

Evolution of urban housing strategies and dweller-initiated transformations in Nairobi

Abstract:

In her century of existence, Nairobi has served as a laboratory of various housing strategies targeting the indigenous Africans and the poor. Discriminated based on racial segregation during colonisation, the poor have also been the object of post-colonial economic marginalisation. Consequently informal settlements and dweller-initiated transformations of formal housing has become their only mode of urban domicile. The paper looks at the later model and isolates the strategic policy and design choices that have guided the dwellers' drive to transform the provided houses. The investigation uses an historical review of related literature in existing housing estates in city's Eastlands' District. Further, a case study of Kaloleni Rental Estate from the district was undertaken. The resultant dwellings point to informalisation leading to deterioration through use of 'temporary' materials and unplanned space uses in these formal schemes. The strategies based on modernist templates which ignored consultation, local cultural spatial paradigms and basic functional needs are faulted for the proliferation of these undue transformations that compromise the living environments. Further, the continued lack of tenant security in transforming dwellings has aided in the continual physical and social deterioration of neighbourhoods. The recommendations include a phased design guided densification model, socially inclusive through the incorporation of the existing dwellership and their participation.