

State control in self-help housing: evidence from South Africa

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Abstract: *Although self-help in housing has been practised for centuries and a number of researchers have formulated ideas on the topic, the notion of self-help is commonly attributed to JFC Turner. Turner's work, in turn, is closely associated with neo-liberal policies promoted by the World Bank. Some argue that the World Bank economised the basic ideas of "freedom to build" and "housing as a verb". What is less well understood, however, is the fact that site-and-service schemes (the practical consequence of Turner's ideas) have in actual fact not been widely applied in the world. In many countries – including socialist countries such as India and Cuba – self-help was implemented through an institutional approach (housing co-operatives; self-help groups), rather than by means of site-and-service schemes.*

South Africa's housing policy is based on a once-off housing subsidy, to be used for the provision of a nuclear home that can be extended over time. The self-help approach envisaged in the policy is called the "People's Housing Process". Self-help is implemented through self-help groups called Housing Support Centres. In this paper, we argue that the implementation of self-help by means of self-help groups in the world at large, and specifically in South Africa, reflects a state mechanism to control housing and is far removed from both Turner's initial idea of dweller-control and the neo-liberal principles of the World Bank.

Although self-help housing has long been one of the most prevalent housing options in the world (see for example Ward, 1982; Harris, 1998; Dingle, 1999), and although a range of researchers have formulated ideas on the topic (Harris, 1999a, 2003), the notion of self-help in the context of developing countries is commonly (rightfully or wrongly) attributed to JFC Turner (Turner, 1976). In turn, Turner's work, along with the practical consequences thereof, is closely associated with site-and-services and neo-liberal policies promoted by the World Bank (Pugh, 1991). Some argue that the World Bank economised the basic ideas of "freedom to build" and "housing as a verb" (Pugh, 2001). However, the fact that site-and-service schemes, as envisaged by Turner himself, have not actually been applied on a large scale in the world (Nientied and van der Linden, 1985), is not commonly understood, or reflected in research (Turner, 1976). Ironically, despite the neo-liberal connotations of self-help as advocated by Turner, self-help has commonly been applied in socialist economies and in liberal economies (Harris, 1999b).

South Africa's housing policy is based on a once-off housing subsidy. The purpose of this subsidy is to provide recipients with a site and basic services, coupled with a nuclear (starter) home that can be extended over time. Theoretically, self-help is thus entrenched in the South African policy. The self-help approach in the policy was officially called the People's Housing Process (PHP)¹ and was implemented mainly through self-help groups called "Housing Support Centres" – a concept similar to that of housing cooperatives.

¹ This name was later changed to "Community Driven Housing Initiatives".

In this paper we will primarily argue that the implementation of self-help by means of self-help groups in the world at large, and specifically in South Africa, reflects a state mechanism aimed at controlling housing, and is far removed from Turner's initial idea of dweller-control. In fact, we agree with Harris (2003), who argues that dweller control (as conceptualised by Turner) has seldom comprised part of the rationale for self-help or for international housing policy. Secondly, we argue that self-help in the South African policy is hedged between the neo-liberal intent, and the practices of state-controlled welfarism. Against this background, the paper is structured as follows. It starts off with an explanation of the origin of self-help, followed by an analysis of the application of self-help in the international arena. Next, an overview of the South African housing policy is given, followed by an assessment of self-help in the country, as provided through the PHP. Finally, a few concluding comments are made.

The origin of self-help in housing

Much has been written on the origin of self-help in housing; and it is not our intention to cover this topic in detail (see Harris, 1998; 1999b; 2003; Pugh, 2001). However, a brief overview is required, in order to provide background information relevant to the paper.

Self-help housing is as old as humankind (Pugh, 2001). In many cases, the idea of government support to enable families to build their own houses came from the people themselves, and not from governments or international experts (Harris, 1998; 2003). Various researchers have indicated that self-help has been a common phenomenon for centuries in a number of countries (Harms, 1992; Ward, 1982; Parnell & Hart, 1999), and that aided self-help was lobbied for, and practised, long before the rise of the ideas of Turner in the 1960s and 1970s (Harris, 1998, 1999). Thus, as pointed out by Harris (1998, 2003), the formulation of ideas on self-help may well be the result of western writers following, rather than leading, international trends. Harris (1998, p. 185; 2003, p. 257) cites the examples of Puerto Rico and India in the late 1930s and 1940s to illustrate this point. At the same time, aided self-help and the renewed emphasis on this approach in the 1960s and 1970s cannot be considered in isolation from the drive for government involvement in housing. Although there are indications of government involvement in housing before the Second World War, the demolition of urban settlements during that war provided a further impetus for direct state involvement in a post-war period. Soon, government involvement in housing became conventional wisdom. However, international literature suggests that very few countries have actually managed to address their housing problems by means of state-driven approaches (Hardoy & Satterthwaite, 1997). Government-driven housing has frequently been criticised for being too expensive (Rodell & Skinner, 1983, as well as for its peripheral location (Gilbert, 1997), the inability to provide enough units (Ward, 1982), and the lack of cost-recovery for maintenance purposes (Gilbert & Gugler, 1992).

Against this background Turner's work in Latin America became known (Turner, 1976). As already pointed out, scholarly works have indicated that Turner was certainly not the first person to lobby for self-help, and that self-help had been conventional wisdom in some parts of Latin America before Turner committed his ideas to writing (Harris, 1998; 2003). Yet there can be little doubt that Turner's beliefs influenced policy; and he is

probably the most frequently-cited author on self-help (Harris, 2003). Turner based his work on a number of principles in respect of housing (Turner, 1976). It is not our intention to provide a full overview of these, but rather to touch on a few aspects that we regard as essential for the purposes of the paper. First, Turner viewed housing as a “verb”. In this way, he emphasised that housing should be regarded as a process: thus, housing takes place over time, with due consideration of the income of the household, the life cycle of the inhabitants and the needs of those who occupy the house. Secondly, Turner (1976) also argued that a house should not be considered in terms of its physical characteristics. In his view the importance of housing lies not in “what it is”, but in “what it does”. The fact that housing will be upgraded over time ensures that the physical characteristics of the house will most likely improve, should people be given the “freedom to build”. Thirdly, the value of the house to the user was related to dweller-control, according to Turner, rather than to its physical characteristics; and therefore, this was the main aspect that should be considered in housing. In this regard, he argued that the main criterion in respect of housing was whether the owner was in control of the construction process – although not necessarily as a participant in the actual building activities. Harris (2003, p. 248) summarises Turner’s contribution in an excellent manner, in the following words: “By self-help Turner has always meant not only the investment of sweat equity by owners in their homes but also the processes of owner-design and management”. Ward (1982) quotes Turner’s statement that many of his critics too easily equate self-help with self-construction rather than dweller-control. In evaluating Turner’s contribution concerning dweller-control, Harris (2003) also points out the irony of the fact that, although dweller-control was probably the most novel idea that Turner brought to the housing debate, it is also the idea which has received the least recognition in policy development. It is precisely this point that we would like to explore further. Our argument is that this idea has received very little attention in the practice of self-help, either internationally or in the South African context – most probably because of the association of Turner’s broader ideas with neo-liberal policy thinking.

The practical implication of Turner’s work is that governments should not provide those aspects of housing which people can provide for themselves. Consequently, Turner was a proponent of site-and-service schemes (referred to as “aided self-help” schemes) in terms of which governments had to take responsibility for the provision of basic services, and individual households were responsible for the construction of the housing unit (Pugh, 2001). However, it should be noted that Harris (2003) argues that Turner actually also had some reservations in this regard.

Turner’s ideas were heavily disputed by Marxist scholars, who argued that self-help leads to the commodification of housing; that it is a mechanism aimed at disciplining the workforce; and that it prolongs the working day for low-income workers (Burgess, 1977; 1978; 1982; 1985). The labelling of Turner’s self-help ideas as “inherently capitalistic” received further momentum when the World Bank started to propose site-and-services as a policy direction, despite the fact that the World Bank followed an inherently different point of departure – Turner was in favour of dweller-control, whereas the World Bank’s approach was based on the economics of housing, with a view to the reduction of labour costs (Pugh, 2001; Harris, 2003). Harris (2003, p. 248) summarises these discrepancies

and similarities in the following words: “Some of Turner’s arguments about self-help are consistent with a conservative brand of political economy, but his thinking has always been most strongly informed by the philosophy of anarchism”. In the process, Turner’s ideas regarding the link between housing satisfaction and dweller-control became part of, and were lost to sight in, a political economic debate.

Self help: application in the international arena

The above section provided an overview of the fundamental aspects of self-help housing, and emphasised Turner’s thinking on the subject. There can be no doubt that self-help (and the way it was justified and implemented) has been closely linked to social, political and ideological assumptions. This holds true, despite the fact that self-help has been practised in countries with centralised economies and countries with open economies. However, the question arises as to how self-help has been operationalised in practice, and to what degree Turner’s idea of dweller-control was operationalised in reality. Ward (1982) has already mentioned the fact that one needs to distinguish between self-help initiated by individuals or communities (referred to by Ward as “workers”), and self-help initiated and controlled by the state. Overall, three distinct forms of self-help can be differentiated.

The first form of self-help is effectuated without any aid from government. This variety has been practised world-wide for centuries by low- and high-income households (Hardy & Ward, 1984; Harris, 1991; Jenkins et al., 2001). The second form of self-help, which can be termed “aided self-help”, comprises an approach in which site-and-service schemes have played a crucial role (Laquian, 1983; Rodell & Skinner, 1983). The state assisted, to a large extent, to create an environment in which people could build for themselves. Commonly, these two forms of self-help have been motivated by a range of political economic arguments. For example, they reduce the costs for governments, and transfer costs to the individual, while at the same time making housing more affordable to the individual households (Ward & Maccolloo, 1992).

Thirdly, however, the world has also seen self-help implemented through institutional organisations. Typically, this has involved the establishment of housing cooperatives. Such cooperatives were commonly used in India, Jordan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, Iran, Cuba, Egypt, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia (Khurana, 2001; Kerr & Kwele, 1998; Midgley et al., 1986; Harris, 1997; Sukumar, 2000; Keivani & Werna, 2001; Gough, 1996). Countries’ responses to, and level of implementation of, aided self-help vary considerably. Socialist states such as the Soviet Union, India (prior to the liberal approach that it has adopted during the past decade or two) and Cuba implemented self-help. The irony is that despite the fact that self-help was commonly associated with neo-liberalism, it was also implemented in countries with socialist policies. This suggests that the labelling of self-help approaches as “neo-liberal” reflects a somewhat simplistic point of view.

Although, in Cuba, a specific attempt was made to prevent the commodification of self-help housing (houses could not be sold and ownership was not possible), self-help in this country did not escape the problem of double exploitation of workers (Mathey, 1997;

Anderson, 2003). At the same time it provided an opportunity for the state to control housing processes. Kapur and Smith (2002) summarised Cuban housing policy by pointing out that, despite some changes in respect of policy, three elements remained central to policy, namely: housing as a right and not as a commodity; the pursuit of equity in housing development; and the role of the state as the primary decision-maker – though Anderson (2003) concludes that high levels of community participation were reached. The establishment of microbrigades was regarded as an effective manner to support government housing initiatives. However, Kapur and Smith (2002) argue that the introduction of microbrigades was a consequence of the state's inability to manage and pay for a centralised housing-delivery model.

In conclusion, it seems that, irrespective of whether self-help is justified in terms of neoliberal arguments or state-control arguments, dweller-control seldom features in these policies. The remainder of the paper focuses on the loss of dweller-control as a result of the interplay between increasing state control and the neoliberal motivations of self-help within the South African setting. In fact, state control is sometimes even motivated by means of neoliberal arguments.

South African housing policy: a platform for aided self-help?

With the demise of Apartheid in the early 1990s, a new housing policy was negotiated at the National Housing Forum (Tomlinson, 1996; Rust & Rubenstein, 1996). The work of this Forum resulted in the release of a Housing White Paper in 1994 (Department of Housing (DOH), 1994). Subsequently, a redirection of policy was brought about through the Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Sustainable Human Settlements in 2004 (commonly known as “Breaking New Ground”), although the fundamental principles had not been altered much. The tensions between the advocates of a state-interventionist approach and the proponents of neo-liberal approaches ran high in the historical debate concerning the direction that should have been taken in respect of housing policy. Yet debates about self-help are less intensive, and tend to become intertwined with political-economic debates.

The message in the South African policy regarding aided self-help is a mixed one. The overall policy approach comprised a range of options; but in the main, it entailed a capital subsidy to provide a serviced stand and a core house through a contractor-driven approach. On the one hand, Huchzermeyer (2001a, p. 305) rightfully notes that “reference to a permanent residential structure set a norm for housing which distinguished itself from site and service schemes...”. On the other hand, the White Paper on Housing suggests that the right to housing will be realised progressively (DOH, 1994). This emphasis on the progressive aspect of housing provision confirms that, to a large degree, the South African policy can be described as a policy of aided self-help. The intent of self-help is summed up by Parnell and Hart (1999, p 384) in the following words: “The harsh reality of what the state's R15 000 home ownership subsidy will buy is a serviced site and a small wet core. For a liveably sized top structure individuals must count on building for themselves”. Yet, the motivation for aided self-help is mainly related to the limitations of the fiscus (DOH, 1994); while it can probably safely be

argued, as Huchzermeyer (2001a) asserts, that the original White Paper was not explicit in respect of its support for community-driven self-help.

The rationale of dweller-control entrenched in self-help, but also of self-help in general, became lost in the political economic debate. Policy was commonly criticised for being neo-liberal (Jones & Datta, 2000) and consequently, for providing a housing product that was too small (Tomlinson, 1996). The small housing product was commonly associated with macro-economic motivations (national budget constraints, savings on labour costs), and never with the concepts of housing satisfaction and dweller-control, which could have been achieved through self-help and expansion of the core housing unit. Although the original White Paper did not specify any housing size, there was constant pressure from the implementers at provincial government level to set a minimum housing size (Charlton, 2006). The required housing size was set at 30m² by the national government in 1999 (Huchzermeyer, 2001a), while other mechanisms were also introduced to increase housing size. For example, the housing subsidy was used for the housing unit only, while other resources were utilised for infrastructure provision (Charlton, 2006). The emphasis on housing size can also be seen in the Department of Housing's Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Sustainable Human Settlements, which suggests that housing should be of a "dignified size" that supports the "morality of family and society" (DOH, 2004, p. 16). Terms such as "dweller-control" and "dweller satisfaction" do not occur in the original White Paper on Housing, nor in the latest plan. However, some attempt was made to formalise self-help as part of the South African policy; and a description of that process will follow in the next section.

Self-help in South Africa: critical reflections on the South African PHP

Against the international and national background outlined above, the People's Housing Process (PHP) was implemented in South Africa from 1998. However, as Napier (2003) correctly indicates, the PHP was, to a certain extent, a "latecomer" on the scene, in the context of the South African housing policy environment. Despite an ever-growing body of literature on housing and housing policy in South Africa (DOH, 2007a), it is surprising to note that so little scholarly work has been conducted on self-help-related work (exceptions in this regard include Napier, 1998; Parnell & Hart, 1999; Marais, van Rensburg & Botes, 2003; Huchzermeyer, 2006). In fact, a search of the National Department of Housing's housing bibliography (2003-2007) only yielded two references in respect of PHP and self-help in South Africa.

Before a more critical analysis of this programme is provided, some comments should be made regarding the fact that self-help was part of South African housing policy for more than a century under the colonial and apartheid governments (Parnell & Hart, 1999). In Parnell and Hart's (1999, p. 367) assessment of self-help, the authors conclude that: "Exploration of the practice of self-help housing practices in Johannesburg suggests that owner construction is a prevailing method of social engineering, whose acceptance or rejection reflects perceived political and economic advantages for the state and the private sector, and is not a simple response to a shortage of affordable shelter among the poor". The important point made in this statement is that it is not new for self-help housing to be related to state engineering and control. As we will argue in the remainder

of this section, state control (rather than dweller-control) over self-help has been central to the development and practice of a more direct policy on self-help in South Africa.

Considering the fact that there has been a close link between the objectives of aided self-help and the original neo-liberal approach of the South African housing policy, the question arises as to what rationale underlay the choice of an approach towards self-help housing. Huchzermeyer (2001a) and Napier (2003) make the point that it is not clear whether the motivation for self-help housing lay in donor pressure or internal pressure from community-based groups, as both aspects played a role in developing the approach to self-help in South Africa. Community pressure came from the Homeless People's Federation, with strong international linkages, as early as 1994 (Huchzermeyer, 2001a). These international and national pressures led to the establishment of the People's Housing Partnership Trust in 1997 (Baumann, 2003) and culminated in the "National Policy for the Supporting of the PHP" in 1998 (Huchzermeyer, 2001a) – albeit with extensive financial support from the United Nations Development Programme. The Housing Code of 2000 (Part Three, Chapter Eight) contains some guidelines on the implementation of PHP programmes, but lacks specific detail in respect of implementation strategies. While the PHP policy mechanism seems to be based on self-help principles, many authors (for example, Public Service Commission (PSC), 2003; Manie, 2004; Baumann, 2003) have noted that the initial policy on PHP is vague, without a clear definition of the term "People's Housing Process", and that PHP implementation is open to many interpretations. Initial delivery through the PHP process was slow and limited in extent. A second wave of interest in PHP developed in 2003, when serious concerns about the existing contractor-driven approach became apparent. The Department of Housing, in an attempt to address the inherently contradictory principles of the People's Housing Process, introduced some interventions in its Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Sustainable Human Settlements, *Breaking New Ground*. These interventions included a redefining of the People's Housing Process; new funding mechanisms for PHP; and institutional restructuring (DOH, 2004, p. 17). But, as Baumann (2003: 7) points out: "The 'rediscovery' of the PHP is perhaps driven more by the failures of the latter paradigm than a belief in its potential to deliver good housing at scale". PHP was regarded as a way to channel private investment into housing (since the formal banking sector had been less successful in this regard), as well as a way to meet the need for a larger degree of beneficiary commitment. It was viewed in terms of "sweat equity" for those who could not afford a cash contribution towards their housing (Bay Research and Consultancy Services (BRCS), 2003). Thus, the renewed interest in the PHP process had little to do with any belief in the acceptance, in principle, of self-help – rather, the PHP was seen as a way of solving the problem in respect of the contractor-driven approach. Subsequently, a new approach to the PHP has been developed, namely "Community Driven Housing Initiatives".

PHP was effectively implemented through Housing Support Centres (similar to the concept of housing cooperatives). In practice, two types of Housing Support Centres were operational. First, some NGOs working in the housing environment were able to function as Housing Support Centres. However, in the implementation of the programme in areas where relevant NGOs were not present, Community-Based Organisations were

established by government to form new Housing Support Centres (DOH, 2000). The guidelines on Housing Support Centres stress the obligation of these organisations to comply with technical requirements, and their need to satisfy the relevant authorities in terms of capacity. In reality, this meant that some Housing Support Centres were community-driven, while many other such centres were established by, and – as we shall argue later – controlled by government, to the detriment of dweller-control.

Although the jury is still out on the “new” direction of the Community Driven Housing Initiatives, the outcome of the PHP process, with a few exceptions, has been far from positive. In general, NGOs have serious concerns, while the application of PHP has been limited (Baumann and Mitlin, 2003; Baumann, 2003; Napier, 2003). A number of critical concerns have been expressed in existing research. We shall broadly outline these concerns; but more importantly, our contention is that they have resulted from an inability on the part of government to accept dweller-control rather than state control as a basic principle. Ironically, arguments for state control are closely related to neoliberal arguments. Consequently, Housing Support Centres became mechanisms of state control rather than institutions through which dweller-control could be fostered. Existing literature already points to a series of concerns, for example the lack of political support, as well as limited resources, inherent contradictions and vagueness of policy (Baumann, 2003). In addition to these issues, we would like to make a number of critical points.

Firstly, it does not seem as if the concept of dweller-control is used in any significant manner in the policy or in practice. In fact, the concepts of self-construction and “sweat equity”, quality housing and larger housing units are commonly cited to express the motivation for PHP. The notion of “sweat equity” is criticised for its relation to individualism and cost-recovery principles (Khan & Pieterse, 2004, p. 19). The principle of “sweat equity” is also frequently used as a cover-up for “quasi”-PHP projects – top-down developer-managed projects – to circumvent the beneficiary contribution of R2 479² required for non-PHP projects (for a few examples, see PSC, 2003, p. 161 and Manie, 2004, p. 8). Considering the emphasis on sweat equity, it should be noted that Turner did not equate self-construction and dweller-control. For example, the Housing Code³ motivates the PHP approach as follows: “Experience has proved that if beneficiaries are given the chance either to build houses themselves or to organise the building of houses themselves, they can build better houses for less money” (Housing Code, 2000), while the Minister of Housing in 1998, Sankie Mthembu-Mahanyele, stated: “Self-building through the PHP [has] proved to be one of the most effective strategies in producing quality housing. Most of the ... houses built through this process were of better quality and bigger than those delivered through pure subsidy grants” (*Gauteng News*, 2001). These two quotes raise a few concerns. It seems as if the intention in respect of PHP lies mainly in self-construction, or the expectation of receiving something better, larger or cheaper (more cost-effective) – in comparison to the product received by means of the contractor-driven approach. Therefore, to a large degree, the emphasis is on

² By the turn of the century, recipients of the housing subsidy had to save this amount before being able to access the subsidy. One way to avoid this approach was through the PHP process, in terms of which the recipient provided own labour, rather than his/her own savings.

³ The Housing Code contains the operational guidelines of the South African housing policy.

the end product (size, quality) and not on the process. Huchzermeyer (2006) refers to this approach as “paternalistic” and “delivery orientated”. Such an emphasis is understandable from a bureaucratic point of view, as it is hard to imagine or motivate a *process* rather than the end product. Furthermore, the phrase in the Housing Code, “that if beneficiaries are given the chance ...”, assumes that someone (the state) should give the beneficiaries the chance, thus implicitly repudiating the notion of dweller-control as an accepted principle and the norm. The possibility that self-help, through the PHP process, could increase dweller-control or generate increasing levels of satisfaction in respect of the housing unit, is virtually absent from policy content and intent. Although it should be acknowledged that the words “or to organise”, in the above quotation from the Housing Code, may well comprise an allusion to dweller-control, they probably refer more directly to communal action in respect of housing. Furthermore, there seems to be some confusion in respect of the ideological underpinnings of the motivation for the PHP process. In this regard, neoliberal ideas relating to sweat equity and self-construction in order to transfer costs from the state to individuals are used in the same breath as more socialist concepts such as quality housing and bigger housing.

Secondly, and linked to policy intent as discussed above, the implementation of PHP has been structured in such a manner as to ensure state control – this, despite the fact that PHP was justified through neo-liberal arguments. Thurman (1999) argues that many NGOs were concerned about the bureaucratic regulatory framework which leaves limited space for innovation and for community response. From official statistics, it appears as if the government has a strong commitment towards implementing PHP projects. According to the Department of Housing, 22.28% of all subsidies approved up to March 2006 were allocated to PHP projects (DOH, 2007b, p. 64). However, authors on self-help imply the contrary (see Baumann, 2003; Mitlin, 2003; Khan & Pieterse, 2004; Huchzermeyer, 2006), namely, that less than 3% of all projects in South Africa can be regarded as true self-help projects. The framework associated with the capital subsidy was restrictive in nature; and as Baumann (2003) rightfully suggests, the guidelines provided were almost similar to those of the normal contractor-driven approach. Huchzermeyer (2006, p. 51) supports this argument by asserting that PHP rules “have become hostile to development driven by grassroots communities,” while according to Bay Research and Consultancy Services (2003, p. iii), “[t]he steps being taken by the provincial and local government to impose control over the PHP are leading to a reduction of beneficiary choice”. Building on these arguments, Khan and Pieterse (2004, p. 19) state that a government in pursuit of delivery objectives tends to violate PHP principles, limiting beneficiary choice to unpaid labour (sweat equity). Moreover, Khan and Pieterse (2004, p. 29) ask the question as to how innovative PHP application can be, with all the bureaucracy and strict regulatory frameworks in place. To a large degree, it reinforces the idea of the state as a deliverer of services and houses, and community members as recipients; and the implicit premise is that the state *might* decide to give people a chance to build for themselves. Baumann (2003, p. 10) summarises this emphasis on state control in the following words: “Relationships have not changed: the state defines and retains control over the process, and the interface between it and beneficiaries continues to be a layer of state-approved, formal institutions.” Once again

the good intention in this regard cannot be disputed; yet much of this good intention does not tie up with the concept of self-help.

Thirdly, there has been an extraordinary emphasis on technical control. The Housing Code stresses the aspect of technical support, linking it to Housing Support Centres in the following words: “Technical assistance and support in this process is, however, critical. Consequently, a crucial imperative of the PHP approach is the requirement to establish a Support Organisation” (DOH, 2000). In fact, a number of Cuban advisors (mainly building experts) were deployed to assist in the PHP. The important conclusion from this is that one of the main reasons for the establishment of Housing Support Centres relates to the fact that houses should be technically “sound” as determined by government, and not as determined (or controlled) by dwellers. The technical intent was further reinforced through a large number of norms and standards in the PHP process. Baumann (2003) argues that despite the fact that the PHP process was exempted from registering with the Home Builders Registration Council,⁴ other norms and standards did apply. For example, the literature on PHP suggests that the houses are usually much bigger than those provided through normal mechanisms (Huchzermeyer, 2002). In some provinces a minimum housing size was set for the PHP. The irony is that, in many projects, it was probably not possible to offer individual households the alternative option of constructing a smaller house with higher levels of internal finishes. In many projects, the quality of building materials was regulated and set standards were implemented to determine what percentage of the available money could be used for specific aspects of development (for example, infrastructure versus housing construction). In addition to size, Baumann (2003) also cites the use of planning guidelines, in terms of which the intent is municipal control, rather than a process which assists in self-help (see also Huchzermeyer, 2006).

Fourthly, in the context of a policy in which dweller-control is central, it is reasonable to assume that the housing architecture is likely to be diverse in nature, since dweller-control will result in different people building in different ways. Many projects (especially those conducted for the PHP by newly-established NGOs) resulted in the construction of similar housing products, or limited choice in respect of design and layout. To a large degree, many of the Housing Support Centres followed a locally-based contractor-driven approach to housing delivery. Baumann (2003, p. 10) contextualises the situation in the following words: “The Chapter 8 framework is essentially a ‘developer-driven’ delivery route with NGOs, local authorities, or (very rarely) beneficiary CBOs acting as the ‘developers’”.

Lastly, the relevant literature points out the prominent role that support organisations such as NGOs and CBOs play – or rather *should play* – in PHP projects (Oldfield, 2000; 2002; Huchzermeyer, 2002; Baumann, 2003; Lemanski, 2007). These institutions are generally regarded as mediators between the state and communities. Poor communities rely on support organisations to voice their concerns to local authorities. Although communities prefer working with support organisations, government tends to work through developers and individual beneficiaries (BRCS, 2003; Khan & Pieterse, 2004, p.

⁴ A council stipulating the minimum technical norms and standards for house construction and providing a guarantee (at cost) for any technical defaults.

20). In cases where local authorities work with organisations, a procurement policy is in place for government to regulate and appoint support organisations of its own choice (Manie, 2004, p. 12). On the basis of experience, NGOs and CBOs develop their own flexible approaches to PHP (Manie, 2004, p. 12). A flexible approach of this kind, reflecting real self-help principles, is contrary to government's approach, which is aimed at controlling the PHP process. However, the capacity and strength of support organisations is also dependent on their own governance and interrelation systems. As Manie (2004, p. 10) points out: "the lack of well qualified organisations both in the NGO and private sector has given rise to a number of fly-by-night support organisations that have stepped into the vacuum with very little understanding or appreciation of what PHP is". Undeniably, support organisations have a certain amount of power at their disposal to steer PHP projects; and in cases of misconduct, control is redirected to a collective few. Yet again, this raises the question as to who controls the self-help process, and also points to complexities surrounding the dweller-control discourse.

Conclusion

This paper has assessed the essential aspects of self-help, and has also confirmed Harris's contention (2003) that dweller-control seems to be absent from housing policy intent and practice. Furthermore, the paper suggests that since 1994, self-help in South Africa, as in the rest of the world – and in a manner similar to the way in which self-help was conducted prior to 1994 – has mainly been structured around state control, rather than dweller-control. Ironically, neo-liberal arguments are commonly used to justify self-help housing; and yet, in practice, state control is the norm. Therefore, it is an oversimplification to automatically equate self-help with neo-liberalism. It is hard to ignore the valuable insights offered by Parnell and Hart (1999, p. 385), who state that "[e]xperience from South Africa, from colonial times to the present non-racial democratic government of Nelson Mandela, shows that adoption of self-help housing strategies always interfaces with the wider political and economic realities, though not in uniform or predictable ways".

Overall, the intent of policy is neo-liberal, whereas the practice contains numerous elements of welfarism and state control associated with welfarism. It is thus hard to disagree with Baumann's (2003, p. 13) argument that "[t]he PHP framework is an 'institutional' model of housing delivery in which households are 'beneficiaries' of an externally designed and controlled process. The focus is on housing rather than the process of delivering it, and assumes collective action without specifying how this is to occur...". Underlying the overall reality in respect of self-help is the anomaly that self-help will not solve the problem. The lack of acceptance of a process which will not solve the housing problem is probably the main reason for the limited acceptance of the PHP process, and also for the increasing attempts towards state control in self-help in South Africa.

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