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Low-income housing and inclusive urban regeneration? Private sector initiatives in the inner city of Johannesburg

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Abstract

Inner city Johannesburg suffers from what has been coined a “housing crisis” where demand for low-income housing is unable to keep up with supply. While there have been many strides made with different financing models and typologies, the price range of many publicly and privately delivered low-income housing is still too expensive for many inner city residents who are forced to resort to illegally occupying abandoned buildings. The nature of property development forces property developers to be cost-recovery driven; creating a burden that gets placed directly on the tenants’ rentals. These two imperatives converge contentiously when regeneration projects are met with barriers including high numbers of occupied “bad buildings” and “hijacked buildings”, with residents that would require alternative accommodation in order for the building to be refurbished, and may not necessarily be absorbed back into the refurbished building once completed. However, some private developers are showing signs of experimentation and innovation in financing mechanisms and models that are facilitating low-income housing delivery at a rental much lower than many other private developers. Interestingly, these same private developers are also producing the spaces around their buildings for their lower income tenants through urban regeneration initiatives. Through a case study methodology, the research asks how and why private developers are engaging in low-income housing delivery and what the significance of this is for a more inclusive form of urban regeneration in inner city Johannesburg.