

## PART 2

# INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS: AN UPGRADE

Part 2 of this article on the in-situ upgrade of informal settlements investigates the role of architects as agents of change.

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### ROLE OF ARCHITECTS IN THE PROBLEM-BASED APPROACH

Ironically, this self-perpetuating cycle of urban housing problem to solution and back to problem again has its origins in South Africa's history predating apartheid policies. In his thesis on urban native housing, Calderwood (1953: 16) cites Connell (1947):

*The task involved in finding a solution to these problems is enormous. Measured against the number of sub-economic houses constructed in the period 1936–1946,*

*the estimated number of sub-economic houses required indicates that a colossal and sustained effort will have to be made on a scale hitherto unknown in this country.*

In response to this problem, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) sponsored Calderwood's architectural thesis to investigate and propose a solution for improved urban native housing (Haarhoff, 2011), which resulted in the design of a house typology known as the NE 51/9 (Non-European house, 1951, drawing number 9). Haarhoff (2011) points out that although Calderwood had intended these as demonstrations of the outcome of a rational design process, they were nevertheless taken up by government and housing authorities 'to be reproduced in the thousands across South Africa for three decades from the 1950s' (2011: 191).

As part of its uncritical continuance of the housing-delivery model, the post-1994 government inherited and successfully perpetuated the problem through the same mechanism of reductionist design. The housing typology associated with the post-1994 RDP is therefore seen as

a direct continuation of the physical manifestation and disempowering delivery mechanism of the notorious NE 51/9 housing typology (Findley & Ogbu, 2011; Harber, 1995; Low, 2005).

Architectural scholars have called for and offered several alternatives for more compact and flexible housing typologies within the capital-subsidy system, ranging from infill structures to semidetached row houses and multiple-storey walk-ups (Low, 2005; Groos & Van Kats, 2012; Poulsen & Silverman, 2012; Robinson, 2009). Despite all these alternative proposals, however, the 'shrunken mansion' (Poulsen & Silverman 2012: 1) typology presented as the single-house-per-plot suburban model persists, with the lack of impact by the architectural profession being glaringly evident (Lepik, 2013; Low, 2005; Osman & Aigbavboa, 2012; Robinson, 2009).

#### PRAGMATIC APPROACH: INCREMENTALISM

Seeing informal settlements in the light of their transitional role in the urbanisation process could be considered a pragmatic view. From such a perspective, informal dwelling is a survival strategy in which a foothold in the economy can be achieved, with the intention of ultimate integration (Landman & Napier, 2010; Tissington & Royston, 2010; Todes, Kok, Wentzel, Van Zyl & Cross, 2010). Tissington (2011b: 3) underscores the reality that informal settlements are meeting 'at least some of the housing needs of those that reside in them,' and supports the position that legislation ought to assist informal settlers to gradually obtain, improve and consolidate access to safe, decent housing and tenure.

Urban LandMark has long advocated the notion of incremental tenure security in its approach to informal settlements. In general, Napier (2013) defines informal settlements as correlated with poverty, overcrowding and lack of urban services. However, rather than seeing these conditions as a problem, the position is taken that this can be seen as a temporary or transitional condition, and part of an urbanising process (Kellett & Napier, 1995; Landman & Napier, 2010; Napier, 2003).

Institutional support for such a view on informal settlements would then be the facilitation of a gradual upgrading process through the model of incremental tenure security (Tshangana & Gørgens, 2011). In its policy intent, the Housing Code acknowledges a position to improve tenure security: 'Security of tenure remains a fundamental principle of the National Housing Programmes. All beneficiaries of a housing-assistance programme must acquire secure tenure, either in the form of ownership, leasehold, deed of grant or formal rental arrangements, and related non-ownership forms of tenure' (Department of Human Settlements, 2009a: 53).

In the Housing Code Part 3 (Incremental interventions) Policy Intent, incrementality is considered in its suggestion that informal settlement upgrade occur in phases: 'Phases 1 to 3 focus on community participation, supply of basic services and security for all residents. Phase 4 constitutes the Housing Consolidation Phase and access to the

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government's housing-assistance programme undertaken in terms of the provisions of the specific programme opted for' (Department of Human Settlements, 2009b: 27).

Underpinning these definitions of informal settlements as sites of incremental integration into formalised systems is an uncritical view of the formal system itself. The state remains in the position of power, in this case as the benign facilitator, and the overarching socioeconomic model of urbanisation is assumed to be the desired outcome of the upgrade process. Parnell & Simon (2010: 54) point to the potential weakness of such a position: 'In practice what African demographic transitions mean is not just many more millions of people, but a totally different social, economic and spatial or settlement structure.'

#### THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTS IN AN INCREMENTAL APPROACH

Wakely & Riley (2010) state that most segments of society rely on an incremental process to procure serviced and permanent housing; a process that occurs over decades and may, in fact, never be concluded.

In an oversimplified understanding of this evolutionary process, the concept of core housing was adopted by the South African government between the 1980s and 1990s. In a case study of one such application in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, Napier (2002) describes core housing as being similar to the provision of mass housing, with the core structure built by formal contractors and the completion of the houses to be undertaken by the beneficiaries themselves (Ibid: 11). The focus was thus on a product – a highly managed and limited form of assisted self-help, rather than on shared control in a decision-making process. The resultant housing as its concluding byproduct could be argued to be more beneficial to the providing party, in its uncritical confirmation of established power structures, and, perversely, in paying lip-service to the notion of participation.

According to Landman and Napier (2010), the notion of assisted self-help offers a more progressive step in the direction to counter the horizontal stratification inscribed in the product-driven core-housing provision. Through the Enhanced People's Housing Process (EPHP), mechanisms exist within state policy to encourage greater participation in the decision-making platform, with mediation mostly through NGOs. >

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1 Jo Noero's *Pelip Housing* (1999): *Incremental housing development by the Swedish Development corporation*. 2 10x10 housing by MMA architects, following the *Design Indaba* competition in 2009.



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Within this understanding of the limitations inscribed in various self-help models, the architectural discourse in South Africa includes a position where greater emphasis is placed on designing towards the creation of mixed-use and affordable housing stock (Landman & Napier, 2010; Low, 2005; Napier, 2005; Osman & Herthogs, 2010). The argument in favour of incrementalism implies an embrace of the intersection between formal and informal processes, and between the notions of provision and enablement.

As an important starting point towards an incremental approach that aims to challenge the status quo, it is considered fundamental to exhibit the 'political will to devolve authority down to the level of organised urban

communities' (Wakely & Riley, 2010). The ideal power relation therefore resides in the voice of the end users determining the parameters of control, facilitated by way of an extended civil-society resource base and enforced through the capacity of the state. The need to enable urban poor communities to undertake this role is, according to Wakely and Riley (2010), the most important consideration in the desire to facilitate incremental growth.

Necessarily, the discourse implies an understanding of power relations and levels of control (Habraken, 1998), and where the architectural service ought to be positioned in terms of incremental enablement. When in service of the providing authority or developer, control is vested with the central decision-maker, divesting the end user of significant influence. When in service of the end-user community, the design professional contributes to that elusive transition between provision and enablement, between formal and

informal systems. It is here that Breimer (2011) proposes to place the understanding of 'zeggenschap', or self-determination that can be facilitated through responsive design. Similarly, Wakely and Riley (2010) propose that private-sector enterprises, such as the design professions, can contribute to the enablement of resident communities and the devolution of control down to this sector of society through their managerial expertise, access to capital and commercial networks – or, as in the case of architects, their ability to synthesise these resources towards socio-spatial transformation.

#### RADICAL PERSPECTIVE: IN-SITU TRANSFORMATION

Recognition of informal settlements as loci of potential transformation represents the more radical perspective on the debate in the South African (and global) discourse. Davy and Pellissery (2013) and Roy (2005) consider the interrelatedness of informality and its harbouring formal system, wherein the manifestation of informality is less a matter of technical deficiency, but rather a 'differentiated process embodying varying degrees of power and exclusion' (Roy, 2005: 148). In what is described as a complex continuum of legality and illegality, it is argued that informal settlements offer their residents an expression of sovereignty, enabling the poor to enjoy aspects of their human rights precisely through their resistance to the deficient formal systems. The authors say 'informality, by escaping the state's regulatory framework, challenges the notion of the social contract that is the cornerstone for the legitimacy of sovereign states' (Davy & Pellissery, 2013: 10).

Although there is agreement that life in an informal settlement constitutes a survival strategy in the face of much adversity, the intrinsic value and importance of these survival strategies, social contracts and transactional models are viewed as important contributions toward an urbanisation model that is currently failing to ensure the right to full citizenship. This perspective on informality therefore proposes a significant alternative to the three preceding views, in which the dominant sociopolitical and economic system is accepted as the desired norm. In this definition of informality, the status quo is considered critically, as being the perpetrator of basic human-rights violations resulting in informal settlements. Their existence, then, becomes the clue and the possible model for fundamental systemic transformation.

Fieuw (2011: 40-41) argues that in-situ informal settlement upgrade holds the key to realising the right to the city through the poor's right to appropriation and participation in central decision-making processes. In contrast to an agenda of commodification, individualisation and regularised control, proponents of an authentic transformation through in-situ upgrade propose assistance to community-based management systems and structures, 'even if this contravenes existing legislation' (Huchzermeyer, 1999). It is under such circumstances of adjustment that the right to the >

3 Guga S'Thebe Arts phase 2: Culture and Heritage Village by Carin Smuts (2006-2015) in Langa.



## THE UPGRADE OF BESTER'S CAMP AND THE VPUU SERVE AS RESPECTED EXAMPLES OF POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS IN-SITU UPGRADE OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS, WHERE ARCHITECTS COULD BE SEEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

communities in informal settlements through activating safety as a public asset (Krause, 2013; Manuel, 2013). The methodology is aimed at actively occupying identified crime areas with public buildings that can assist in social transformation. A highly participative process is followed, with interventions preceded by social compacts with community representatives and identified stakeholders (Cassidy, Ntshingwa, Galuszka & Matzopoulos, 2015; Krause, 2013). The success of this programme resides not only in reducing crime substantially (Cassidy *et al*, 2015; Cooke, 2011; Manuel, 2013), but also in generating a network of urban spaces connecting civic facilities, such as parks, schools and libraries, that have contributed to nurturing civic responsibility, social cohesion and economic activity (Cooke, 2011).

The upgrade of Bester's Camp and the VPUU serve as respected examples of politically conscious in-situ upgrade of informal settlements, where architects could be seen as agents of change. The challenge of undertaking this radical approach lies in mitigating the territory between existing political structures of authority and the self-governing structures within the settlements (Charlton, 2006; Haskins, 2007; Van Horen, 1996).

In both cases, intensive, ongoing negotiations with the complex array of stakeholders, especially inclusive of established residents, was undertaken, developing action plans that responded to immediate and long-term concerns (Cassidy *et al*, 2015; Poulsen & Silverman, 2012: 67-71).

The intention of such processes of engagement is to facilitate bottom-up transformation by means of tangible interventions into sites identified through action plans that become vehicles for shared decision-making platforms. The aim is ultimately to facilitate an engaged citizenship through inclusion into the city (Krause, 2013; Van Horen, 1996). The physical upgrade of neighbourhood facilities, economic development and community development are therefore synonymous with the intention of benefiting the affected community, strengthening business in the existing informal economy, facilitating community involvement and, ultimately, promoting democratic values and decision-making processes (Chebelyon-Dalizu, Garbowitz, Hause & Thomas, 2010; Hardy, 2011; Klitzner, 2014; Ngxisa, 2012; VPUU, 2014).

In terms of its relevance to the architectural profession, the focus on community engagement does not negate >

production of the city as social organisation ('auto-gestion') is given expression (Lopes de Souza, 2010: 318). The inherently, and necessary, confrontational aspect of this perspective on informal settlements is confirmed by Lopes de Souza (Ibid: 329): 'The state is not a partner ... the state apparatus as such is an enemy, even if it is sometimes (dialectically) more or less genuinely open to pressures from below as a government.'

### ROLE OF ARCHITECTS IN IN-SITU TRANSFORMATION

During the 1980s, the Informal Settlement Division of the Urban Foundation commissioned the architects Harber, Masson and Associates to address problems encountered in the informal settlement of Bester's Camp in Cato Manor, KwaZulu-Natal (Poulsen & Silverman, 2012). The approach taken was one of intensive negotiations with the residents resulting in an in-situ process of upgrading. Detailed surveys and measuring up of existing structures and occupation informed appropriate strategies for improvement to these structures, as well as identifying sites for the establishment of civic amenities, such as a hall, school and service depots. Individual funding mechanisms were implemented to encourage residents to improve their own dwellings through partnerships with local hardware suppliers: 'Today, Bester's is a high-density settlement with mainly pedestrian access ... A people-centred approach to in-situ upgrading has meant a search for, and response to, the unique characteristics of every site' (Ibid: 71).

The influence of Bester's Camp can be seen in the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) project in Khayelitsha, Cape Town under the directorship of Michael Krause, who worked for Harber and Associates from 1998-1999 (ICPC, 2012). The VPUU programme is a multi-government sponsored initiative started in 2005 focused on improving the quality of life for

4 The Art Therapy centre at the Regina Mundi Church in Soweto by Kate Otten Architects (2008). 5 The Refilwe Business Node in Metsedwing, Pretoria, by Holm Jordaan.



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the profession, nor does it negate the tacit value of the endemic knowledge base. Rather, these examples suggest transformation in both directions, enhancing a virtuous triangle between formal authority structures, social capital inherent in the resident community, and the resource base of civil society inclusive of NGOs, private-sector funding and built-environment professionals. The VPUU and Bester's Camp offer tangible evidence of the democratic potential of such multi-sectoral engagement, where the architectural professionals engage as agents of transformation.

Further examples of such comprehensive engagement processes emanating from within architectural practice include the pioneering legacies of Kate Otten, Carin Smuts and Jo Noero. More recently, these ranks have been joined by younger firms, such as 26'10 South Architects, where Anne Graupner and Thorsten Deckler have been actively involved in both the discourse on informal-settlement upgrade, as well as in the facilitation of projects stemming from agency (26'10 South Architects, n.d.). A project undertaken in Refilwe by

Holm Jordaan Architects, under the leadership of Marguerite Pienaar (Holm Jordaan, 2017), similarly followed this trajectory of participatory research and design, with community builders responsible for the execution of the physical structures.

These instances of application in architectural practice bode well for a change in the discourse surrounding, and

approach to, informal-settlement upgrade. They enjoy support in the academic sphere, through the active development of curriculum content across all the major schools of architecture (Delpont-Voulgarelis & Perold, 2016; Du Trevou, 2015; Louw, 2013; SDI, 2012; Wits City Institute, 2015). Increasingly, courses are being shaped to encourage students to engage with communities living within informal settlements or conditions of informality nested within the formal urban context. From these

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studios, collaborative efforts with NGOs, such as Habitat for Humanity (HfH, 2015) and Architecture Sans Frontieres (ASF-UK & DAG, 2015), are resulting in a new generation of professionals who are prepared for this 'messy and confrontational' context.

## CONCLUSION

It has been argued here that architecture could contribute to the discourse on in-situ upgrade of informal settlements by, firstly, grappling with its own implication in existing formal processes and, further, by challenging its fundamentally individualist nature by engaging in participatory and collaborative processes of agency. Within the South African context, the architectural profession has been largely omitted from any of the policy considerations regarding informal-settlement upgrade.

In terms of institutional positioning, there is no evidence in the Architectural Profession Act No 44 of 2000 (SA 2011) of a specific role to be undertaken by architects with regard to any of the policies as described. Similarly, in codes of conduct described by the South African Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP), there has been no allowance made for performance criteria or terms of reference related to community participation or engagement with a client base existing outside of the statutory framework. On the contrary, all the above institutional guidelines are confirmation of a systemically entrenched operation of work, which is necessarily the basis of a professional discipline. By its very nature, therefore, the profession of architecture remains ensconced within the formal system and serves to uphold that system through its legal acknowledgement. It is therefore not surprising that the condition of informal urbanism poses a fundamental conundrum with which, it can be argued, the profession has yet to become fully engaged on a meaningful level.

Notwithstanding this omission, examples of architectural involvement in informal-settlement upgrade have been reviewed and considered in terms of their contributions, either in support of existing power or as opportunities for critical engagement towards transformation. These examples serve to underscore the argument that architecture does indeed possess the ability to engage in the political realm, impacting on urban spatial relations through processes of collaboration. In the case of informal-settlement upgrade, these relations sit at the forefront of defining the democratic evolution of South Africa. It is therefore proposed that by embracing this potential agency of change, based in a clear understanding of the nuances in the discourse, architects may contribute positively to the spatial redress inherent to informal-settlement upgrade. ■

## REFERENCES

Refer to <http://www.businessmediamags.co.za> for a full list of references.

6 Imizamo Yethu platforms by UCT Architecture students under the guidance of Mike Louw.