

PLANNING FOR THE UPGRADING OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Planning for the upgrading of informal settlements is still a relatively unknown field for planners in South Africa and it is certain to receive more attention in future. The role of the upgrading of informal settlements in providing low income housing will be discussed, as well as certain factors that play an important role in planning projects of this kind. A "strategy", involving certain alternative solutions available to the planner in the field, will then be put forward. Findings from a study done in Joe Slovo Square, Bloemfontein, will be used to illustrate the article.

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Planning for low income groups in the past was dominated by top-down policies and segregation between racial groups. On entering a new phase in the future of South Africa it is important that planners, and all other disciplines involved with low income housing, should adopt strategies that are directed at the development of people and their environments from the bottom up.

The upgrading of informal settlements is seen as an important part of a strategy to provide housing to low income groups in South Africa. In this article the following issues will be discussed:

The role of upgrading in providing low income housing.

A strategy for upgrading informal settlements.

1. HOUSING: UPGRADING OR RESETTLEMENT

Informal settlements can be seen as the physical manifestation of the housing backlog in Third World countries, which can be attributed to the enormous urban growth in those countries and housing policies implemented by governments to accommodate this growth.

Before the 1960's, housing policies concentrated on the provision of mass produced housing by the public sector and the relocation of people living in informal settlements. One of the major problems with this approach was that Third World governments could not afford to provide all the homeless with conventional housing. Low income groups could also not afford conventional housing without heavy subsidisation by the authorities.

The research of Charles Abrams and John Turner in the 1950's and 1960's, changed the attitude towards informal settlements. Traditionally these settlements were seen as *"chaotic and disorganized misery belts, populated by poverty stricken migrants fresh from the countryside who were ripe for revolution"* (Dwyer 1975: 199). The research gave new meaning to the concept of self-help; it showed the important contribution that these settlements can make

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in relieving the housing shortage, and it also noted the negative effects of the destruction of these settlements (Laquain 1983: 15-16). This change in attitude was the origin of schemes providing sites and basic services and the upgrading of informal settlements.

The upgrading of informal settlements is reactive planning and is not the ideal way of providing housing for the urban poor. The reason for this is that upgrading is the treatment of the symptoms of urban growth, whereas attention should be given to the causes of the problem. However, the problem of informal settlements is a reality which should include proactive planning and both a housing and urbanisation policy (Kruger 1991: 28).

One alternative to the upgrading of informal settlements is the resettlement of the people living there in either conventional housing schemes, site and services schemes or relocating them without making provision for improvements. Some of the negative effects of resettlement are:

Financial loss due to the destruction of existing housing structures (Laquain 1983: 13-14).

Restraining the development of communities (Platzky and Walker 1985: 20).

Multidimensional stress (Scudder 1975: 455-468).

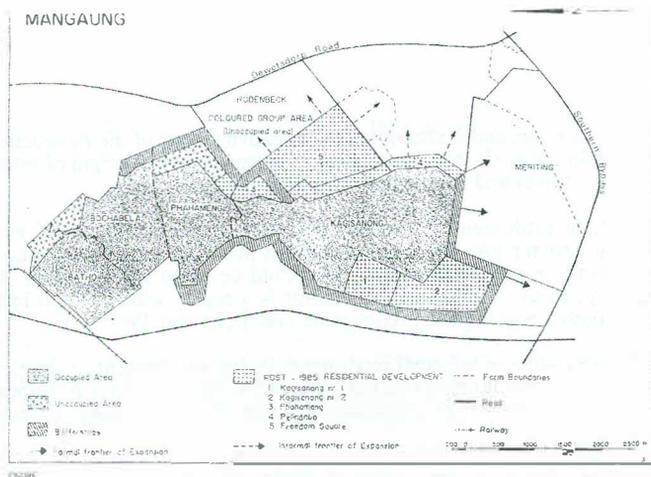
A break in family and friendship ties.

Because of the negative effects of resettlement on people, this alternative for dealing with informal settlements should be seen as a last resort. In other words care should be taken that resettlement is more advantageous for the people themselves than the *in situ* upgrading of the settlement.

According to the Urban Foundation, there are seven million people, including backyard squatters, living in informal housing in South Africa. (Urban Foundation 1991: 6). However, the number staying in informal settlements is difficult to determine, although it forms a substantial part of the total. South African planners should thus give serious attention to the upgrading of informal settlements.

2. THE SLOVO SQUARE UPGRADING STUDY (FIG 1)

The discussion in this article is based on an extensive study carried out in Slovo Square, an informal settlement in Bloemfontein. No formal planning was involved in this settlement which was established after February 1990 and was part of a series of land invasions initiated and organised by the Mangaung Civic Association. There were 664 informal housing structures in the settlement.



For this study basic information was collected by way of informal conversations with people living in the settlement and people involved with these settlements. Use was also made of literature on the area. On the basis of this, a questionnaire was used to gather more specific information. Reference will be made to the findings of this study in the ensuing discussion.

3. FACTORS GOVERNING THE UPGRADING OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Certain factors are identified as important for the success of upgrading projects, in particular security of tenure, location, participation and needs.

3.1 Security of tenure

People cannot be expected to take part in an upgrading project if they are not sure of their future in a certain location. The participation of the inhabitants, which is essential for a successful project, will depend on security of tenure or the perception thereof. There are a number of ways in which security of tenure can be provided, such as: freehold, leasehold, staged tenure and community control.

In Slovo Square it was found that security of tenure does not receive a high priority in terms of the needs of the inhabitants (Kruger 1991: 143). It was ranked second last at 4%. This may be related to the fact that the land was "given" to them by the Mangaung Civic Association and so the inhabitants see this as sufficient security of tenure. Because of this, 10% of the dwellings in Slovo Square are already built of more permanent building materials. However, the authorities are still contemplating the resettlement of the people from this settlement. An important deduction which can be made is that people living in informal settlements need to receive education concerning land tenure.

3.2 Location of the informal settlement

One of the aims of upgrading is to reduce the amount that urban poor spend on housing. This reduction will enable these people to spend more money on other basic needs. However, if the location of the informal settlement is far removed from job opportunities and services, transport costs for the urban poor will increase and thus cause a reduction in money available for other basic needs. This makes the location of the informal settlement very important in the decision to upgrade.

Slovo Square can be viewed as a perfect example of a well located informal settlement, sited 4 kilometres from the Bloemfontein Central Business District and less than 2 km from the major industrial and business areas. Resettlement of the inhabitants by the authorities

would at least double this distance, thereby increasing transport expenses for these people.

3.3 Community participation

"Of all the resources now being devoted to improvement of conditions in slums and squatter settlements, those of the people themselves are by far the most significant." (United Nations 1976, in Harrison 1983:176).

One of the major advantages in upgrading informal settlements is the fact that the target population can easily be identified. The planner thus knows who he/she is planning for and therefore it may be easier to establish community participation than in other housing projects.

Community participation can be incorporated in the planning and implementation stages of an upgrading project, and has advantages for the community and the planning agency, such as:

- a. Priority is given to specific community needs. This causes a cost reduction because money is not wasted on low priority needs. Physical labour done by the inhabitants during implementation also saves money.
- b. Community organisations modelled specifically for upgrading can remain intact after the project has been executed. This will give the community the opportunity to develop autonomously (Skinner 1983: 127).
- c. Cost saving can accrue to the project agency. Tasks that can be better executed by community organisations can be left in their hands (Skinner 1983: 126).

Although problems are experienced with community participation, Huizer, 1971, (in Skinner 1983: 138) is of opinion that: *"If treated as intelligent individuals, they are more likely to participate in the project than if dealt with as inferior beings."*

3.4 Needs

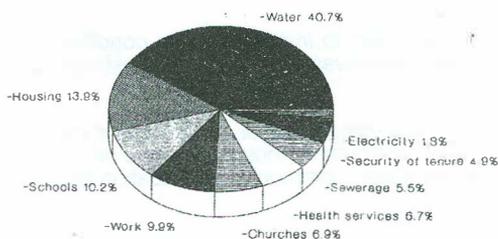
The existence of different income, ethnic and education groups makes it necessary to treat every informal settlement as unique in the determination of the needs of that specific community. For this purpose community participation is indispensable. Due to the lack of financing, in projects of this kind, it is also important that the order of priority of needs in a community be determined. In theory one would expect to find importance attached to: security of tenure, physical services (such as roads, water, electricity, sewerage and refuse removal), housing, and facilities for health and education.

However, in the Slovo Square study the needs (in order of priority) were found to be the following (Kruger 1991: 143): (FIG 2)

Water, a properly built house, education, job opportunities, church, health and sewerage.

As noted before, "security of tenure" had low priority.

The needs of the people of Slovo Square (Ranked on priority)



Figure

4. STANDARDS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

In the past, standards in the Third World countries were based on those of the First World. These standards did not address the real needs of the people and were beyond the means of the urban poor. Turner (1972: 151) makes a distinction between what people should get and what people can afford. In other words, the standard of infrastructure and services should be determined by the needs of the people and their ability to pay. Because of varying financial and physical situations in informal settlements, set rules and regulations concerning standards may not be realistic.

Subsidisation of higher standards should be considered in situations, not only to the advantage of the community, but also for the population of the urban area as a whole. One cannot expect the urban poor to pay more for something that is not a high priority need for them. For example, should a low income community pay for a sewerage system that will prevent the contamination of the groundwater of the rest of the city?

In the Slovo Square study it was found that the inhabitants of the settlement cannot afford the most basic form of services. However, three possible choices exist, namely subsidisation of services, communal services, or installation of services in stages, whenever the community can afford it.

5. THE ROLES OF THE DIFFERENT ACTORS

Research done in informal settlements sees the provision of housing as a process instead of a product delivered to the user. As more actors become involved in the housing process, the role of each actor has to be determined during the planning of the upgrading project. Acceptance of the self-help principle places more responsibility on the community and the family, especially in terms of building the housing structure. The authorities usually play a facilitating role in this process.

The role of the professional in this process is mainly to provide a framework in which the community can undertake the upgrading.

In the South African situation the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has much potential. The basic role of NGOs is to assist local communities, support specific policies and act as mediator between communities and the authorities (Turner 1988: 175).

At present, organisations of this kind are needed in South Africa to work with people at grass roots level by establishing successful community participation.

In the Slovo Square study it was found that the community was not aware that the authorities were still contemplating the resettlement of the people (Kruger 1991: 119). Even the Mangaung Civic Association was not aware of this, which suggests the important role that NGOs can play in bridging the gap between communities and authorities.

6. FINANCING THE UPGRADING PROJECT

Three basic elements in upgrading projects need financing, namely land, infrastructure and the housing structure.

In terms of finance for obtaining land, care should be taken when making assumptions about what people in an informal settlement are willing to pay. It will often be the first time that people pay for the land on which they live and the concept is thus unknown to them. The willingness of people to pay will also depend on their perception of security of tenure (Tym 1984: 214).

In Slovo Square 89,6% of the people are willing to pay for the land on which they live. However, the average amount that they are willing to pay for a site of 500 square metres is R29,00 (Kruger 1991: 149). This shows the dangers of making assumptions about the willingness of people to pay and stresses the importance of educating people in these matters.

The most important feature of infrastructure that will have an influence on the cost is the fact that it is a public good which cannot be installed by the individual. Therefore the infrastructure cost for the individual is debatable in all cases, depending on the local and national circumstances (Tym 1984: 215).

Financing the housing structure is seen as less important because it will be built informally or incrementally and will usually be undertaken by the occupant. Because of this, financing schemes should be made available to members of the community for the building of their houses.

7. A "STRATEGY" FOR UPGRADING

Upgrading can be undertaken in three phases, namely: gathering information, analysing the information (plan formulation) and implementing the plan.

Community participation is central to all these phases and should be a continuing process integrating the different phases. Because of the disparate conditions in different informal settlements, it is important to see each informal settlement as unique. For this reason the discussion can only set guidelines for the planner involved.

7.1 Phase 1 Gathering information

This phase can be split into the following tasks:

- a Choice of settlement to be upgraded. It is important to choose the settlement with the greatest need for upgrading and not to decide in terms of political advantages for the authorities. Political pressure by a well-organised community should also not influence the decision.
- b The demarcation of the area to be upgraded. Care should be taken not to divide existing organisational structures and the area should consist of a fairly homogeneous population.

- c Mapping of the demarcated area. This will simplify further collection of information. Standards for mapping should suit the specific situation (i.e. time and money available should determine detail and accuracy.) Simplified techniques can include using aerial photographs or orthophotographs as base maps and field mapping techniques. It is important that public organisations that have aerial photographs and orthophotographs of these areas make them available for use in planning.
- d Information about the surrounding area. Can the informal settlement earmarked for upgrading be consolidated into bigger area? Information concerns the capacity and location of transportation, sewerage, stormwater drainage, water distribution and electricity.
- e General information about the settlement to be upgraded. Essential here would be information on the present size and physical characteristics of the settlement, demographic data, and the needs, preferences and wants of the inhabitants.

For the Slovo Square study, general information was first gathered through unstructured conversations, observation and attending meetings. This information was used to compile a structured questionnaire. This method of information gathering was highly successful in the study. Because of this the use of as many methods as possible is suggested.

7.2 Phase 2 Analysis of information and plan formulation

In this phase planning is based on the information gathered with four basic aspects receiving attention, i.e. financing, layout, provision of services and security of tenure.

Each of these aspects will be discussed briefly.

7.2.1 Financing

The financing of a project will depend on the involvement of the authorities and the willingness and the ability of the community to contribute. The responsibility of the authorities in the provision of low income housing is ongoing and no definite final estimate can be made.

In Slovo Square 89,6% of the inhabitants were willing to pay for installation of services and 77,1% were willing to pay a monthly instalment (Kruger 1992: 149). However, the people do not have any idea of the costs involved in the installation and provision of services. The incomes of the people are such that at most 50% of the households can afford basic services (Kruger 1991: 148).

7.2.2 Planning the layout

Three basic factors, other than town planning, play a role in determining the layout.

a. The willingness to move

The willingness of the people to move will determine the cost effectiveness of the layout. If all the people are willing to move, a conventional low-income layout can be designed which will reduce the cost of the provision of services. Unwillingness to move will cause time delays during the implementation of the project. Movement of structures and allocation of sites should be organised to satisfy as many of the households as possible.

b. Size of sites

Besides basic town planning, consideration should also be given to unique circumstances. The following factors should determine the size of a site:

- the need for low-income housing;
- the availability of land for low-income housing;
- present and future family size;
- present size of sites; and
- permitted activities on the site.

These activities may, for example, include the growing of vegetables or small home industries and the size of a site should not restrain these activities.

c. Land use

Attention should be given to the land use situation at present in the settlement. In Slovo Square the community provided for necessities, such as shops, churches and sport facilities. However, the planner should determine the amount of land required for necessities such as education, medical clinics, open spaces and community facilities, in cooperation with the community.

7.2.3 The provision of physical services

The provision of services will depend on the finance available and the needs of the community. A choice exists between three methods for the installation of services (Kruger 1991: 96-97).

a. Communal services points

This entails that a certain number of households make use of central service facilities for water, sewerage and other basic services. If this method is chosen for a project, the future development and upgrading of the settlement should be considered, since providing services to individual households at a later stage may render the services already provided useless.

b. Infrastructure in phases

Infrastructure will not be provided immediately, but over a period of time, whenever the need arises and financing is available. The major disadvantage of this method is the disturbance of community life for longer periods.

c. Conventional method

With this method all the necessary infrastructure is installed simultaneously, but it is not seen as realistic for upgrading because of the financial implications thereof. The advantage of this method is that it will cause the least disturbance to the community.

7.2.4 Provision of security of tenure

The information gathered in phase one should include the needs of the community concerning security of tenure, and it is important that the community has adequate knowledge of what this entails. To ensure that the provision of security of tenure will not hamper the implementation of the upgrading project, provision in stages is seen as a viable solution.

Acceptance of the proposed plan by the community is the key to the success of the project and its implementation. This cooperation entails the movement of housing structures, physical labour and monthly payment for services installed and provided. If the proposed plan is not accepted it should be changed and the planner should explain the implications of such changes to the community.

7.3 Phase 3 Implementation of the plan

It is important that the project is accepted by the authorities involved in the area, for the following reasons (Kruger 1991: 99):

If the project is not accepted no financial support will be given.

The sojourn of the people on the land will still be seen as against the law, and registration of ownership will be impossible.

Connection with existing infrastructure will be impossible.

If the application for the implementation is not successful, the authorities might give more urgent attention to the resettlement of the people.

If the authorities accept the proposed plan, tenure of the land should be acquired and if necessary rezoning should be applied for.

The next step will be the surveying and mapping of the area. Land surveying standards in South Africa are very high and therefore, with reference to appropriate standards for low-income communities, the proposal is made that standards for this type of project should be lowered. More detailed surveying can be done whenever money and time are available. This lowering of standards can be justified on grounds of the low priority that security of tenure is given in these communities (Kruger 1991: 143). Surveying is thus most necessary for the installation of services and the ordering of the settlement. However, the cost involved and the ability to pay with, play an important role in the decision on the standard of surveying.

Physical implementation of the plan can occur in phases or post haste, according to the finance available. The role of the community in implementing the plan should be determined during the planning phase.

Conclusion

The major difference between planning for the upgrading of informal settlements and other housing schemes is that the people for whom the planning is being done can be consulted during the three phases of planning. This fact should be used to plan better environments for the low-income residents in these settlements. Central to successful planning for these settlements is the adaptation of standards to suit the needs of the inhabitants. The planner should therefore also be able to adapt to the specific situation and should not have any preconceived ideas concerning standards.

Although it has been shown that the upgrading of informal settlements is not the only solution to the low-income housing problem in South Africa, it makes an important and necessary contribution to the betterment of the conditions for a large part of the low-income population.

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