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Sexing the city: designing a haven for Hillbrow sex workers

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Sexing the City

Designing a haven for Hilbrow sex workers

ABSTACT



Many choose sex work as a profession due to the financial advantage it offers even though circumstances are often undesirable and inhumane. My thesis aims at creating a safer, more comfortable environment for Hillbrow sex workers where they are respected, dignified and empowered.

In a criminalized environment, many forms of abuse and exploitation take place. By legalizing the trade in South Africa and creating spaces in our urban landscape that allow for this business form, we can assist sex workers with the current socio-cultural conditions of rape, physical abuse and access to health and socio-economic issues of exploitation, one-sided business hierarchies and economic dependency they face. My research pertains to these socio-economic and socio-cultural issues within the industry as well as understanding the physical environment of the Hillbrow sex industry.

My design intervention stretches from an urban- to building scale. A proposed secondary night-life network connects taverns, bars, night clubs, strip clubs and brothels. A building where sex workers can live and work was my main focus, and act as a major node within this network.

The proposed building is situated on the corner of Esselen Street and Claim Street. This site forms part of the Hillbrow red-light district that I have identified through a range of mapping techniques. The building houses programmes that respond to the socio-cultural and socio-economic issues found within a legal sex industry and it signifies desired outcomes of respect, dignity and empowerment.

Visibility was chosen as a main theme and was explored through spatial arrangements, materiality and light. This theme was applied in four, systematic design phases which resulted in achieving a final design. The manifestation of a series of paradoxes along with the obscure nature of the sex industry produced a complex, dynamic thesis.



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