



Housing and Urban Neighbourhoods

HOUSING JOHANNESBURG

Lone Poulsen, Adjunct Professor, School of Architecture and Planning, University of Witwatersrand

Johannesburg, home of wealthy and poor, permanent and temporary residents, reveals extreme models of housing and urban neighbourhoods. From enormous mansions with vast landscaped gardens in tree lined avenues, to dense shack settlements accessed by muddy paths. From highrise, high density blocks in the inner city, to low rise suburban sprawl, and the medium density cluster developments transforming the semi rural periphery. The road to democracy was fought on the basis of human rights but despite the removal of discriminatory legislation, low income housing developments have since 1994 entrenched the fragmentation and segregation of the apartheid city. New RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) housing has perpetuated the patterns of apartheid planning, providing low density, 27m² houses in monotonous suburban layouts that continue to locate the poorest furthest from the benefits of urbanity. Whilst wealthy and middle income households have exercised choices about residential neighbourhoods, poor (mostly black) households have remained in the designated low income townships of the apartheid plan. Ironically these once despised townships are transforming into lively urban neighbourhoods where residents themselves have taken the initiative to consolidate and invest in their environment. Demonstrating enormous creativity, the streets are teeming with people, informal trading, children playing and many opportunities for chance encounters with neighbours.

Despite the impressive delivery of 1.7 million houses since 1994, the housing backlog and demand for new housing is increasing due to: natural population growth; continuing in-migration; urbanised households tending towards smaller families; extended family structures; and an increase in child-headed households as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Housing provision focussed on the delivery of houses rather than other forms of tenure and types of accommodation. This is borne out by the increasing demand for rental apartments provided both by private sector and social housing institutions. High demand for rental rooms with shared ablutions and cooking facilities is evident in the fact that the single sex hostels, developed for migrant workers,

continue to be extremely overcrowded with four to eight persons sharing a room. Although most of these hostels can hardly be described as desirable accommodation, for many it is the only affordable alternative. The government's policy on hostels has been to convert them into family accommodation but this has proved difficult and very expensive. Many hostel conversion projects have met with resistance as this would result in dedensification and displacement of existing residents and simultaneously render the new units unaffordable. The demand for rooms, often occupied by families, is also evident in the increasing provision of rooms and shacks in the backyards of township houses. These rooms built by homeowner landlords have provided a substantial proportion of rental accommodation utilising the township house or RDP house as an income generating resource. For many poor people who are unemployed, or rely on temporary employment, or who operate in the informal sector, these rooms are the only affordable accommodation available. Rural to urban migrant workers are still prevalent, and for many it still makes more economic sense to work in the city and send remittances to the rural areas, than to bring a family to the city.

Inner city accommodation in highrise apartment blocks is perceived to be predominantly the domain of immigrants from other African countries, although many local people have also chosen to locate there to gain access to employment opportunities and benefit from amenities. Apartments are sublet to make them more affordable and often several households share one apartment. This has resulted in extensive deterioration of the build-ings as overcrowding puts a strain on services and a lack of management and maintenance aggravates the situation. There have been some successful regeneration initiatives by private property companies and social housing institutions that have turned neglected buildings into desirable accommodation. However, the high costs of management and maintenance make these 'successful' projects unaffordable to low income earners. These poorer residents are driven to cheaper accommodation in abandoned buildings run by 'slumlords' who subdivide the building into rabbit warrens of rooms

with inadequate ablution facilities. The city managers often find themselves in the invidious position of being criticised when they evict people from these unhealthy and overcrowded living conditions, and equally condemned, if residents die as a result of fires in these unsafe buildings. Social housing projects subsidised by the government and intended for lower income households are proving expensive to build and to manage. These projects are not affordable to the poor and are only serving the very upper end of the subsidised income band. Recent social housing developments are only providing 20-30% of the units for subsidised rental in order to make the projects viable. During apartheid the form and growth of the city was determined by the public sector utilising the Group Areas Act and modernist theories of planned neighbourhoods. Currently, the power of the city planning department appears to have diminished despite extensive processes to produce Local Integrated Development Plans. Whilst, government provided low income housing continues within the neighbourhood planning paradigm, new residential living environments on the periphery of the formerly white areas are being promoted by private developers. Their sole objective seems to be profit driven as they buy up land in an ad hoc manner with little concern for the creation of urban environments that have a life beyond the next development. This part of the city no longer consists of an integrated network of streets and neighbourhoods but rather a set of arterial roads giving access to a proliferation of cluster developments enclosed by high walls and security fences. Private developers trade on the reputation of Joburg as the crime capital to sell these safe and secure gated communities. Entry and exit occurs via private car with little chance of neighbourly encounters outside of the gated community. The only pedestrian activity in the road is that of domestic workers walking to the nearest taxi stop. Johannesburg's urban living environment thus continues to be spatially fragmented and socially segregated.

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