals as well as refugees.

Fining the culprits, usually big businesses trading on the streets, for excessive littering must be enforced. Refuse removal and cleaning up operations late at night by Durban's Solid Waste would mean better use of ratepayers' money.

These moves are part of a grand plan that is slowly coming together, promising great hope for the future. There are problems, but at least these are being addressed. Other issues need to be placed on council's agendas for action. Albert Park is one example where urgent remedial action against defaulting property owners and drug trafficking is needed.

Once Albert Park is given priority for upgrading together with urban renewal projects presently in progress in Warwick Triangle, the Point project, community police forums, street children's

initiatives, the Integrated Development Plan, Durban will emerge as the most excellent city in the country.

Few realise the tremendous efforts invested by all role players to make Durban safe, better and beautiful. The results will unfold gradually. Residents must however continue to lobby for change, make representation and level legitimate constructive criticisms so that the "new" or improved image of Durban will have a grassroots advantage.