



# Working<sup>in</sup> Warwick

Including street traders in  
urban plans

Richard Dobson and Caroline Skinner  
with Jillian Nicholson



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## Introduction: From decay to renewal - the triumph of Warwick

The Warwick Junction Urban Renewal Project<sup>1</sup> has received domestic and international acclaim for its active support for street traders. This local authority project was tasked with tackling urban management and design challenges in the area surrounding the primary transport node in Durban, South Africa. Since there are very few examples in South African or internationally where street traders are incorporated into urban planning, the story of Warwick is one worth telling.

Historically South African local authorities kept street traders away from city centres and tourist areas and generally regarded them as a nuisance rather than an asset. There are many cases of sometimes violent mass evictions of street traders. This Project recognised that street trading was an important part of the city, contributing to its economy and to employment. Although incomes are often low, the economic benefits to the municipality and the turnover generated by traders in Warwick, far outweigh the relatively small capital costs of the Project. In addition the profits from these activities go back into poor communities where traders often support large families – yet another incentive to create street trading spaces.

In responding with vigour and enthusiasm, Durban's municipality has added a new and exciting dimension to the city. Warwick is an example of enhancing rather than hindering the livelihoods of street traders, and of paying attention to their needs rather than building infrastructure that is inappropriate and, in other local authorities, often unused.

Much of the success of the Warwick Junction Urban Renewal Project, which was set up in 1995, is due to the way in which the council<sup>2</sup> was prepared to suspend conventional management practices in favour of a participative inter-departmental approach. This combined the skills and knowledge of officials in the renewal process and in ongoing management of the area. Street traders and their organisations were integrally involved in shaping this change and in raising key issues. Through this process innovative solutions were found to urban management, architectural and design challenges.

The regeneration process was, inevitably, not always plain sailing. The Project experienced failures and disappointments as well as successes. These gave rise to lessons and reflections that are an important component of the book and are helpful both for initiating change as well as for ongoing planning and management. The principal lesson was the realisation that success required real and continuous commitment on the

part of those working in the Project.

This book is more than a documentation of the Project. It aims to demonstrate the benefits for local authorities and their citizens of integrating street traders into urban plans and to excite interest in implementing some of the initiatives described here. Its primary message to all those in a position to effect positive change in this sector, particularly for those in local government, is 'your city can do this too'. While the scale of the renewal process of Warwick was significant, it grew incrementally and so should not deter others from embarking on smaller initiatives.

During the writing of this book the city started to consider plans to redevelop parts of Warwick. This has introduced some uncertainty about the future of Warwick's street and market traders. In contrast to the approach of the Project, there has been little consultation with traders. This book, therefore, is also a call to the city to continue its inclusive and consultative approach which provides an inspiring example for other cities.

### Awards and nominations

- Mail and Guardian Green Trust Award for urban renewal, 2000
- KwaZulu-Natal Institute of Architects' Heritage Award for renovation of the Project Centre, 2000
- Nominated for the IBM Innovations in Government Award in 2007
- South African Institute of Architects' President's Award 2007/2008
- UN Habitat / Dubai International Award for Good Practice for the Brook Street Market, 2008.

<sup>1</sup>Throughout the book this is referred to as 'the Project'.

<sup>2</sup>Council refers to the local administrative body. It is made up of both elected representatives or councillors, and bureaucrats or officials. The terms 'council', 'local authority' and 'local government' are used interchangeably.

