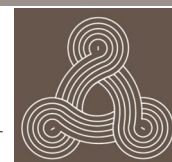


TOWNSHIP ECONOMY IN 2020

Township High Streets

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Introduction

There is growing recognition that township high streets fulfill an important role in localised economies. These are the streets in which a high concentration of businesses can be found, notably informal micro-enterprises. High streets tend to correlate to the main transport corridors along which mini-bus taxis operate. Hence, these spaces often include nodes supportive of public transport, such as taxi ranks, bus stations and train stations. The high pedestrian footfall around these nodes and along these streets is the key to the high street business environment. In research into nine township economies, we found that about one third of all business activities are situated along these high streets (Charman, Petersen & Govender, 2020). Importantly, the high streets accommodate a more diverse range of businesses than can be found in the neighbourhood or residential contexts, especially among businesses engaged in the provision of services. Such businesses include hair salons and barber shops, businesses providing electrical repair services, furniture shops, street traders selling hardware and homeware (plastic buckets etc.) and more unusual businesses in the township context such as lawyers and medical practices.

In the global urbanized North, the historical role of high streets as centers of commerce and trade has been eclipsed by shopping malls, which are characteristically situated on the urban periphery where the malls are designed to accommodate private motor vehicles. In the developing context of the township economy, in contrast, high streets continue to emerge as spatial touchpoints of economic activity. Whilst shopping malls, which attract corporate retailers and financial services, have been established on the township periphery, high streets are a haven for small businesses. In our recent area census of the business environment in Delft South, we found that around 44% of

all micro-enterprises were trading within the high street context, up from 29% in 2010 (See Township Economy in 2020 #1). Much of the growth in business numbers on the Delft high street has been achieved through the densification of trading on public space. This means that there are more traders along the street, making more efficient use of space such as sidewalks, road reserves, recreational parks and open space. Yet part of the expansion of business activities along high streets has been driven by the property owners who have made strategic investments in their buildings to transform their homes from a predominately residential use to a mixed-use property.

In this essay, I examine some of the key ways that township high streets have become more productive, both economically and in social terms. I have already provided an insight into two of these ways, namely an intensification in the use of public space and the redevelopment of private properties situated along the high street. Through focusing on cases studies, one from Namibia and one from South Africa, I will examine two additional means. First, the important role of business pioneers, and second, the role of municipal government and spatial interventions (intentional and unintentional) that support and enable high street development.

Our first case study is Eveline Street, located within Goreangab township in the City of Windhoek, Namibia. We examine this case in detail in our book **Township Economy: people, spaces and practices**. The research was undertaken in 2016. I will compare and contrast the Eveline Street outcome with the findings from recent (2020) research on two high streets in Philippi, namely Ingulube Road and Amsterdam Street. This second case study was commissioned by the Philippi Economic Development Initiative, as part of a City of Cape Town supported project to develop an area-based strategy to activate township businesses

We acknowledge the contribution to this research by Thomas Swana and Paul Stohrer from PEDl, as well as the technical advice of the area-based team of the City of Cape Town, notably Paul Williamson and Sisa Ngondo. The social spatial research was undertaken in partnership with theMAAK (Ashleigh Killa and Max Melvill). The field research team was led by Anthony Muteti.

and improve the social environment along these high streets. In both case studies, we were able to access historic datasets and thereby measure the quantitative change in business activities over time. In the Eveline Street case, we accessed a 2008 dataset on businesses operating in the high street from the City of Windhoek. In the Philippi cases, we drew on the SLF small-area census research undertaken in 2011. In both case sites we collected data on business activities, using a survey, and undertook a social-spatial analysis on the use of public space and private property developments along the two streets. In our next blog post Series #7,

the authors report on the results of the Philippi social-spatial research.

Eveline Street

Eveline Street is a well-known leisure destination, holding a similar attractiveness to famed late-night 'drinkertainment' destinations such as Long Street in Cape Town or 7th Street Melville, Johannesburg. Eveline Street hosts a wide range of bars, night-clubs, restaurants and businesses selling take-away foods. In 2008, the City of Windhoek (CoW) undertook a survey

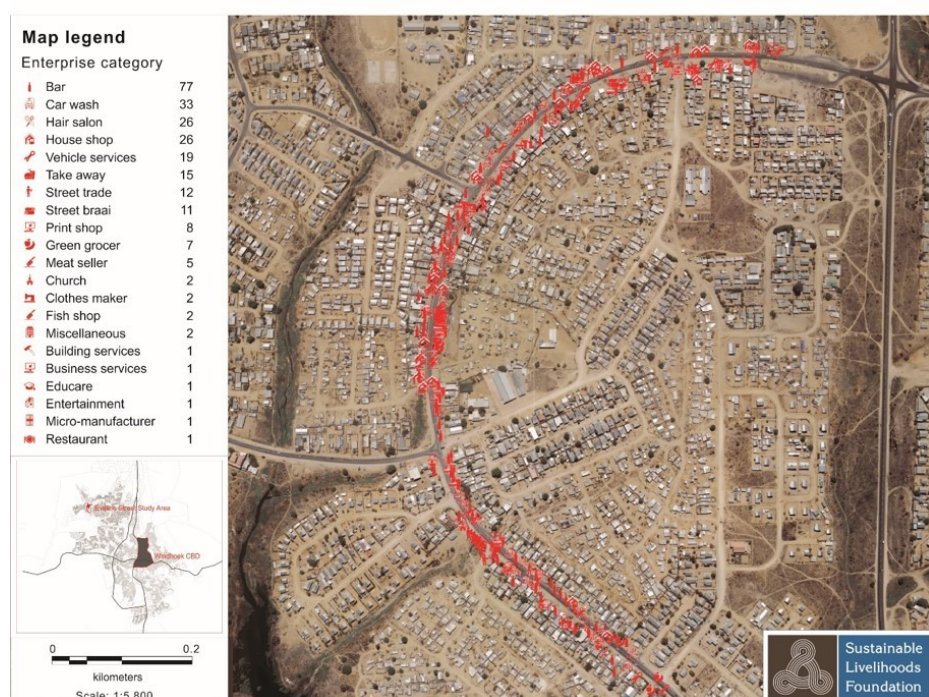
Enterprises on Eveline Street, 2008



MAP 1

An overview of enterprises on Eveline Street, Windhoek, in 2008

Enterprises on Eveline Street, 2016



MAP 2

An overview of enterprises on Eveline Street, Windhoek, in 2016

of businesses along the street. At that time there were around 60 bars along the street. In respect to the concentration of businesses along such streets, the CoW introduced a business corridor initiative, which entailed rezoning the high street from residential use to business use, a move which permitted alcohol selling venues to regularise their businesses (since trading from residential sites was prohibited) and obtain a license to trade. The property owners of these bars took advantage of this concession, obtaining licenses and investing in their properties and businesses. The role of bars in Eveline street is unlike the situation in most South African townships, where bars operate from residential neighbourhoods and high streets

have a dormitory character at night. Eveline Street bars orient onto the street. Bars set up temporary tables and benches on the sidewalk, encroaching into the public space, yet ensuring that socialisation is directed towards the street. Numerous property owners have erected structures extending onto the sidewalk to provide shade for parking and business clients and have paved the sidewalk. The street-facing bars help to activate the streetscape and foster synergies for other businesses, notably car washes, food take-aways and hair care businesses. The car washes support the sedan taxis that operate throughout Windhoek. The hair salons and food take-aways operate into the night, interdependent with the light-night leisure economy, with bars providing a customer base for both business sectors and vice versa.

FIGURE 1

Activated businesses on Eveline Street, indicated in red

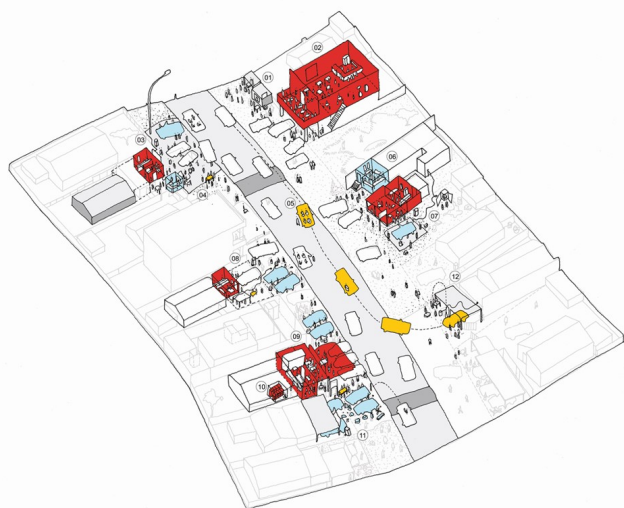


FIGURE 2

The round kerb and broad sidewalks on Eveline Street enable cars to perpendicular park, enabling easy access to businesses



In 2016 we surveyed the businesses along Eveline Streets. We found that the number of micro-enterprises had doubled, from 133 in 2008 to 270 in 2016. Importantly, the high street now accommodated not only more businesses, but also new categories of business. We found that the pioneering bars sector had increased up to 80 businesses. New kinds of businesses had also set up along the high street; these included automotive services, a greater range of food retailers, and businesses providing specialist services, including print shops and a laundromat. The change in micro-enterprise numbers/ categories from 2008 to 2016 is shown in Maps 1 and 2. Most of the bars on Eveline Street were more sophisticated in their business operations and seemingly provide a higher quality of service than township taverns. In contrast to South African taverns, all of the Eveline Street bars sold a variety of soft drinks and supported non-drinking socialisation, especially during the daytime when the venues provide a space in which taxi drivers and other patrons can rest and watch television whilst waiting for their vehicles to be cleaned.

The City of Windhoek has played an important role in shaping the emergence of Eveline Street. The business corridor initiative, as mentioned, was catalytic in enabling business owners to regularise their businesses through reducing the red tape associated with land re-zoning, a condition necessary to obtain a liquor license. In addition, authorities have supported businesses on Eveline Street through creating a more enabling environment via the provision of street lighting, CCTV surveillance monitoring (absent in Philippi), traffic calming and the establishment of a traders' market

at which meat braai stands have agglomerated. At the ends of the street, the CoW have approved multi-story residential developments, which have helped to density the street environment and amplify the demand for public transport, retail and leisure services. In an example of unintended development, the street morphology has a soft-kerb structure, which, along with the 8-meter wide sidewalk, enables off-street parking. Vehicles can thus drive off the street and perpendicular park right outside of the businesses that people intend to visit. The perpendicular arrangement ensures that parking space is maximized, which in turn, has had an important influence on the street environment. It has directly contributed to the emergence of business clusters, as demonstrated in Figure 1 above, in which the activated businesses are shaded in red.

Ingulube Road and Amsterdam Street

Ingulube Road and Amsterdam Street form part of a

continuous transport corridor that starts at the Philippi train station / taxi rank and ends at the Nyanga taxi rank. We first studied the Ingulube / Amsterdam section of the corridor in 2011. Since that time there have been two notable spatial changes impacting on the corridor. The first has been the establishment of informal settlements on vacant (under-developed) land

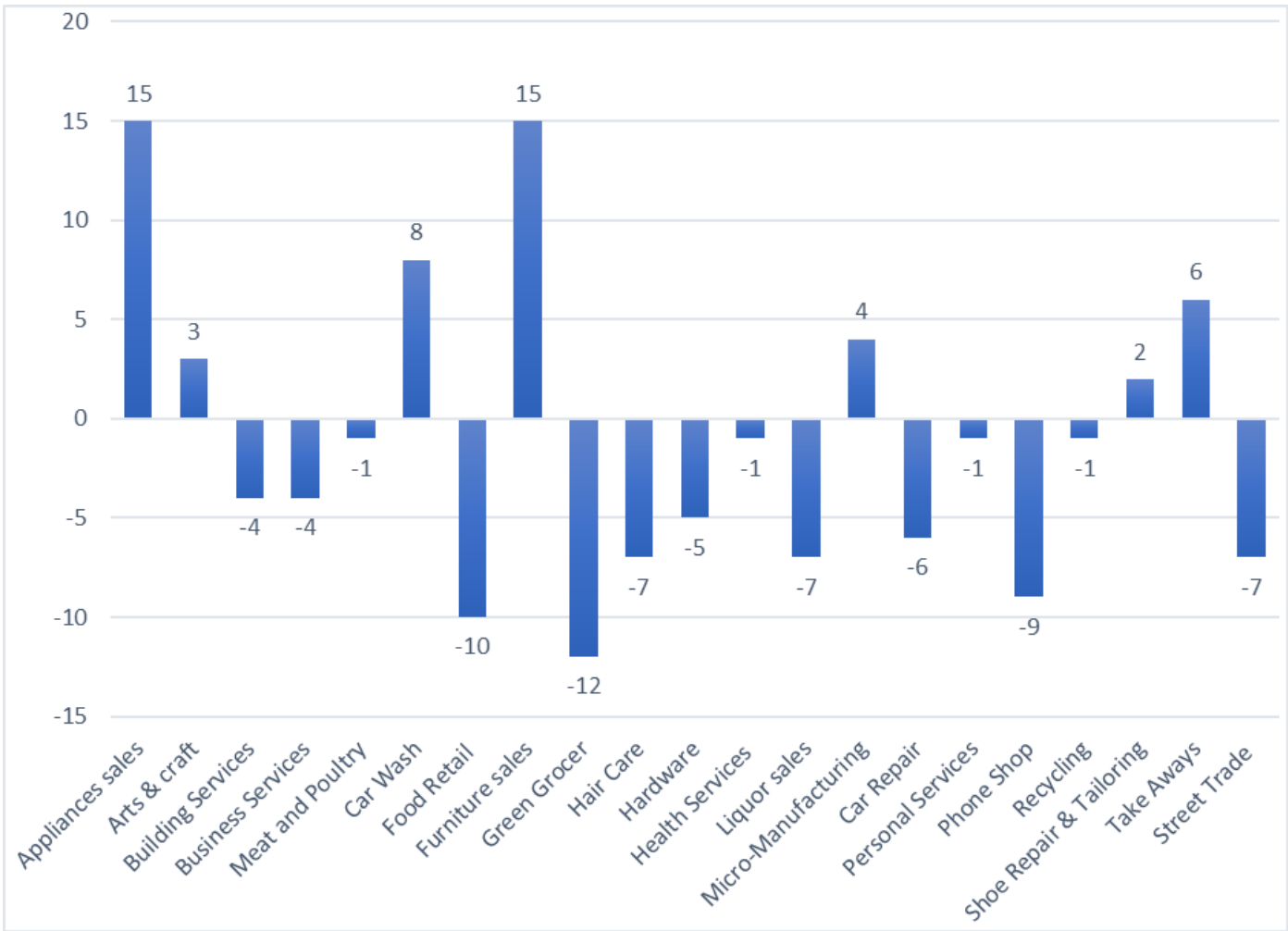


FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4

Change in enterprise numbers on Amsterdam Street and Ingulube Road between 2011 & 2020

A carwash and hair salon on the high street in Philippi



parcels, thus increasing the population of the street catchment. The second has been the closure of the train station, which has impacted on pedestrian footfall to and from the station. As high streets, Ingulube and Amsterdam are destinations of a different composition of micro-enterprises. There are no clear pioneer businesses, such as the Eveline street bars, which strongly influence the trajectory of development. There are few bars situated along the corridor.

An important influence on the development of these two streets is the relationship of properties to the high street. When the area was planned, the urban planners did not envision the street as a space of commerce and socialisation. Hence, the state-subsidised houses built on the properties along this street face inward, with their 'backs' to the high street and 'fronts' towards the residential area. Residents of properties contiguous with the high street access their homes

Philippi Amsterdam Street Precinct Micro-Enterprise Survey, November 2019
Micro-enterprise business category



MAP 3

*Micro-enterprises identified on
Amsterdam Street, Philippi, in 2019*

Philippi Ingulube Road Precinct Micro-Enterprise Survey, November 2019
Micro-enterprise business category



MAP 4

*Micro-enterprises identified on
Ingulube Road, Philippi, in 2019*

from the neighborhood side streets. This spatial layout is particularly notable in Ingulube Road. In addition, because Ingulube Road / Amsterdam Street were designed as part of a transport corridor, intended to serve buses and taxis, there was minimal provision for off-street parking for sedan vehicles, whilst the hard-kerb structure throughout the corridor was intended to present a barrier to vehicles moving off-street. It was not intended for businesses to operate on the street. Instead, the planners had sought to accommodate informal trading opportunities within an off-street node, situated opposite the library (roughly mid-point along the corridor), in two underperforming business hives at the end of Amsterdam Street, furthest from the station and pedestrian activity, and within a retail hive opposite the station that continues to operate as originally intended. The subsequent emergence of the high street as a space of business has been undertaken in defiance to these objectives.

In 2011, we identified 287 businesses. Then, the two streets contained clusters within which particular businesses predominated, including hair salons, braai stands (especially chicken), food retailers, traditional healers and street traders. Most street traders were located close to the train station and taxi rank, operating from within the station precinct. The other businesses were mainly situated on the street sidewalk, operating from shacks built with corrugated iron, shipping containers and temporary stands. In 2019, we identified 265 businesses, a decrease of 22 businesses. This indicates that there had not been an intensification in the use of space. New businesses had simply replaced those that had closed. The change in enterprise numbers/categories is shown in Figure 2. The main categories in decline were green grocers, food retailers and liquor traders. The main categories that increased were appliance sales, car washes and furniture sales. The most numerous business in both periods are hair care, followed by take-aways (both braaied and cooked meat), with the main change a shift in entrepreneur nationality from South African to non-South African. The comparative data indicates that the role of the high street has begun to change, shifting away from its initial role as a retail space for food items (including fruit and vegetables), foodservice and personal-medical services, to becoming a more diverse business environment with specialised services and retailers. The decline in survivalist businesses retailing food and beverages is consistent with our research in Delft South where we noted a similar

FIGURE 5

Business and Property Pioneers on Amsterdam Street, Philippi

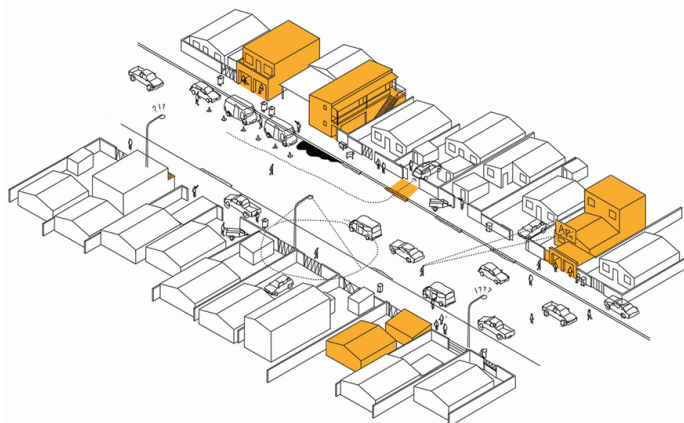


FIGURE 6

Businesses access water from communal facilities not intended for business purposes



FIGURE 7

Electricity is accessed illegally for business operations



trend.

We found important differences in the development outcome on Ingulube Road and Amsterdam Street respectively. These differences are partly observable in Maps 3 and 4. Over the eight-year period, in Ingulube Road, there was a reduction in businesses that provide mechanical services and electrical repair services, and a corresponding rise in businesses selling furniture (new and second hand) and household appliances. In Amsterdam Street, the most notable change over this timeframe was the growth in car washes and businesses selling fast-food, including street braais. As these are male dominated categories, it is not surprising that almost two thirds of the businesses on Amsterdam Street are operated by men, whereas more women trade on Ingulube Road, especially at the station precinct, as hawkers and as hair stylists. Immigrant entrepreneurs operate the majority of businesses in the categories of hair care, furniture retail, appliance repair and grocery retail. Along the high street corridor (both streets included), 32% of businesses operate from shacks, 29% operate from containers, 21% from building made of brick (mostly those within the hives), 12% have no structure, 3% use temporary furniture, 1.4% have semi-fixed stands, and 0.4% are mobile businesses. It is only in Amsterdam Street that property owners have begun to respond to the opportunities of the high street through developing their properties to support businesses. This development can be seen, illustratively, in Figure 4. There are similarities in these developments, including the extension of buildings upward, to the spatial changes recorded in Eveline Street. Elsewhere on the corridor there has been little change in the composition of business infrastructure since the time that we first surveyed these businesses.

Implications for Development Practice

In both Eveline Street and on the Philippi corridor of Ingulube and Amsterdam, high streets have emerged as a spatial and economic spine with dense concentrations of business. Although both case studies provide testament to the potential of small enterprises (and entrepreneurship) to transform the urban form, the outcomes are divergent. If Eveline Street represents a progressive trend, the outcome in Philippi is regressive, either wholly or in aspects. Part of this outcome for Philippi is the weak role of private landholders in shaping the street development. Another contributing influence is the absence of a collective of business

pioneers, whose actions in growing their businesses enable opportunities for other micro-enterprises. This is not to report that there are no pioneers in Philippi, for there are indeed a handful of businesses that have invested in their properties / businesses and fostered synergistic opportunities in the manner of the Eveline Street bar owners. But there is simply not an aggregation of entrepreneurs fulfilling this role. Most businesses in Philippi occupy (municipal) land under precarious conditions. There is no tenure security for these entrepreneurs.

The second difference is the comparatively inferior business and social environment. In Philippi, there is no provision for off-street parking. As a result, vehicles park on the sidewalks, obscuring access for pedestrians, whilst parallel street parking consumes space inefficiently, which contributes to street congestion. There is poor surveillance along both Ingulube Road and Amsterdam Street. This is a result of both under-investment by the state in security systems (technological and physical) and the absence of a culture of looking out for one-another akin to that nurtured in street-based leisure economies. In consequence, robberies and muggings are a common occurrence in Philippi. We observed that there is weak (and non) enforcement of City by-laws and business regulations. Many businesses access services informally and illegally (including water, electricity and waste management), avoiding investments that would support wider social benefit in the local area. This deeply informal business environment can be discouraging to customers, especially where informality harbors risks to personal safety and health (there are no toilets or washing facilities, for example). Whilst aspects of urban informality on the Philippi high street might appeal to the masculine culture synergistic with street braais and car washes, the appeal is evidently limited. As a result, some consumers (women, youth for instance) avoid the township high street and have turned, instead, for the nearest mall as their entertainment destination. An important achievement of Eveline Street has been the unlocking of a culture of entrepreneurship in which competition has resulted in investment to business which provide a broader social dividend. This is the big difference.

Further Reading

Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation. Transformative Leisure Economies. Eveline Street, Katutura, Windhoek. 2016.

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