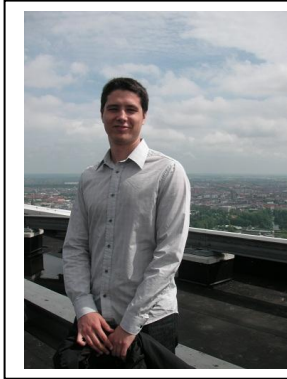


Empowering residents

The importance of housing



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Introduction

The population of the world is growing and the majority today live in urban areas across the globe. A big part of the urban population growth is caused by migration. The migration often creates bigger demands for services and infrastructure than the governments can supply and informal settlements are created as a result. People living in informal settlements are generally not supplied with services provided by the government, thus often living in bad living conditions with poor access to education, healthcare, water, e.g. This paper is about how people through empowerment can improve their living conditions. Empowerment is to mobilize the people's own power to help them towards a goal. This paper will also give an example of one method through which empowerment can be provided to the people, and the paper will also try and answer why housing is so important to people by looking at houses from an economic point of view.

1 Urban Shelter Design Development

After the Second World War in Europe, many states involved in the war became responsible for providing basic housing for poor people, or whoever who wanted state housing, which often led to large-scale housing programs by the municipality that was funded by the central government (Jenkins et al 2007). In the 1950s and 1960s however, the capacity of the state to build enough low-income housing to supply the rapidly growing demand, proved to be very limited. By building a minimum amount of houses but also by continuing to tear down informal settlements the situation was exacerbating. Some projects had been made with so called “self-help” housing, involving the residents to take part in the construction of houses and researchers had shown that resident-controlled housing was both more efficient and more effective than the housing projects made by the public sector (Sommerville 1998). In the 1970s the World Bank promoted several projects of self-help housing across the world. The requirement was that the cost of the housing should be recovered from the residents. The building pace could however still not make it even with the demand so the emphasis shifted more towards not only providing housing but also creating communities and supplying skilltraining to ensure an increase in the residents’ income-level. An increased income-level was seen as a necessity to ensure the revolving funds and make housing affordable for the residents. The people’s participation was essential to ensure success in projects that included settlements that were already built.

2 Factors Shaping Urban Shelter Design

Empowerment through housing

The definition of empowerment is debated but in general empowerment means more control for the people over their own lives (Sommerville 1998). The control can come in various ways, including education, employment and housing, but what these ways have in common when it comes to empowerment is that of increased choice and freedom of action for the residents.

Empowerment could be any process bringing control to the people. Foucault even argued that simply discussing what can and what cannot be done is in itself an empowerment process (Sommerville 1998). The process of empowerment can be started by the government or by a landowner, and is then called a “top-down” process, or it could be started by the residents that want empowerment making it a so called “bottom-up” process. This distinction was made by Turner who named the residents as “passive citizenship” if it was a “top-down” process, or as “active citizenship” if it was a “bottom-up” process.

The key goal of empowerment is when the residents are in a position where they all can choose how much part they want to take in the process, not being forced into participation because of living conditions or external forces. Participation alone is, however, not enough to ensure a long lasting shift in the balance of power between the people and landlords or authorities (Sommerville 1998). To ensure long lasting empowerment some institutional arrangements are also required, such as arrangements for educating, training and informing the residents.

Empowerment through knowledge

An important issue when it comes to empowerment is the educating, training and informing of the residents. This is to secure that their new freedom will last and that the residents are able to maintain their homes. To this end, some training in skills are required to ensure an income, but also training and education in house maintenance, handling a budget, how the community and housing organisations work, are required. The residents should be encouraged to, and supported in, finding their own education and training needs. In that way, they can get empowered by setting up an agenda for themselves rather than following one set by someone else.

Empowerment through resources

Empowerment through resources can be supplying residents both with actual resources but also with opportunities to empower themselves. Examples from the first one could be building resources or government subsidies, examples from the second could be supplying offices for management or rooms for community meetings as well as providing someone knowledgeable to encourage the

empowerment. Empowerment through resources tends to work better in “bottom-up” processes where the people themselves can use the resources in a more efficient way. An intermediary is however needed as a supervisor to see that the resources are used in the most efficient way. More about the intermediary later.

Empowerment is more than just owning your property, it is the opportunity and freedom in controlling what happens with the property, the decision to own it or not to own it. What is needed is a broad approach of education and training for empowerment, to make the systems on all levels more effective, accountable and democratic. Over time, various approaches have been tried and resulted in a number of methods to help empower the residents.

Organized self-help housing

Organized self-help housing is one method to empower residents. The idea of organized self-help housing is having an intermediary, for example an organization, that both has a responsibility towards financial agencies and authorities, as well as supporting participating households (Åstrand et al 1996). The intermediary organizes building materials, skill training and the construction of the buildings both when it comes to design and controls. The households are expected to participate by doing the actual work on their houses, with technical assistance from the intermediary.

Most residences in the developing world today is built within the informal sector with the use of self-help housing. The houses are produced at a lower cost but with the same quality as if a contractor would have built them. Organized self-help housing however also allow an improvement of the physical planning and a coordination of transports and purchase of materials.

One important aspect of organized self-help housing is the low cost at which the houses can be produced. The reduced cost of construction is mainly through the people’s participation in building their own houses, but is also affected by how the intermediary organizes the project, as well as the efficiency and capacity of the intermediary. By building their own houses, the residents learn how to build and

make repairs thus reducing the cost of maintenance as well. The lower cost makes it also possible for low-income household to afford a house that they wouldn't be able to afford if it were provided by the private commercial sector.

An important benefit from a well organized self-help housing project is the improved social and economical development. When participating in the organized self-help project the residents work in teams for a long time and they get to know their neighbours and see the benefit of community work. Improved living conditions, together with the skill training and education, often mean better psychological and physical opportunities to raise the households income.

The economic role of housing

Studies shows that home equity is more important among low-income households than among households with higher incomes. Home equity is also more important among minorities. According to Zhu Xiao Di homeowners in the USA with an annual income of less than \$20.000 had around 71 per cent of the household wealth in home equity while for homeowners with an annual income of more than \$50.000 the same number is only 38 per cent(Xiao Di 2001) . This means that people with an annual income of less than \$20.000 have a larger part of their household wealth in a stable investment. On the other hand could the money not spent on housing be invested in e.g. remodelling, education or skilltraining that in the long run could increase the net income of the household. Having household wealth invested in housing has, however, proven to be an effective way to protect the money against inflation, given a fixed-rate mortgage.

Less wealthy households also enjoy better homes relative to their income and have a higher chance of accumulating wealth if they sell their house, because of a greater price appreciation (a bigger group of potential buyers competing rises the prices more than a single buyer) of low-income housing compared to high income housing.

3 The Role of Professionals

The role of the professional is to work as a part of the intermediary organization but also to spread the knowledge about methods like organized self-help housing as an alternative to commercial houses, houses that are often unattainable for low-income households.

In working within a facilitating organization, the role of the surveyor is to secure land tenure, financial support, support from authorities and legislation, to organize and coordinate resources and transportation, community organization, labour, skilltraining, education, to ensure good physical planning and to help provide and install attainable services e.g. electricity, water or sewerage as well as social services such as schools and health clinics.

When it comes to making decisions on the local level, the surveyor should act as an adviser and let the community decide on their preferred way as often as possible. The role of the adviser would then be to give possible solutions and show the consequences of the different options when it comes to the housing situation, legal and economic consequences, health and estimated time for the project. The surveyor should act as a support when it comes to organization of the community, administration and the physical planning. The surveyor could also act as a teacher in administration, organization, legal and economic matters to ensure the training of the residents to make them more aware and self-sufficient.

As a part in a intermediary organization, it is the role of the surveyor to ensure the legal and economic support. The legal support of the project is mostly about securing land tenure, setting the legal framework for the community and enabling the project to begin with. Legal hindrances for the project could be a building code and regulations that describe unattainable building standards. It is then the job of the surveyor to lobby for a change in the regulation to enable houses with attainable standards to be built. Securing appropriate land for the project at an affordable and reasonable cost is also a legislative task for the surveyor, either by lobbying for changes in the law if needed or by working together with the

authorities in making a land-use plan. To attain required permits could also be a job for the surveyor.

When it comes to economic support, the surveyor could work with attaining needed funds from donors or financial institutions. The administration of the economic funds into revolving funds or into the project could also be handed by a surveyor.

When it comes to physical planning the role of the surveyor is to ensure proper land use, secure tenure and to act as an intermediary between designers and doers. Planning is a political decision-making process where social values are relative and thus needs to be emphasized by someone that is in contact with the residents.

4 Criteria's for Design of Sustainable Shelter and Neighbourhoods

As a surveyor more concentrated on physical planning issues and legal aspects rather than economical aspects it would be my task to help organize the project when it comes to the legal foundation, organization and administration of a housing project as well as the physical planning. It's important for me to start off early with involving the residents, and to make an overview-plan for the construction that shows results on a regular basis to maintain the interest of the residents. It will be important to try and bring down power to the residents to truly ensure their own empowerment.

It will be my responsibility to try and keep me posted in the evolving of planning paradigms since there is an ongoing evaluation and discussion about the use and benefits of participation-approaches. Working in a participation project also gives me the responsibility to share my experience and thoughts to the discussion, helping to evolve new approaches. Maybe the next step in a project will be to expand the skill training and education to how to use the new houses properly so that the houses do not need higher maintenance because of incorrect use.

For me, as a professional, it is important to remember that in a project for low-income household, where we are building houses, we aren't just building houses but homes and hopefully giving opportunities for a better future for the residents.

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