

## **Contestation and Coexistence: An Exploratory Study of the Interactions between Formal and Informal Sectors within eThekweni City Centre**

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**Abstract :** South African city centres depict dynamic urban spaces which reflect complex interactions between multiple actors: the state, formal businesses and informal street traders, with each competing for territorial claims and spatial dominance. The objective of the study is exploring how space is contested, negotiated and occupied between formal and informal sectors, while consequently trying to understand the implication that this has on spatial planning and spatial justice. Through a case-study analysis of the eThekweni city centre, this research examines spatial arrangement, coexistence and conflicts that shape the urban fabric. The study employs spatial justice as a theoretical lens to highlight the inequalities that are embedded within urban planning policies and how street traders are resilient to the harsh restrictive spatial frameworks. Limited evidence is known about how urban planning frameworks can integrate informal street traders in city centres and recognize them as legitimate stakeholders. The study investigates how spatial planning frameworks can be reimagined to promote spatial justice and further facilitate coexistence between formal and informal stakeholders in city centres. Primary data collection included interviews with key stakeholders, while NVivo software was used to analyse the interview data. Observations were conducted through transect walks, which allowed for insight into the spatial dynamics and daily interactions. Visual representations were depicted using GIS mapping to show areas of contestation as well as areas where formal and informal activities intersect. Furthermore, secondary data from literature enabled a comparative analysis of similar case studies through precedent studies. The study revealed continuous contestation by formal businesses and the state, who are for the most part often prioritized by planning frameworks while street traders are often marginalized regardless of their contribution towards economic development. This study therefore proposes strategies for spatial planning that supports an integrative urban framework which ensures equitable access and also a reduction of the marginalization of street traders within urban spaces. This study aims to contribute to understanding urban coexistence and further advocates for spatial planning approaches that integrates informal street traders as legitimate actors in the urban landscape while fostering spatial justice within city centres.

**Keywords :** coexistence, contestation, integration, spatial justice, spatial planning, street traders

**Conference Title :** ICSDP 2025 : International Conference on Sustainable Development and Planning

**Conference Location :** New York, United States

**Conference Dates :** October 07-08, 2025