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**Housing in Addis Ababa beyond crisis and heroism**

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# Morphology, Housing and Renewal

## Housing Production

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### **SITES AND SERVICES IN PERFORMANCE: HOUSING IN ADDIS ABABA BEYOND CRISIS AND HEROISM**

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The so-called “sites and services” program was arguably one of the most successful cases of affordable housing promotion in the developing world. The turn of the 1980s was the heyday of this program and the World Bank its main sponsor. However, from the late 1980s on, a combination of geopolitical shifts and the pressure of neoliberal policies steered to its decline. In the meantime, what happened to the settlements created more than three decades ago? How do people live there? What can we learn from the performance of these settlements, neighbourhoods and townships? To contribute an answer to some of these questions, I will examine the case of Nefas Silk, a sites and services settlement with approximately 3500 plots, sponsored by the World Bank and built in Addis Ababa in the 1980s. In the urban global South, Nezar AlSayyad contends, forms of urbanization, social actors and forms of social organization should be investigated employing an intellectual framework that embodies urban informality as a “new” urban paradigm and a “new” way of life. However, as Ananya Roy points out, informality is often addressed from two opposing and conflicting frames: crisis and heroism. On the one hand there are those like Mike Davis who express deep concern for the disruptive characteristics of informal urbanization, and on the other hand those like Hernando de Soto who praise the entrepreneurship of the informal sector. In either case, however, there is a pervasive tendency to create a divide between formal and informal urbanization, authority and self-help, control and freedom. I will use AbdouMaliq Simone’s notion of “people as infrastructure” as an intellectual framework to contest this divide. In doing so, I aim at bringing about alternative approaches to cope with the mismatch between rapid demographic growth and limited financial resources in the implementation of housing policies in the developing world. I will discuss the potential of progressive development for the majority as opposed to instant development for a few as a strategy to promote a synergy between affordable housing solutions and sustainable urban growth. The goal of my paper is to produce a critical account on development aid policies based on affordable housing solutions underpinned by the concept of incremental growth. Using documentation gathered in empirical research on housing figures built in Addis Ababa from the 1974 revolution on, I will compare the Nefas Silk sites and services settlement with a housing figure promoted in the 1980s by the Norwegian non-governmental agency Redd Barna (Save the Children) and a housing programme developed in the mid-2000s by the Ethiopian government with technical support provided by the German international cooperation agency, GTZ. With the result of this comparative analysis I will single out the potentials and the threats of reconceptualizing the sites and services programme to develop new housing policies and to produce knowledge to support design decision-making processes for all the stakeholders engaged in actively promoting sustainable development of affordable housing in the global South.

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### **THE NEW TENEMENT**

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The Hofdijk Housing Scheme in Rotterdam (Jan Verhoeven, 1977-83), the Hundertwasser House in Vienna (Friedensreich Hundertwasser/ Josef Krawina, 1982-84), and the International Building Exhibit block on Ritterstraße in West Berlin (Rob Krier and others, 1981-83) were all showcase projects by which their respective municipal governments promoted specific local policies aimed at the regeneration of the inner city. They were aimed at complementing or reversing several decades of functionalist planning which at the time was increasingly perceived as destructive and outdated. My paper will present these projects as evidence of an emerging European discourse about the qualities of urban life. These new ideas mixed anti-modernist criticism with nostalgic images and strategic goals, absorbing conceptions about the city as a generator of creativity and innovation, locale of democracy and productive debate, and object of identification and personal attachment. The showcase projects of the 1970s and 1980s were connected to this discourse, through their characteristics. They generated public space in the form of traditional squares and corridor streets and perceived as a counterproposal to the bleakness and disorienting arrangement of many modernist tower block estates. On the other hand they related to a revised view on the nineteenth-century metropolis, which since the 1970s was no longer predominantly connected to blight, filth, and oppression, but rather to intellectual advancement, political reform, and artistic innovation. Thus they operated in the generation of a post-modernist intellectual framework that influenced planning in European cities to date.