



The Effects of COVID-19 on Informal Traders in Undesignated Spaces

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Abstract

The literature on COVID-19 impacts overlooks the pandemic's impact on informal traders who operate in undesignated public spaces. While studies on the impact of COVID-19 on informal traders exist, there remains little focus on how the socio-economic livelihood activities of informal traders in undesignated public spaces, such as parks, who rely on both domestic and international tourists as customers, have been impacted. This paper fills this gap by focusing on two case studies of urban public spaces in the city of Tshwane, South Africa. These spaces are Jubilee Square and Magnolia Dell Park. The study is predicated on the spatial triad framework which enables it to interrogate how the restriction on access and utilisation of public spaces during the COVID-19 lockdown impacted on the socio-economic activities of informal traders. It found that informal traders in these two parks were the most vulnerable category of traders during the COVID-19 lockdown and faced huge socio-economic and livelihood challenges. They lost their income sources and had their social networks disrupted. The article proposes social policy interventions in the governance of public spaces as part of an effort to save both lives and livelihoods in the face of a pandemic.

Keywords:

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1- Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the diverse response mechanisms adopted by countries affected the socio-economic livelihood activities of informal traders, who rely on both domestic and international tourists as customers. Among the informal traders affected, yet not attracting scholarly attention, are informal traders who operate in undesignated public spaces such as parks. The available literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, not only in South Africa but across the world, has blind spots concerning how informal traders who rely on domestic and international tourists and who utilize public spaces were affected. In South Africa, available studies on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry focus on the pandemic's impact on formal and established businesses, including the food and beverage sector [1, 2], the transport sector [3, 4], and the accommodation sector [4], among others. Thus, with studies on the COVID-19 pandemic still evolving, there is currently no study that specifically focuses on informal traders who operate in public spaces such as public parks. This is problematic because most of the informal traders who operate in these public parks are generally categorized as unemployed and are among the most vulnerable groups that the South African government targeted in its COVID-19 social policy interventions, particularly following the national lockdown implemented starting on March 27th, 2020.

The national lockdown implemented starting on March 27th, 2020 resulted in steep prices for basic commodities due to limited access to them, as well as inflated medical costs that adversely affected the poor [5]. To prevent a massive increase in poverty, the government expanded its existing social protection programs and immediately boosted cash

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transfer packages to ensure that vulnerable groups, especially the poor and the unemployed, had ample resources to deal with the social and economic costs of COVID-19. The government rolled out social grants to vulnerable population categories and enterprises. Capitalizing on its already available social infrastructure, such as the social grant pay-points of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), vulnerable populations continued to access their grants, which were now accompanied by new relief measures. The government rolled out a social relief and economic support package of R500 billion, from which, among others, the unemployed receive an R350 Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant, which started in May 2020 [6]. Among the recipients of the social relief and economic support package were the many informal traders, some of whom operated in parks and gardens and yet who remained understudied until now. It is therefore important that vulnerable groups, such as informal traders, be studied in depth to gather detailed information on how they are affected and how they should be supported. A study of this nature could provide policymakers and other responsible stakeholders to design response mechanisms for future pandemics that could affect informal traders in undesignated spaces. The study could also highlight some pathways through which these traders could recover and put their labour to use in trading rather than rely on government grants. Drawing on these standpoints, focusing on two case studies of urban public spaces in the City of Tshwane, South Africa, namely; Jubilee square and Magnolia Dell Park, this article (i) interrogates how the restriction on access and utilisation of public spaces as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated measures impacted on the socio-economic activities of informal traders; and proposes future pathways for protecting the lives and livelihoods of informal traders in undesignated spaces.

The next section presents the research methodology for the study. This is followed by an outline of the theoretical framework that was used to explore how the socio-economic activities of informal traders were impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown. The chapter then moves on to provide a background on South Africa's COVID-19 response mechanisms. Thereafter, a presentation and discussion of the findings are made; potential pathways for protecting the lives and livelihoods of informal traders in undesignated spaces are highlighted; and lastly, concluding remarks and recommendations are made.

2- Research Methods

This exploratory qualitative study is based on in-depth interviews conducted in the two purposefully selected parks, namely, Jubilee Square and Magnolia Dell Park in South Africa. The parks were chosen based on the number of informal traders as well as their popularity with local and international tourists. The study involved 10 informal traders who were selected purposefully based on their periods as traders in the parks. Six park users were also conveniently selected to augment the data from the traders. The interviews were conducted between March and June 2022, when most lockdown restrictions had been eased, most traders resumed activities, and face-to-face interactions were allowed, although with COVID-19 safety protocols. Participants needed to be informal traders and have knowledge of the spaces under study. Participants were assigned numbers to be able to follow up during analysis and discussion. Informal traders were coded as "traders", while park users were coded as 'users'. Data was recorded using a recording device and later translated. Thematic data analysis was used in relation to the two dominant themes that had been identified in the literature, namely, the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.

Table 1. Categories of Participants

Category of Participants	Number of Participants
Informal traders	10
Users	6
Total Number	16

As can be seen in the table above, participants consisted of both users and informal dealers. The overall number of participants was 16, with 10 being Informal Traders and 6 being users. The flowchart of the research technique for the study is shown below in Figure 1.

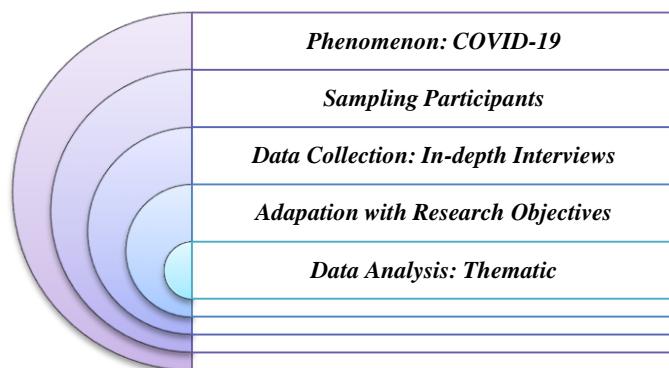


Figure 1. Flowchart of the research methodology for the study

3- Theoretical Framework: The Spatial Triad or Unitary Theory

The spatial triad framework or unitary theory used in this article was developed by Henri Lefebvre in the 1970s. The framework shows the rapport between the material (economic), mental, and social spaces. It conceptualizes three different but interconnected categories of space. It also contemplates space in its theoretical and symbolic forms. Lefebvre views space as offering interconnected and overlapping socio-economic practices [7, 8–10]. Thus, Lefebvre developed the spatial triad framework, which was predicated on the notions of perceived, conceived, and lived space, which he considered the basis for space production [7].

The perceived space refers to the physical space [7]. It is the physical components of a space, which include, for instance, infrastructure in a public park. It is a space that can be contacted by the five senses (see, hear, smell, touch, and taste [11]) and in which informal traders position and sell their products. The physical nature of public space is purely materialistic and allows for the pursuit of livelihood activities, while its "planned" nature is purely idealistic. Spatial practices and developments ensue in this space and can be observed in human movement and activities [12]. This space offers structure to daily spatial practices. With regard to traders, space influences the type of business that can be pursued. Space facilitates economic and social life. Space also ensures the thriving of societal cohesion [10]. Therefore, a study of the geographical area may provide insight into the perceived space, that is, physical space such as infrastructure, as well as its value to those who use it.

The other form of space is conceived space. In the context of public parks (the focus of this study), conceived space refers to the standards and ideologies [7]. It is "a place for the practices of political powers that are designed to manipulate those who exist within them" [9]. The by-laws, rules, and regulations, including COVID-19 lockdowns and safety protocols, form part of the conceived space. By-laws, rules, and regulations facilitate or hinder certain activities within that space [10]. Conceived space, in the context of COVID-19 regulations, could be seen as undercutting the needs of space users and their conditions and circumstances through access and lockdown restrictions.

The lived space signifies the memories, stories, and daily societal experiences [13]. Regrettably, there continues to be more emphasis on the rationality approach in the management of conceived space than on lived and perceived space. Positioning perceived and lived space in this secondary manner has led to the continuous unfairness experienced in public spaces [14]. Hillier [10] argues that viewing perceived and lived space as secondary results in diverse forms of discrimination and domination. As a result, space users become mere consumers who are prone to displacement, disenfranchisement, and alienation when, for instance, pandemics such as COVID-19 emerge. Where this obtains, the identities of users are eroded and their socio-economic activities are disrupted. It is, therefore, crucial to consider public space utilisation as consisting of interconnected parts of the perceived, conceived, and lived spaces to assess how informal traders were impacted by COVID-19 regulations.

4- South Africa and the COVID-19 Pandemic

In South Africa, COVID-19 arrived on March 5, 2020. The first incident to be reported involved a person who had recently come back from Italy. On March 15, a national state of disaster was declared by the president of the country. A week later, the president declared a total national lockdown for three weeks, starting on March 26. The lockdown was later prolonged by an additional two weeks to April 30. Only socio-economic activities that were deemed essential were permitted. At the end of the lockdown, a "COVID-19 alert system" was introduced to manage the gradual easing and departure from a harsh mitigation stance towards suppression [6]. There were five basic levels to the alert systems, with Level 5 being the hardest and Level 1 being more relaxed. However, from time to time, adjustments were being made to the levels in response to the various COVID-19 waves as well as the advent of new variants. The generic alert system was based on a risk-adjusted method steered by numerous benchmarks, which included: (i) the ability of health services to cater for the severely sick; (ii) the rate and transmission rate; and (iii) the "extent of public health interventions and the economic and social impact of continued restrictions" [15]. Level 5 lockdown, which mainly focused on "flattening the curve" as part of the mitigation procedures, lasted for five weeks. It was then eased to level 4 (between 1 and 31 May 2020), with a focus on gradually moving towards a mix of mitigation and suppression. Only activities that were considered key were allowed.

The first lockdown in March 2020 received general public support as a requisite line of attack to avert the spread of the virus and permit the country to get ready for the rollout of other plans. Nevertheless, the austere effect of the lockdown on the socio-economic and livelihood activities later raised suspicion about the suitability of the full lockdown in the country. In addition to a health disaster, the restrictions caused further strain on an economy that was already underperforming. With the advent of COVID-19, among its other economic implications was the pulling out of investors as a result of doubts about key revenue-boosting projects [16]. This affected Foreign Direct Investments. This resulted in massive industrial retrenchments as companies seek to control high wage bills [17]. The COVID-19 outbreak ignited disturbing consequences for the informal economy [16]. With approximately 3 million people employed in the informal sector in the country [15], the lockdowns, therefore, left many people in the sector affected [18].

In Tshwane, the ban on informal economic activities under levels 5 and 4 of the lockdown disrupted the socio-economic activities of informal traders who operate in different categories of spaces. Similar results were reported in Durban "WIEGO, 2021". In general, it is reported that about 97% of informal street traders, 95% of informal market traders, and 74% of waste pickers in the country experienced enormous income losses during the first phase of the lockdown restrictions [16]. While exploring the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the informal sector, it is, therefore, important to place more attention on the coping and survival strategies used by informal economic actors during a pandemic.

Reviewed literature across the world concurs that the informal economy is a key source of livelihood for over two billion of the global population [17–21]. Nevertheless, the nature of the informal economy, in several ways, exposes it to various risks, thereby making it more susceptible to and extremely affected by severe disruptions, such as disasters. In India (Mumbai), shops and trading stalls were swept away by floods in 2005, thereby shattering down the income and livelihood sources of informal traders [16]. With little restriction on access and utilisation of perceived space, street traders in Mumbai were able to quickly embark on their self-help by utilising their social networks and capacity to mobilize resources, and thus, resume their activities. The relaxation of the by-laws and regulations in the traders' 'conceived space' [7] encouraged innovativeness in remodeling and planning spaces through low-cost options such as using natural resources and waste materials to reconstruct trading stalls (Trader 7, April 6, 2022), thus, recovering quickly from the livelihoods shock (ILO, 2018).

Elsewhere, a cyclone in Bangladesh (2009), earthquakes in Nepal (2015) and Ecuador (2016) also heavily affected the socio-economic activities of informal traders and destroyed infrastructure. The responses adopted by informal traders were outside the government's jurisdictional basis for disaster control and response. These included the utilisation of community initiatives and volunteerism, and working together with civic bodies such as religious organisations to galvanize the support that was needed to resuscitate and revamp structures as well as raise operational capital for informal traders [21]. This shows that the government or local authorities did not place more emphasis and the execution of a rationality approach in the management of lived and perceived space, thereby enabling traders to innovate and bounce back. In Thailand, where landslides, floods, and forest fires are recurrent disasters for seasonal informal traders, principally those in the tourism industry, livelihoods and incomes are mostly affected [16]. Informal traders have thus established and sustained social capital relationships, comradeship, and social capital networks that exist amongst various categories of informal traders. This has enabled them to respond to and adapt to disruptive events without involving government bodies [22]. In Southern Africa, in countries such as Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa where various tropical cyclones have been recurrent in recent years, huge infrastructure and property used by informal traders continue to be destroyed [16]. The ensuing floods often submerge trading stalls and informal markets, leaving traders with no source of income [23]. For the majority of these disasters, the response by informal traders has been to depend on their social networks, which they created amongst themselves, including partnerships with civic organizations that provide humanitarian support to affected informal economic actors [24]. This summary of the informal economy and the responses by informal traders to destructive natural disasters are important in the exploration of how the socio-economic activities of informal traders, with specific reference to those who operate in the selected two public spaces, were impacted by COVID-19.

5- Findings and Discussion: Socio-economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Informal Traders

The results of the study are presented and discussed under the two concepts developed in the previous sections, namely; economic and social impacts.

5-1- Economic Impacts

Public spaces are increasingly becoming sites of various anticipated and unanticipated small-scale economic activities, not only in Tshwane but also across the globe. In Ghana, Akuoko et al. [23] found that most informal traders pursued their livelihood activities using public spaces. In Thailand, informal traders utilized public spaces for their activities, thus, avoiding paying rents and other expenses which can impact their incomes [22]. The participants in the current study also confirmed that the use of public spaces for economic activities was more prone in West and East Africa and that is now gaining popularity in Southern Africa. One participant mentioned that:

In West Africa, in Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria for instance, informal traders are more common and operate without interruption. It is an important source of survival in those countries" (Trader 7, 06 April 2022).

While also becoming increasingly visible in Southern African countries like Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South Africa, a participant mentioned that "*the use of public space for informal economic activities is very monitored and often disrupted by authorities*" (Trader 1, March 07, 2022). In Zimbabwe, during the initial lockdown in that country, vendors in the city of Mutare lost their wares to the police services which destroyed produce blaming informal traders for not obeying COVID-19 regulations [21]. In South Africa, Mhlanga & Moloi [24] found that public spaces were the basis for informal trading in that country. This situation confirms Lefebvre [9] who argues that the physical nature of public space is purely materialistic and allows for the pursuit of livelihood activities, whilst its 'planned' nature is purely

idealistic. The planned nature of public spaces has resulted in incessant debates on the acceptability of informal traders in public spaces. This has resulted in the execution of hard and soft government controls to discourage the practice [21]. In many instances informal trading in public spaces [12]. One participant confirmed this in the City of Tshwane by mentioning that in that city, informal trading "*is considered as an unwelcome practice that violates the city*" (Trader 6, 17 March 2022). Thus, when COVID-19 regulations were introduced in South Africa, although informal traders also offer basics such as food, they were quickly banned from operating in public spaces as their services were deemed as not essential [15].

Although they attract tourists and other users, public parks are not traditionally considered to be spaces for economic activities [10]. However, with unemployment on the rise in South Africa and globally [15], parks such as Jubilee Square and the Magnolia Dell Park have slowly become a space wherein informal traders have positioned themselves strategically to offer different products and services to diverse categories of park users. The traders locate themselves on the edges of the parks. In Jubilee Square, traders offered tailor and barber services, sold Compact Discs (CDs), memory sticks, sunglasses, food and beverages, and offered photoshoot services [26]. Traders positioned themselves alongside the paved walkways within and outside the park (Trader 9, 09 May 2022). There is also 'Wandis Food' - a food container that sells food and drinks to park users.

Traders revealed that they raised money for rentals, food, and school fees from their economic activities in the park and that the COVID-19 lockdown disrupted their livelihoods activities more than could be compensated by the government's R350 grant. Park users also viewed the activities of traders as necessary activities in the park and posited that like every human being, traders had a right to be in the park and to pursue any activity as long as it is not criminal. One park user mentioned that:

It is good to have them sell. My children can buy sweets while I can buy a book and read while I watch them play. I do not need to go to the shops which are a bit far (User 6, 02 June 2022).

Another user also mentioned that:

It is unfortunate that some traders also secretly sell drugs. However, most of them are sincere traders who have families to look after. I believe they have every right to do whatever they can in the park to look after their families and themselves [27].

Park users, therefore, did not find any fault with informal traders as they emphasized the expediency of having them present in the park. In this view, the prohibition of informal trade activities in the park does not only affect the traders but also the park users. This view is echoed by Hallegatte et al. [22] who aver that the activities that take place in public places benefit all users including traders, those who pass by, and even the local authorities.

Magnolia Dell Park also offered similar trade opportunities to traders. Unlike Jubilee Square, the park does not only attract local tourists but also attracts international tourists, with tour buses being a common feature around the park (Trader 9, May 9, 2022) [26]. Thus, at the main entrance, traders exhibited their goods, which mostly consist of artifacts, paintings, jewellery, and other African decorative goods that might appeal to international tourists (User 3, April 17, 2022). This is unlike in Jubilee Square, where the goods are predominantly perishable goods, such as food. This shows that while parks serve as an economic space for traders, for tourists they serve as a social space. It is in this view that Lefebvre [9, 10] argues in the unitary theory that there is always rapport between the material (economic), mental, and social spaces and that the manipulation of space by authorities through normative standards and ideologies only serve to disenfranchise those whose livelihoods are embedded in their access and utilisation of public space [8]. The implementation of a COVID-19 national lockdown that prohibited local and domestic travel and also banned the use of public parks meant that informal traders lost all these sources of income [21].

Both Jubilee Square and Magnolia Dell Park have an active economic use of space, whether anticipated or unanticipated. This is in line with the spatial triad framework, or unitary theory, which espouses that the physical nature of public space is purely materialistic and allows for the pursuit of livelihood activities. People frequent specific spaces due to the goods, whether materialistic, mental, or social, available in such spaces. Strauss [11] supports the necessity for a space to possess a good in demand that will attract users with some form of activity. Both parks in this study had economic activities. Unfortunately, these economic activities were discontinued when COVID-19 safety protocols were implemented and when access and utilisation of parks were banned. Before the implementation of the lockdown and the ban on accessing and utilizing parks, participants, most of whom were women, indicated that they were able to "*raise some funds for households needs, although it was not enough*" (Trader 9, 09 May 2022) and that they were always below the bracket of the South African Minimum Wage of R3,500. Before the pandemic, traders revealed that they could generate incomes that ranged between R250 and R900 daily [6]. With the lockdown, the traders were left "*with no source of income. Their operations were stopped by the bans on economic activities*" [28]. As such, the livelihoods "*were hugely affected*" (User 3, April 17, 2022). Even after the relaxation of the COVID-19 regulations, some traders in the parks could not resume as they had used up their capital (Trader 9, May 9, 2022). Those that resumed also continued to raise insufficient incomes. The same situation was also observed in Kenya [29]. Among other things, restrictions on

the mobility of people and "*the fear to contract the virus in the parks*" (Trader 1, March 7, 2022) ensured low incomes. This highlights the vulnerability of the informal traders operating in a public space. This view is supported by Thulare and Moyo [13], who found that informal traders were the most vulnerable group of traders during the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa. The same level of vulnerability among informal traders was reported by Janssens et al. [30] in Kenya. This shows that the COVID-19 response mechanisms in South Africa, but also across the world mainly focused on the welfare of the people on the social aspect while the economic needs were not taken into account. While it was important to save lives, it was also crucial to safeguard livelihoods.

The findings of this study show that informal traders in parks lack social protection and adequate social safety nets, which could empower them to lobby for attention during the lockdown and also bounce back after the lockdown. This is also inconsistent with the results found in Zimbabwe, where informal vendors were not provided with any support to continue their activities under the national lockdown in Zimbabwe (User 4, May 6, 2022). While some informal traders who operate in designated spaces, from time to time, successfully lobbied for support and protection, this is not the same for informal traders who use undesignated spaces. In undesignated spaces, Traders had to use other strategies, including illegal survival strategies, to continue operating (Trader 10, June 2, 2022). In a bid to keep operating under lockdown, informal street traders in many designated spaces in South Africa, for instance, successfully lobbied the government to ease lockdown regulations to allow them to operate their businesses. In a series of engagements, the South African government and informal economy lobby groups consented to a social support initiative that saw informal street traders receiving food parcels [30]. Other informal economic actors, such as waste-pickers at different dumping sites, also received food vouchers or electronic instant cash transfers [16].

In Johannesburg, informal street traders of second-hand clothing approached the Gauteng Department of Economic Development for permission to operate at De Villiers Street [16]. They tabled a suggestion of alternating shifts amongst themselves to ensure that, in the process of sustaining livelihoods, they also observed lockdown regulations. Spaza shops were also later allowed to sell only essential household grocery items [30]. The success of these informal traders resulted in hot-food traders such as local restaurants also being allowed to operate during lockdown [16]. Although these were provisional arrangements, it is important to note that the initiatives sustained the livelihoods of these informal street traders. These initiatives did not apply to informal traders who operated in parks because parks, and the tourism industry in general were in a complete shutdown under levels 5 and 4 of the lockdown. The loss of income by the informal traders in parks and the "*disregard by the state and other authorities*" (Trader 7, April 6, 2022) confirm the susceptibility of the informal traders in undesignated areas to socio-economic risks. It also exposes the lack of policy frameworks aimed at providing both social protection and sustainable social safety nets to vulnerable traders who operate on undesignated government premises.

The above discussion confirms the argument by Lefebvre [9] in his spatial triad framework or unitary theory when he argues that space (conceived space, in particular), could have encompassed normative standards and ideologies or by-laws and rules and regulations that can either facilitate or hinder certain activities within that space. Conceived space, in the context of COVID-19 regulations in parks, is seen to undercut the needs of traders through access and lockdown restrictions, thereby shattering down their income sources and livelihoods.

By so doing, according to Lefebvre [9], the regulation of space access and utilization could "humanize" or "de-humanize" users. With their sources of income destroyed and livelihoods disrupted, it may be argued that the COVID-19 regulations de-humanized traders in the parks. Provision of post-COVID-19 support and improved access to parks could (re)humanize informal traders and give them back some power for the realisation of their socio-economic needs.

5-2- Social Impacts

The social impacts of COVID-19 on informal traders in the two case studies were linked to the pandemic's economic impact. The economic activities of traders were linked to their social activities as well as those of other users. According to Strauss [11], public parks play an exclusive role in building relationships in communities. They allow for local encounters, congeniality, and community engagement [13]. Parks are social spaces of interaction and constitute social capital. The two cases under study validated aspects of social activities.

In Jubilee Square, traders and users mentioned that the pandemic and the associated regulations had a huge social impact on them and their families. Traders mentioned that despite using the park as an economic venue, they also used it as a neutral space for meeting friends, discussing business, and getting emotional support. Traders also targeted users who frequented the park for various activities as potential customers. Users frequented the park for the free Tshwane WIFI, to meet up with friends, to rest, and "*to get time out of our flats*" (User 6; 02 June 2022), while some played various games in the park, including soccer and tennis (User 3, 17 April 2022; User 4, 06 May 2022; User 5, 06 May 2022). Some of the traders were homeless people who survived by selling small items such as memory sticks, socks, toys, and sweets in the park. Some also collected items for recycling, while others offered car wash services to park users. Some traders and users mentioned that they had the opportunity to interact with various groups, such as political party representatives, religious groups, and users who just came through for party celebrations. They were able to interact with these groups as they engaged in their businesses or rested.

In Magnolia Dell Park, different social events were common. These included weddings, bridal showers, and birthday parties for children or adults, while others simply came to take wedding pictures. The uses of the park in Magnolia Dell Park show that social events in public spaces do not only offer opportunities for strangers to engage with one another, but that the events which often take place in the parks form part of the commercialization, privatization, and securitization of public space. This is in line with the unitary theory, which considers space as offering interconnected and overlapping socio-economic practices [7, 9, 10, 22]. The various social events that occur in the park also sustain the economic activities of informal traders.

The control of space (public parks) by Tshwane authorities in line with the government declaration completely cut traders with their social capital, on which their economic and livelihood activities were dependent. While trading in the park, traders had motivated a variety of networks, including communal connections, political, and associations founded on business interests and other social attributes. For Lefebvre [9], these social networks can be entrenched in historical or traditional affiliations with space. In this way, space can embody and evoke feelings of freedom, agency, and being. Lived space is, therefore, a reflexive space that enables 'self-realisation' in terms of the capacity to meet personal social and economic needs. The networks of participants were particularly important for "*sharing information on where to get cheaper stock, products currently in demand, and other issues of mutual interest*" (User 3, April 17, 2022). Traders also used their networks in the park to share social knowledge, "*exchange experiences and facilitate trading cooperation so as not to be offering the same products as this would result in losses*" (Trader 10, 02 June 2022). The spatial triad framework posits that space also ensures the thriving of societal cohesion [9]. Where social cohesion obtains in this manner, Lefebvre [21] argues that "spatial practices [become] nourished by perception: [and become] the realm that reinforces routine, normalization, and reproduction." Participants mentioned that with the arrival of COVID-19 and the introduction of restrictions, including bans in the parks, traders have had no access to the various networks that usually enabled them to survive. The control of space, therefore, in line with COVID-19 regulations, is seen to have undercut the socio-economic needs of traders, their conditions, and circumstances through restrictions on park access and utilisation.

It was also observed that the majority of traders in the two parks were women. This finding confirms that, in the face of the high unemployment rate in South Africa [19], women have been mostly pushed into the informal economy. This is evidence of economic fault lines characterized by gendered economic spaces and structural economic disadvantages in which women are edged out of formal employment [16]. This resonates with other studies elsewhere that found that women, most of whom are widows and divorcees without any other income source and yet have to provide for many dependents, dominate the informal economy [16, 20]. According to participants, "*this resulted in much stress*" (Trader 10, 02 June 2022). The stress of being "*confined into their homes with no means of survival soon created a conducive atmosphere for nasty sequences of violence*" (Trader 1, 07 March 2022). According to Ndhlovu & Tembo [30], this violence mostly cascades from the male partner to the woman, and consequently to the children. It was reported that women experienced more stress of having to manage home, children, emotions, and budgets, among others, during the lockdown [23]. Before the pandemic, these women traders would have an opportunity to relieve their stress in the parks as they went about their businesses. With the COVID-19 lockdown, these stresses are now manifesting in homes and often disadvantaged children. It is for this reason that Lefebvre [20] argues that space enables people to meet both personal and social and economic needs. Unfortunately, there continues to be more emphasis on and execution of a rationality approach in the management of conceived space than on lived and perceived space and yet these directly speak to the socio-economic needs of people. The positioning of perceived and lived space as secondary during the design and implementation of COVID-19 regulations could have been the reason for the lack of outright consideration of the traders who operate in these spaces. Emphasis on the conceived space in the Tshwane informal traders operating in the parks becoming mere consumers who are prone to displacement, disenfranchisement, and alienation when, for instance, pandemics such as COVID-19 emerge. With the pandemic largely under control in South Africa and globally, some more context-specific space interventions must be adopted so that while saving lives, the livelihoods of informal traders in undesignated spaces are not just taken for granted.

6- Towards a Social Policy Recovery Path

The COVID-19 pandemic has reflected socio-economic numerous implications on the behaviour and livelihood operations of various categories and sub-categories of the human population. These are implications which are likely to last for a longer time. The pandemic has, however, vindicated the relevance and importance of social policy responses in governance. The social policy approach denotes public actions that are meant to inspire social protection and development [31]. It is "collective interventions directly affecting transformations in social welfare, social institutions, and social relations... [as well as] access to adequate and secure livelihoods and income". It is also "...an instrument for ensuring a sense of citizenship [and] ...a prerequisite for sustained economic development..." [32]. In the management of public spaces, the social policy approach should be reflected in the adoption and implementation of by-laws, rules, and regulations that facilitate and guarantee the safety of operations by traders, as was the case for informal traders in De Villiers Street, Johannesburg, under the national COVID-19 lockdown [16].

Considering that parks are not designated for business purposes, and since evidence already shows that several households rely on them for livelihood, it is now important to adopt regulations that can safeguard the lives and livelihoods of traders in these spaces, just like in any other spaces, designated or undesignated. According to the spatial triad framework, failure to do so only leads to human de-humanization, displacement, disenfranchisement, and alienation [9]. This approach is consistent with Mazwi et al. [33], who posit that social policy "...guarantee[s] that every citizen lives a life of dignity regardless of status, ethnicity, age, gender, and any other distinctive feature." Expanding on the notion of transformative social policy, scholars believe policy should include methods for change, "as in transforming social relations and institutions." [34, 35]. In the context of this study, the Tshwane Metro Municipality, as a social policy intervention, needs to revise and adjust its by-laws, rules, and regulations to cater for the informal traders whose livelihoods depend on operations in the public parks. These adjustments should also be implemented in the face of disasters such as pandemics.

In addition, in the context of a pandemic, social policy does not just comprise protection, vulnerability, destitution, and short-term risk analysis, but also provides for production, protection, reproduction, re-distribution, and social cohesion. Thus, by using this social policy approach as a response, the Tshwane Metro Municipality, which owns Jubilee Square and Magnolia Dell Park, could consider relaxing rules and regulations to enable informal traders and the general users to access and utilize parks, not as an indication of carelessness or disregard for human lives but also as a means to safeguard the livelihoods of people.

7- Conclusion

This study explored the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on informal traders who operated in undesignated spaces in Tshwane, using Jubilee Square and Magnolia Dell Park as case studies. The study found that informal traders in these two case studies suffered a loss of income as they could not trade under various lockdown levels. It was also found that both traders and park users lost their social connections under the lockdown. It further emerged that while informal traders in designated areas could lobby for support and permission to operate under strict safety protocols, those operating in undesignated areas could not, as they were considered illegal park users. This further complicated their socio-economic activities. What emerges from the study, however, is that the pandemic provided a new framework in which not only scholars and researchers can conduct studies on the informal sector with applicable research models, but also in which government authorities can start rethinking the policies, by-laws, rules, and regulations on the management of public spaces, taking into account the plight of those who depend on these spaces, not for accumulation but rather for survival. This study, therefore, highlights the need to adopt social policy interventions in dealing with pandemics. This enables countries to safeguard both lives and livelihoods.

This study used a limited number of participants and, therefore, cannot be generalized. A study that utilizes a larger sample size and a mixed-methods research approach could yield more concrete and generalizable results. Future studies should therefore adopt such an approach.

8- Declarations

8-1-Author Contributions

Conceptualization, E.N. and D.M.; methodology, E.N. and D.M.; resources, E.N. and D.M.; data curation, E.N. and D.M.; writing—original draft preparation, E.N. and D.M.; writing—review and editing, E.N. and D.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

8-2-Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available in the article.

8-3-Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

8-4-Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

8-5-Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

8-6-Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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