The Occupation of Space *versus* Undemocratic Social Engineering:
The case of Hatcliffe New Stands, urban Zimbabwe

Kathryn Ewing
BAS (UCT) BArch (UCT) PhD (Glasgow)

Mackintosh School of Architecture, University of Glasgow
e-mail: katie@visionplan.co.za

Key Words: freedom to build, occupation and consolidation of homes, capacity, demolition

Abstract

Dramatic and devastating spatial, economic and social change occurred in Zimbabwe during the winter months of 2005. Evictions which were activated by the Zimbabwean Government to carry out "Operation Murambatsvina"[1] have resulted in the authoritarian system destroying, torching and dismantling the homes of the urban poor living and working in poverty stricken urban areas[2]. Two adjacent settlements that were victims of the evictions are Hatcliffe Extension Holding Camp and Hatcliffe New Stands, located on the northern periphery of Harare. These two settlements each had a unique and powerful spatial identity in their relatively short existence. This paper explains the power of the emergence of habitable sustainable environments built by the people in comparison to the destructive implications of undemocratic social engineering. My focus centres on the occupation of space and consolidation processes at settlement scale in Hatcliffe New Stands before the evictions took place. This paper argues for the people as the predominant agents of change, rather than the normal passive recipients of services in deprived societies. The fundamental aspect to begin with was to comprehend *'reality'* from the households' perspective. It is based on hearing the story from the urban poor. Data has been gathered through sensitive fieldwork from in-depth interviews and observation to spatial surveys within Hatcliffe [1].

1   Introduction

The majority of urban poor households strive for a secure, sufficient and decent livelihood that they have reason to value. The utmost priority for an urban poor family is to ensure physical and social well-being in a push towards poverty reduction. Low-income households experience extreme deprivation, high levels of uncertainty, with a continuation of paucity and unfulfilled elementary needs, such as water, food, shelter, land, health and education. Overcoming these deprivations is a main objective of development in expanding people's crucial instrumental freedoms giving access to livelihood opportunities and assets [2]. Friedmann and Douglass [3] argue, "Access to environmental life space, access to land, housing and a life supporting environment is a primary good for which even very poor households will make an exceptional effort and sacrifice to secure." Friedmann [4] further regards defensible life space where it, "includes the physical space in which household members cook, eat, sleep and secure their personal possessions… It extends beyond the space called 'home' to the immediate neighbourhood where socialising and other life-supporting activities take place… Gaining a secure and permanent foothold in a friendly and supportive urban neighbourhood is the most highly prized social power of all..." Social mechanisms of the household are fundamental in the utilisation and development of different economic functions within the physical setting. Such mechanisms allow members of a household to form strategies, make decisions, allocate resources, manage the household, produce

---

[1] "Operation Murmabatsvina" means "refuse or get rid of the dirt/ filth" or "drive out the rubbish" in Shona.
[2] Urban areas of Harare, Chitungwiza, Masvingo, Kariba, Victoria Falls, Chipinge, Beit Bridge, Gwanda, Bulawayo, Chinhoyi and Gweru have experienced various levels of evictions in informal and formal housing areas of the urban poor.

their livelihood, and maintain their habitat both at an individual and community level. This paper reviews two key complex and interrelated variables of the housing debate:

- ***Firstly***, the ability of people to adopt endurance strategies to cope with homelessness and poverty through *'housing themselves'*, encouraging *freedom* and *choice*; and
- ***Secondly***, the *spatial occupation* and *consolidation processes* of a community settlement.

In many cases land invasion or land (re)distribution may cause spatial upheaval. By investigating the spatial consolidation processes of the home offers a valuable insight as to how people claim their right to land and initially inhabit space as an individual and as a community. Consolidation processes may be linked to the surrounding local forces and perceived security of the household. The occupation of space reveals the inherent knowledge and skills people use to produce democratic spaces within the home and neighbourhood regarding varying, complex housing processes. It also reveals the importance placed on socio-spatial relationships. Families and communities form an attachment to new places giving identity and belonging. Different families have various priorities and reasons for building their home in a certain way or occupy distinct spaces, or even develop the home over a short or long time period. What is remarkable in the housing process is *how* the people initially 'start-up' their home, either legally or illegally, and how physical living conditions influence the process of locational choice and change.

However, as experienced in many developing urban environments, households that have taken their own initiatives to occupy space, house themselves and improve their living conditions are often considered *illegal* [5]. So why do people still risk relocating and investing in improving and consolidating households and community environments on uncertain land? The answer is far more complex than the basic necessity to provide shelter. It provides hope and a sense of belonging. This paper intends to give a brief insight into the spatial possibilities that were initiated at Hatcliffe New Stands. This settlement was quickly being developed by a community and has since been destroyed by a top-down approach of undemocratic social engineering. This in turn has damaged a successful people's housing process.

2   Strategies from the Past: Explaining 'The Freedom to Build'

The shelter debate in developing countries is by no means a novel phenomenon. In order not to rehash the past, fresh ideas and ways of thinking about housing processes are necessary. Nevertheless, valuable insight can be gained through the thinking of Turner's [6] argument the *'Freedom to Build'* and the inherent connections to Sen's [7] idea of *'Development as Freedom'*. Since the late 1960's Turner and others [8] recognised the urgency of the basic problem of shelter. Alternative housing policies emerged in an attempt to generate new policies aimed at upgrading informal settlements activated by poverty, marginality and informality. They were triggered by the visible inability of existing development policies to provide adequate housing for the urban poor.

Turner's [9] ideas concentrated on the decision-making housing network (autonomy of housing) and network of social arrangements. These systems of *'housing by the people'* focused on behaviour patterns giving the maximum of individual initiative, responsibility and decision-making to the users in the housing process. Basic priorities addressed fundamental household needs, allowing for self-sufficiency and self-direction. Turner dealt with a system of actors - activities - achievements, where housing is a *'verb'*, an active engagement with the possibilities for shelter but at the same time allowing the independence of choice. His views related to the people's ability to conceive, manage, build and use dwelling environments as complete living entities. Although Turner's radical approach had a great influence on the view of housing, little has changed in the housing sphere in many developing countries to date. Conventional housing is a predominantly authoritarian driven approach or housing viewed as a *'noun'*, delivered as a *whole*.

Amartya Sen's approach 'Development as Freedom' [7] brings an alternative and refreshing perspective to rethinking the *process* of development within the housing field. He argues the concept of 'development' enables the people's freedom of choice, instead of viewing the traditional economic understanding of development based on Gross National Product (GNP), income level and industrialisation. Development as Freedom focuses on the capability of the urban poor centring on collective human variety and social choice. The expansion of freedom is understood as both the primary ends *and* principal means of development. He describes the capabilities of people in relation to substantive freedoms to understand the functioning of certain activities and resources. Such everyday resources, such as access to water, are vital towards human fulfilment and a quality of life that the people and communities have reason to value. Sen [10] expands on five substantive freedoms that reinforce one another through dynamic interconnections: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security for the poor. These instrumental freedoms, rights and opportunities have a powerful bond that had an influence on the process of development. These principal freedoms are seen to act as agents of change in economic, social and political development. Free and sustainable agency emerges as a major vehicle of development. Nevertheless, what may arise is economic *unfreedoms* through inadequate processes (violation of human rights, evictions) or through scarce opportunities (involuntary poverty, lack of access to resources) and exclusion.

One principal question that poses itself in the twenty first century is why has the positive concept of the Freedom to Build not managed to succeed in housing the urban poor over the past 40 years? Is it all a myth? The answer to the question may lie in the visible fact that people continue to build for themselves but there are many obstacles or unfreedoms that create a defective system [11]. Understandings of development strategies in contemporary theory as explained from Turner and Sen could lead to more sensitive and supportive housing policy responses for the urban poor that mitigate against the destruction of settlements through evictions of informal and formal settlements in developing countries.

3 Ndechangu… it belongs to me: The history of two settlements

The area researched in Harare is called Hatcliffe Extension, located 25km north of the city centre. Hatcliffe Extension was established as a *'holding camp'* in December 1993 accommodating 1081 families. The majority were homeless people relocated from Churu Farm (south of Harare), in hope of better conditions and promises of housing from the Government. A survey by Dialogue on Shelter for the Homeless conducted in 2001 revealed that more than 2219 families were living in the Holding Camp (approximately 13 015 people). An increase of over 100% since the initial development of the Holding Camp.

Hatcliffe New Stands is used as a case study to explain the emergence of a sustainable and legal settlement. A section of virgin land (previously Harare Council farmland) on the urban periphery was recognised for resettlement purposes. Hatcliffe New Stands is located approximately 4 kilometres from the existing Holding Camp where 3500 stands were designed on the master plan. 2040 stands were verbally allocated by Government to certain households from Hatcliffe Extension Holding Camp and a small percentage from Dzivaresekwa Holding Camp in February 2002 [12]. Households started moving to their new stands of 200m² in March 2002. The majority of inhabitants at Hatcliffe New Stands have been informal *'squatters'* [3] for the past 12 years and prior to this 2 to 3 years before moving to Hatcliffe Extension. Through these numerous moves, a large proportion of property and building materials were destroyed or lost. There was no water, no sewerage and no electricity on the allocated land, but people moved their *'plastics'* and *'cabins'* [4]

---

[3] It is important to note that the inhabitants of Hatcliffe New Stands use the term 'squatter'. The people named the areas New Stands.

[4] Informal structures are commonly referred to as *'ma plastics'* or *'plastic shacks'* in the Holding Camp by the community. Government initially built 822 prefabricated, temporary, timber *'cabins'* to accommodate the homeless people from Churu farm, but the number of people exceeds the amount of cabins, so there was a combination of 'cabins' and 'plastics' within both the Holding Camp and Hatcliffe New Stands.

to the new land with a sense of hope. From March 2002 to mid 2004 there was phenomenal spatial change between the existing Holding Camp and people that moved to New Stands. A new, organised but scattered settlement developed across the landscape.

In September 2002, eviction orders were issued by Local Government to people that have moved to the promised land of Hatcliffe New Stands. Harare City Council regarded Hatcliffe New Stands as illegal due to the fact that it was not considered liveable as there were no services available. They would not deal with any further issues until Local Government had come to a conclusion over the complete servicing and development of the stands (individual connection to water and sewer). The fear of evictions was a hotly debated topic. Yet, despite this lack of security of tenure in Hatcliffe New Stands, the people were still willing to invest money into their homes and businesses from March 2002 to 26th May 2005. A personal survey conducted in October 2002 and confirmed in May 2003, illustrated that over 903 families had relocated using their energy to define spatial boundaries (both shared and individual spaces) and claim land. There was no initial legal paperwork involved in the land accord except verbal agreement at the hand-over ceremony in February 2002. However, by mid 2004 the people had to pay Local Government Housing ZW$300,000 for a lease agreement for a stand, which they duly paid to secure their homes and land with some form of 'legal' paperwork. The people now *'believed'* that they *'owned the land'*.

4   Betsarai… help each other: The occupation of space

Hatcliffe New Stands works on an ordered master plan of 3500 stands planned for the areas. This plan was designed by the Government Department of Physical Planning. Implementation of the layout occurred with a survey and installation of stand numbers, corner pegs and basic bulk servicing, such as sewer and water pipes and connection points. The roads were gravel, but generally underutilised as they did not provide the shortest desire line to areas within the New Stands, so people rather moved freely along the most direct route.

Figure 1: Illustration of Hatcliffe New Stands showing the grid of the master plan for 3500 stands with the occupation of 856 stands (903 households) by October 2003

Figure 2: Movement routes constructed by the people regardless of the ordered movement pattern created by the formal, graded, gravel roads

Figure 3: Spatial configuration of HOUSING BY THE PEOPLE- Hatcliffe New Stands May 2003
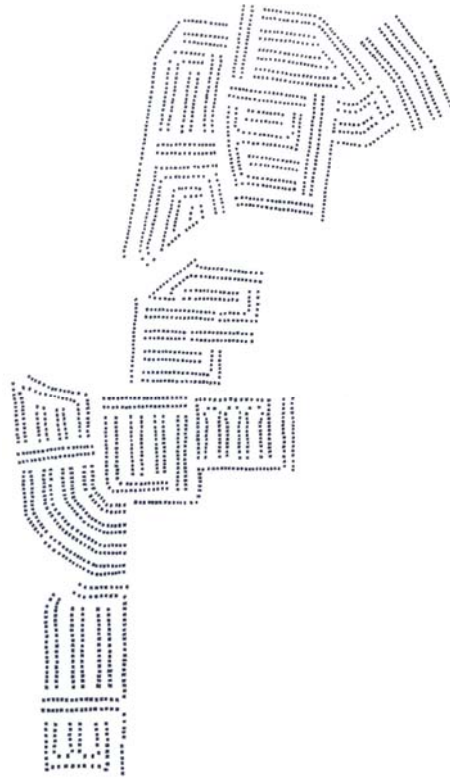
Figure 4: Proposed spatial configuration of HOUSING FOR THE PEOPLE, Hatcliffe New Stands

The importance of a level of spatial planning and development control is vital in contested settings as to guide development through a basic framework. The plan for Hatcliffe New Stands was designed according to outdated housing and planning regulations, with minimal recognition for future income-generating possibilities, second dwellings, household expansion, social desires or cultural needs. Neither does the 'designed' plan directly tackle the key priorities and problems of the urban poor. It caters for the long-term match-box house scenario, where housing is constructed to abide by strict building standards and regulations driven from the top down.

For all the formal planning, the reality on the ground revealed that Hatcliffe New Stands illustrates a dispersed spatial pattern which has an energetic quality built by the people. Even with vast tracks of open land between occupied stands, there are inherent interconnected spatial systems that create an internalised semi-private space or courtyard formation. The stand is seen as the secure life space that will eventually become the permanent 'yard' for the household. Due to a collective decision made by the community leader, every new household in the New Stands was instructed to build their 'temporary home' at the roadside edge of each stand. This helped to create semi-public court spaces between dwellings that are shared with neighbours to form focal gathering points around wells or other communal activities. There is an incentive for people to form strong relationships with neighbours as the perceived idea of security and safety in numbers helps establish a community. Many households remarked that the New Stands were *"a better place to live"*, due to improved spatial living conditions. Social networks developed through individual and community decision-making and the desire to 'know one's neighbours', but most importantly, for a short time the people had the freedom to choose what and how they to occupied and built on their 200m^2 stand. For many, this came as a welcome chance to have an enhanced quality of life.

5 Musha wedu… our home

The following oral stories (written word for word from the participant) from local residents explain the occupation of space in Hatcliffe New Stands and comparison to their lives in the

Holding Camp. The importance of having a place to call home is critical for many destitute families. Eulita Pande is a strong and independent woman who supported her extended family through selling peanut butter and making clothes. Eulita explains the importance of the home and the sense of finally belonging to a community at New Stands where she had a place of her own,

> *"The home, 'musha', if you haven't got your home you haven't got your life because that is where your life is. If you have got your home you are somebody. You are somebody who is respected and if you want to build, you can build until you are satisfied, so it is very, very important to have a home[…] The Holding Camp was the place where we were being keep so it was just somewhere to stay […] We were not free. Even when we were staying there we were being told that we would have to move each and every day from this place because it was a holding camp, but now that I have been given this stand, even if I get money, we can plan for the future […] It is my stand. There is hope! […] I am safe while I am staying here on my stand. The first thing why I feel safe is that this is promised by the government and this is my stand, which I am now staying."*

Pachipano Chikwire and his wife, Zenzo, sustained their family of six children by selling chickens. Pachipano is a respected member of the community. He gives his opinion of the New Stands,

> *"The day we have been waiting for to come to this place and we have been holding on to that, it wasn't easy, but now we have a stand […] In the holding camp you could not even plan anything; just like a person waiting for the bus to come and it never comes. We have been promised and promised for a long time that we would be given land, and at the end there was no hope, because if you keep on waiting and this thing does not come, the bus does not arrive. You know you end up becoming discouraged, thinking these people are lying to us because they have been promising us for some years […] People were surprised (to be allocated land) yes, because we were not quite sure […] It was like a drama you know, you see, the bus came […] The only area of confusion is the ownership. If you have the lease agreement, the stand is in your name, the house is in your name, therefore I am the owner. We say in Shona, ndechangu, yes, it belongs to me…"*

Paul Hamandawana is an elderly man, who like Pachipano sells chickens for a living. Unlike Peter, Paul remained confident that he had access to ownership on the New Stand. He gives his views on the allocation of stands,

> *"(Minister) Chombo [5] said, "This place belongs to you and it is yours" and "it is yours, this place it yours and you are going to build your own house there and there is nobody who is going to move you from there." Now we are brave now, we are strong enough. […] No there is nothing talking about moving, people are talking about building!"*

Betty Mukora, a mother of four children, moved to her New Stand as soon as she could and strongly believed that she was there to stay. She said,

> *"I moved after elections on 11 March, the last day of elections. But now, I don't even listen to those rumours about the stands not being given, those people who are saying these things like this and that before the elections, it was campaigning. The minister said that the stands have been given by Mugabe and told us first to give people here in Hatcliffe Extension and I heard that and I was given a number for my stand. So I moved here and started to build my house with my husband on our new stand here…"*

---

[5] A newspaper article [12] published the following report, "The Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, Cde Ignatius Chombo, yesterday handed over 2000 housing stands to people in Hatcliffe. He also gave the people certificates bearing their names and the stand numbers to certify that they are the legal owners of the stands. The ceremony was witnessed by hundreds of people who came from Hatcliffe and Dzivaresekwa holding camps. Most of the people are former Churu Farm squatters." It is noted that there were *no certificates* provided to the people, but they were verbally 'allocated' stand numbers. However, this newspaper cutting is viewed as a formal reminder of the land allocation and Government's promise of housing.

It is clear that the allocation of land in Hatcliffe New Stands created a great deal of hope towards building a home with belonging and identity, status and most importantly an address. However, it also developed a level of confusion between people living in the Holding Camp and those that had moved to the New Stands. Nevertheless, these families decided to build their homes.

6   Mukai muZimbabwe: The destruction of sustainable environments

"Mukai muZimbabwe. That means, 'wake up Zimbabwe', you have been sleeping too long, so much has happened to us and we just sit back and watch" (Betty Mukora, Hatcliffe New Stands, 2002).

The coordination office of the Housing and Land Rights Network of Habitat International Coalition (HIC-HLRN) [13] stated that the massive evictions under 'Operation Murambatsvina' in Zimbabwe in mid 2005 rendered over 200,000 people homeless in two weeks (starting on 19 May 2005). Over 30,000 informal street vendors and operators have been arrested and detained [14]. A United Nations Special Envoy report [15] which gives a more realistic account estimates that the operation cost 700,000 people their homes, their source of livelihood or both and has indirectly affected at least 2.4 million people, approximately 18% of the national population. From the night of 26 May 2005 to the 29 May 2005, over 10,000 people were forcibly removed from their homes in Hatcliffe (both the Holding Camp and the New Stands) and over 6,000 homes destroyed [16]. 3,000 armed police were present during this eviction.

The people of Hatcliffe New Stands, *a legal settlement with lease agreements given to the people by the Zimbabwean Government* (Housing Minister Ignatius Chombo) and Hatcliffe Extension Holding Camp, *a settlement originally set aside and defined by Government and Local Authorities in December 1993*, were made homeless and landless. In June, these two *'legal'* settlements no longer existed and had been reported to resemble a "bomb site" [17]. Along with the destruction of homes, core fundamental facilities including the small clinic and orphanage and crèche run by the Dominican Convent in the Holding Camp had to be dismantled and removed. The people of Hatcliffe Extension Holding Camp and Hatcliffe New Stands lost their land, their homes and consequently have to fear losing the minimal pile of belongings they have left, but most importantly they face the threat of losing their families. No alternative adequate accommodation was provided in the process of the evictions, apart from a holding camp, Caledonia Farm which was set up after the evictions had taken place and situated on the eastern periphery of Harare with little shelter or services.

However, due to international reaction and the UN Special Envoy report based on Operation Murambatsvina, the Zimbabwean Government has had to stop all destructive action and further demolition of houses. By the beginning of August 2005, 4000 stands had been allocated or reallocated in Hatcliffe Extension [18]. However, some of the original inhabitants cannot afford to move all their belongings back to site, or they are too ill or they have not been informed whilst they have been seeking refuge elsewhere in Harare or the rural areas of Zimbabwe. Those who have returned however, are finding it difficult to rebuild all that they have lost, sinking deeper in poverty and deprivation and battling with long term consequences resulting from the evictions.

7   Is there a way forward?

The people of Hatcliffe New Stands created a dynamic urban environment, using their inherent capabilities to build, manage and make decisions in order to create a home that provided numerous opportunities and access. To reinforce Turner's ideas, *people will build their own houses.* What is recognised is that people are fundamental players in urban strategies, concentrating on the energy of the urban poor.

The eviction process experienced in Hatcliffe New Stands in May 2005 stripped not only the residents of Hatcliffe New Stands of their rights to land, but it also destroyed a people's housing

process that had developed through a community network and social system that provided more than just homes. If given the freedom to build and rights to choose, the urban poor make and remake space, transform space and capture space. They intrude into the patterned grid of history through informal activities, permeating into every aspect of the functioning of society [19]. These people and their activities form a *fundamental, dynamic part of the building of a city* in the context of urban Africa. They disrupt the coherence of the planned urban landscape, visually, emotionally, resourcefully and powerfully. Hatcliffe's history is an example of the potential for people to create urban housing and to borrow from Sen [20], I emphasise that "Development is indeed a momentous engagement with freedom's possibilities." Sadly, in many instances, the urban poor are the 'unwanted sector' of society and are subject to vicious removals by force. Hatcliffe New Stands is but one area that has experienced such extreme destruction in Zimbabwe. Is there a way forward or is this hanging on to an unrealistic hope for the people?

References:

[1]Ewing Kathryn (2004). *Perceptions of Secure Life Space. Socio-spatial change of informal households in urban Zimbabwe*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Mackintosh School of Architecture, University of Glasgow.

[2 & 7] Sen Amartya (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[3] Friedmann John & Douglas Michael (Eds.) (1998: 5). *Cities for Citizens: Planning the Rise of Civil Society in a Global Age*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

[4] Friedmann John (1992: 67). *Empowerment: The politics of Alternative Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[5] de Souza Flavio A. M. (1999: 20). Land Tenure Security and Housing Improvements in Recife, Brazil. *Habitat International*, Vol. 23, No. 1: 19- 33.

[6] Turner John F.C. & Fichter Robert. (Eds.) (1972). *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process*. New York & London: Macmillian Company.

[8] Burgess R.D. (1982). 'Self-help housing advocacy: a curious form of radicalism. A critique of the work of John F.C. Turner', in P. M. Ward (Ed.) (1982). *Self-Help Housing. A Critique*, London: Mansell: 55-97.

[9] Turner John F.C. (1972). 'Housing as A Verb in Turner', in John F.C. & Fitcher Robert (Eds.) (1972) *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process*. New York & London: Macmillian Company: (7): 148-175.

[10] Sen Amartya (1999: 10, 38). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[11] Global Reports on Human Settlements (2003). The Challenge of Slums. United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT). London: Earthscan.

[12] An article was published in the Government newspaper *The Herald* February 21 (2002). 'Minister hands over 2000 stands' Harare, Zimbabwe confirming the allocation of stands.

[13] Information from an e-mail appeal, Coordination Office of HIC-HLRN on 10 June 2005

[14] Current statistics were gained from an e-mail appeal sent out from the Coordination Office of HIC-HLRN on 10 June 2005 ; and United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing; 'Zimbabwe's cleanup takes a vast human toll', http://www.zwnews.com/issuefull.cfm?ArticleID=12070 (12-06-05)

[15] United Nations Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe, Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka (2005). *Report of the fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina*. July 2005.

[16] Information from a letter from the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions COHRE on 08 June 2005.

[17] E-mails from Trudy Stevenson, Member of Parliament for Harare North Constituency on 27 May 2005 to current, combined with other reports and updates from friends and colleagues in Zimbabwe.

[18] Information from MP Trudy Stevenson, Harare North Constituency.

[19] Adapted from Chandoke, Edensor Tim (1998: 212). 'The Culture of an Indian Street', in Fyfe Nicholas (1998). *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*. London: Routledge.

[20] Sen Amartya (1999: 298). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.