

Robust civic participation in management of heritage houses as a tool for sustainable human settlements

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Background and purpose - Unprecedented urbanization has implications for basic service delivery especially housing (Lojanica, Damjanović & Jankovic, 2017); (McGranahan & Satterhwaite, 2014:20). Relatedly, there exists conflicting demands for new urbanism and heritage preservation of built lived spaces (Obad & Bojanić, 2019, p. 8). The paper presents selected results of an ongoing doctoral study aimed at exploring housing adequacy in the colonial Bochabela Township in Bloemfontein, South Africa. It fundamentally argues that with the National Heritage Resources Act (25 of 1999) listing all properties over 60 years as heritage, their owners, specifically those in townships where such housing is dilapidated due to lack of adequate maintenance, should be active stakeholders in preservation initiatives. This should aid conservation of historical and cultural value and warrant social, economic and environmental sustainability. Rampant poverty and failing township economies require strategic state support (Scheba & Turok, 2020:77), thus prioritizing need for collaborative, bottom-up community development in addition to value-based

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heritage management. The study aims to investigate the nature of civic participation in Bochabela's heritage houses management, to explore how owners in Bochabela perceive the value of their houses through the lens of legislative definition of heritage value; and to examine ways through which owners of 60+ year old houses in Bochabela can be enabled to improve their housing adequacy while preserving its heritage value.

Conceptual/Theoretical perspectives and Significance - With civic participation as common ground, the paper links urban planning and heritage management, through identifying its interdisciplinary significance, examining its theoretical and legislative relevance within the South African perspective. It further links civic participation with sustainable housing development through creation of economically vibrant, environmentally considerate human settlements with cultural significance.

Methodology - This qualitative study engaged 20 purposively sampled owners of dilapidating 'heritage housing' in Bochabela through in-depth interviews in December 2019. Relevant scholarly literature and legislation were evaluated.

Preliminary findings - Majority of owners have no knowledge of their houses being heritage resources with restrictions for structural changes without municipal consent. Furthermore, there is seemingly marginal government management coupled with inability of owner maintenance thus dire dilapidation of these houses. Some government revitalization initiatives involve demolition and construction of new social housing. These contradict the effort to preserve historical attributes for future generations. Some owners oppose demolition as their houses represent family, cultural and sentimental value while also

bigger than current social housing. Most have pictures of original owners as part of their wall decor.

Fig. 1 – Typical Heritage Houses and common interior wall pictures in Bochabela, Bloemfontein, 2019.

Source: Researcher



Concluding remarks - The paper highlights the importance of civic participation in management of heritage properties to instill civic ownership, attachment and pride, thus improved sustainability. It recommends interdisciplinary collaboration between urban planning and heritage to innovate housing adequacy.

References

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