Political Power and Housing Provision in Contemporary South Africa: Khutsong Township Settlement Project

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Abstract

This article interrogates the power dynamics in Khutsong Township from the prism of applicable theories on urban politics. The housing project in the Khutsong Township was unique due to a change in the initial objective. The intention was a resettlement project due to dolomite hazards; but it eventually became a settlement project. This was a result of the core role-players who affected the outcomes of the project, based on their interpretation of the main aspects. The article reports the empirical study on these power relationships and compares the results to the mentioned urban political theories. From the main findings, it can be concluded that the local power situation in this project is explained best by referring to hyper-pluralism, party hegemony and a negative public choice perspective. The article thereby reveals the unique and dynamic multi-directionality of the power exercised in this case. Thus, the article contributes to understanding power configurations that may emerge in housing projects within South Africa.

Keywords: Khutsong; housing; political power; power relationships; urban politics; local power configurations

Introduction

This article interprets a housing project in Khutsong Township in terms of urban political theories. The housing project was unique in its scope and objectives. The interest of the study lay in the objectives of the project, which changed over time due to the intervention of power role-players. In contrast to typical housing projects, the exercise of power was found to be not top-down and uni-directional. This exercise was characterised by distinct power dynamics, which makes this a meaningful project to study by applying urban political theories.

The article describes relevant urban political theories critically. Thereafter, the empirical study and its findings are discussed. The article concludes by identifying the theories that are relevant to understanding the local power configurations in this urban housing project.

Local Power Configurations: Perspectives

The core question in this article is: Who governed in the Khutsong housing project? To answer this question, this section first introduces theories that attempt to address the question about the governing agent. Urban political theories refer to a number of perspectives in this regard (Zaaiman 2001, 77–175). This article briefly considers the applicability of several theories on urban politics, such as: pluralist theory; power-elite theory; regime theory; Marxist urban theory; regulation theory; public-choice thesis; and a feminist perspective.

Pluralist Theory

This theory is anchored on the Western liberal-democratic ethos, which presupposes the participation of various groups in decision-making on local development. In this theory, Robert Dahl's study on city politics in New Haven, Connecticut, stands central. Dahl's (1961, 103) decisional method examines decisions to ascertain which power processes (influences) were at work in policy-making on development in New Haven. The political system of the city was stratified, as was the case with other political systems, which implies that a small group of individuals (elites) were strongly involved in the political process (Dahl 1961, 60). The city's political system was pluralistic, seeing that interest groups and citizens exerted different levels of influence on the local policy processes. Notably, Dahl (1961, 102) remarks that, should leaders take control, they themselves are also controlled and "… even if the policies of political associations are controlled by a tiny minority … decisions of political associations are themselves influenced … by their assumptions as to what the voting populace wants" (Dahl 1957, 101).

Therefore, a group of elites on their own are unable to influence all spheres of development. Dahl (1958, 465) explains: "Neither logically nor empirically does it follow that a group with a high degree of influence over one scope will necessarily have a high degree of influence over another scope within the same system." The most

powerful actors or groups are the ones who can clearly be observed to have made the noticeable decisions on development.

In the study that directed this article, it was thus important to examine how the different interest groups influenced the decision-making process in the Khutsong housing project. This was done by considering how these groups, through their distinct approaches, overtly shaped the processes of the housing policy. Furthermore, the pluralist perspective argues that urban policy-making is informed by diverse group interests. Therefore, this study sought to understand how the different groups exercised power mutually, and how the groups or stakeholders made decisions on major developmental projects such as housing. Dahl's formulation leaves scope for a multi-directional interpretation of power in this context.

The pluralist approach has undergone several modifications over time. Stratified pluralism is the form that Dahl's decisional study investigated in New Haven. Hyper-pluralism involves diversity and an increased scope of organised interests, where public officials' capacity to control policy processes are reduced. As Yates notes (1977, 85 cited in Judge 1995, 24), in hyper-pluralism, the outcome of policy-making is a product of "highly fragmented and unstable problem and policy contexts." He adds that this is "an extreme pluralism of political, administrative, and community interests … producing a form of street fighting pluralism" (Yates 1977, 34). According to this model, power is shared amongst several actors and groups, resulting in a more diverse, complex and unstable policy-making process. Such an approach relates to the Khutsong case study on power dynamics, which indicate multi-directionality.

The pluralist perspective of power in local policy-making has been criticised from different angles. Certain scholars have concentrated on exposing the insufficiency of the methodological techniques, while others have focused on the setting of the agenda (decision-making process) and the results of Dahl's study. According to Bachrach and Baratz (1970), numerous community matters are not contested as public issues. In other words, certain important issues do not form the agenda of public policies, seeing that these matters are maneuvered covertly out of the decision-making process.

Several scholars critique the pluralists for having an overly optimistic view of the diverse distribution of power (e.g., Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Lukes 1974, 2005). There is only a limited chance for a perfect environment where equal power distribution takes place in a real political process. In addition, most policy outcomes are manipulated by a small number of powerful policy elites. Boogers (2014, 4) points out that Dahl and the pluralists are criticised for paying scant attention to the aims of agents who wield power. Boogers (2014) maintains that if the pluralists had considered the motives behind the possession of power, they would have managed to explain the growth and disintegration of interest groups. Despite the criticism, the pluralistic perspective does have valuable arguments to consider in the present study, especially since pluralism leaves room for a multi-directional interpretation of power.

Power-elite Theory

This refers to the endowments in resources and the positions occupied by a limited number of elites in society, making them more influential in socio-economic and political processes. In this regard, Mills (1956, 3–4) mentions that decisions in community or local governments are made by individuals "whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences." The 1953 study of Hunter, *Community Power Structure,* applied this theory to a local setting, namely the city of Atlanta. Hunter found that most of the top power structure or influential people in the city comprise senior executives in business. The mayor also formed part of this group. This implies that the policy makers, as the top-level elites, are "stable, closed, and invisible" (Hunter 1953, 110), while the elected officials who implement policies are the ones who frequently interact with the other societal members.

Hunter explains further that the community "power structure is kept intact through shared interests, mutual obligations, money, life style and habit … as well as coercion and force" (Hunter 1953, 6). Hunter observes further that in Atlanta, policy-making processes were influenced largely by economic interests; this suggests that without the approval of the elite, development and other processes would be at a standstill. However, this state of affairs does not exclude the tendency that the political systems in urban localities fail to represent the interests of the masses.

According to Harding (1995, 39), the elite theory's use of the reputational method can be refuted on grounds of predetermination and inadequacy. For his research, Hunter utilised a list of influential people, which may already suggest where the concentration of power lies, thereby making his study predetermined. Furthermore, Polsby (1963, cited in Stein 2003, 224) repudiates the elite theory on the grounds that it is non-falsifiable. In other words, the theory assumes the existence of elites and argues that failure to identify them is a methodological issue, not a theoretical one. Nevertheless, this approach was useful to determine who the influential stakeholders were and how their power was concentrated in the processes of urban policy-making and implementation regarding the Khutsong housing project. However, the elite theory provides largely a uni-directional perspective of power, which does not describe the transfigurations in the Khutsong project sufficiently.

Regime Theory

Numerous scholars utilise this theory (later succeeded by institutionalism, Davies and Trounstine 2012) to examine policy processes and decision-making (e.g., Belligni and Ravazzi 2013; Fainstein 1995; Harding 1995, 1994; Mossberger 2009; Stone 1980, 1989, 2005; Zunino 2006). Regime theory views power as fragmented and emphasises the collaboration between local governments and private business stakeholders in governing urban development projects, thereby constituting regimes. In this regard, Stone (1989, 229) defines a regime as an "informal arrangement by which public bodies

and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions." In succinct terms, he explains that a regime can entail formal or informal relationships through which local powers govern a community (Stone 1993, 4).

In light of the exposition above, it can thus be argued that power in the regime theory is viewed as anchored in the notion of coalition. Stone elaborates on this notion: "Regime theory starts with the proposition that governing capacity is not easily captured through the electoral process. Governing capacity is created and maintained by bringing together coalition partners with appropriate resources, nongovernmental as well as governmental. If a governing coalition is to be viable, it must be able to mobilize resources commensurate with its main policy agenda" (Stone 1993, 1). According to Stone, the success of regimes in addressing agendas for urban development is predicated on trust and loyalty amongst the coalition actors.

The regime theory is critiqued for downplaying democratic mobilisation in urban development processes. Jones-Correa and Wong (2015, 162) note that this theory limits the role of other grassroot groups to influence the urban political economy since it gives credibility to the elites' engagements. Brenner (2004) accuses the regime thesis of a "methodological trap of localism" according to which the theory views the urban context as a "pre-given, relatively discrete container of political-economic processes." He argues further that the regime theory is excessively localistic by assuming that cities are self-contained. Nevertheless, in light of the regime theory, it would be important to establish whether in the Khutsong housing project certain interests blended, fused or gained capacities to act and achieve common purposes. The question is, therefore, whether the control of power is exerted through a group of elites and decision-makers in urban governance, or rather through collaboration in governance.

Marxist Urban Theory

This theory states that when investigating urban politics, scholars should understand that urban political institutions form part of the state apparatus (Pickvance 1995, 253). Thus, the urban sphere is considered as a microcosm of the entire national politics, where the dominant class contradictions within capitalism also emerge. According to the Marxist view, urban politics perpetuates the accumulation of capital (Pickvance 1995, 267). Domhoff (2005) elaborates by commenting that in theorising on urban politics, Marxism emphasises issues of accumulation, class struggle and reproduction of labour power in the process of creating urban development space.

The core argument of the Marxist theory is that, in urban areas, a small group of "bourgeois" accumulates capital at the expense of the working class, thereby producing unequal relations in the accumulation of capital. This view seems similar to the elite theory, which argues that power rests in the hands of a few individuals who share similar interests. However, Castells (1983) believes social transformation in the city areas flows from urban social movements, which he views as parallel to urban trade unionism.

The Marxist thesis on urban political dynamics has been criticised on several grounds. Pickvance (1995, 271–272) refutes Marxist thought for viewing the state as mostly an instrument for capital accumulation. Such a view thus fails to consider the autonomy of the state in promoting responsive local development that addresses the needs of all residents. Mollenkopf and Strom (2007) argue further that Marxists have ignored variations in policies and practices across various localities and time spaces. Nevertheless, the mentioned theory could be used to help explain the Khutsong housing politics by focusing on how possible capitalist accumulation amongst the various actors influenced the outcome of the housing project.

Regulation Theory

This is a neo-Marxist approach (Geddes 2009, 62), which argues that the economy is not only regulated by the market but by other non-market forces as well (Jessop 1997). According to this view, economic change is the outcome of political, cultural and social forces (Painter 1995, 276). The regulation perspective, therefore, examines the economy and suggests that continued capital accumulation depends on underlying socio-cultural and political factors. In this regard, regulation entails private-public partnerships in urban governance. The regulation augments private accumulation, while ensuring that the public as consumers are entitled to responsive provisioning of goods and services. The state and local governments are considered the main regulators of local economic development. This approach views the power of the state in regulating socio-economic development as scaled and spatially dispersed in its application of regulation (Brenner 2004).

Furthermore, Kipfer and Keil (2002) point out that the national government and municipalities presently have to focus on promoting capital accumulation, since they compete with other global cities and towns in their effort to attract investors. Therefore, the regulation approach reduces state and local government's control of development to promoting the creation of the "entrepreneurial city." According to Franz (2000, 36), the idea of an entrepreneurial city is expressed best where the state fulfils the role of promulgating regulatory mechanisms that enhance its competitiveness within the global economy. Thus, the state has to implement policies and development projects that give priority to private interests and accumulation. Similarly, local government promotes economic accumulation through private investors and, in the process, seeks to provide the best social services. Regarding planning and decision-making in the urban development programmes, the regulation approach argues for a compromise to balance public and private interests.

The approach has been critiqued for undermining social struggles during a mode of regulation. The reason is because the approach assumes that a mode of regulation is coherent and all classes involved are willing to compromise, without any form of conflict or social struggles. With this view in mind, the regulation theory could be applied critically to evaluate the Khutsong housing project by exposing the existence of public-private partnerships.

Public-choice Thesis

This thesis argues that politicians or government officials and public individuals seek to realise their own interests when making local policy decisions (Crow 2009, 121). According to the theory, political beings are continually seeking ways and stratagems to maximise their own utility (Brennan and Buchanan 1984). Keating (1995, 123) concurs by stating that the "central tenets of the public-choice theory are based on individualistic premises and utilitarian philosophy." Accordingly, the theory suggests that for individuals, the public good is merely an aggregate of an individual's interests. In this regard, self-interest can be considered as a strong motivating force permeating human action, and activity "if not bounded by ethical or moral restraints, is inclined more naturally to aim at the furtherance of individual or private interest" (Buchanan and Tullock 1962, 27).

From their side, the municipality or government must be concerned with promoting the realisation of public interests since "The consumer-voter may be viewed as picking that community which best satisfies his preference pattern for public goods … if the community fails to satisfy the preferences of the individual, he will move (the act of 'voting with his feet')" (Tiebout 1956, 418). Therefore, efficiency from a public-choice perspective is based on the presence of competing service providers. The result of the creation of these market forces in the public and non-profit sectors is that they will lead to improved efficiency and effectiveness due to competition amongst service providers.

The public-choice approach has had its fair share of criticism as well. Keating (1995, 124) argues that the notion of human beings as maximisers of rational utility, is unclear. He explains that in certain cases humans have portrayed altruistic behaviour and have subordinated their own preferences to moral impulses. The theory, therefore, has failed to acknowledge that most social and political behaviour is collective, rather than individually oriented. Furthermore, Keating (1995, 124) indicates that the notion of self-interest is problematic, since interests are embedded in structures, thus also governed by the structures in which individuals find themselves. This problem is noted by Stone (1993, 10), explaining how people's understanding of politics is altered drastically if they understand preferences as "being formed not in the context of static social structures, but rather in a context of dynamic social interactions that sometimes reveal new possibilities and offer changing opportunities" (Stone, cited in Keating 1995, 124–125). Nevertheless, the public-choice theory could help uncover self-interested actions by role-players taking part in the Khutsong housing project.

Feminist Perspective

The feminist perspective argues that urban theories do not incorporate a gendered lens when considering urban politics (Clarke, Staeheli, and Brunell 1995, 205–206). In addition, several feminist scholars point out that gender has been omitted frequently from urban planning and policy-making (e.g., Bondi 2005; Clarke et al. 1995; Fainstain and Servon 2005; Garber 2009). This critique is confirmed by Bondi (2005, 1) who

states: "Gender is an integral, ubiquitous and taken-for-granted aspect of urban life. It is an influential dimension of urban identities, an axis of urban inequalities, and it animates the everyday practices that characterize and constitute cities and city life."

Feminism expresses issues of marginalisation and exclusion that women face in urban politics due to the patriarchal nature of the urban set-up. Feminist approaches are rooted in the critique of the androcentric or patriarchal nature of society and its economic system. They view urban politics as shaped by gendered social and economic relations (Clarke et al. 1995, 207) and posit that the patterning of gender is largely an urban issue. This perspective was also useful in interrogating the Khutsong housing project, being typified as male-dominated.

As described in this section, the different theories presented useful interpretative frameworks to help understand the multi-directional local power configurations underlying the Khutsong housing project. The following section briefly describes the background to the mentioned project.

The Khutsong Housing Project: Background

Kemeny (1992, 20) urges scholars to focus on "fundamental prior questions concerning the grounds of knowledge of housing studies: questions which have rarely, if ever, been addressed by housing researchers." Such an approach calls for political theorising of housing discourses. The Khutsong case study offers a space to interrogate the impacts of actors' power relationships on the outcome of such projects. The housing project was not as obtrusively politicised as the demarcation issue; however, power dynamics amongst varying actors contributed to the outcome of the entire project.

Khutsong was established in 1958 as an apartheid township to house mining labourers outside the "Whites-only" town of Carletonville. Due to the democratising of the national and provincial spheres of government in South Africa, the Carletonville Transitional Local Council was established in 1994, which included the Khutsong Township. The council immediately commissioned geotechnical studies due to the increasing doline and related sinkhole formations and damage to infrastructure, especially in the Khutsong Township. The study was conducted by Interconsult, which in 1997 submitted a geological report that indicated 90% of the existing Khutsong was situated on high-risk zones unsuitable for human settlement. In 2000, the local government was fully democratised in South Africa. In December of the same year, the Merafong City Local Municipality (MCLM) was established. This municipality prioritised the dolomitic crisis and numerous studies were conducted to determine its prevalence (Nieuwoudt 2013). Councillors of the new democratically elected municipality informed Khutsong residents of the danger that their houses might cave in. Therefore, plans were implemented to relocate residents from these zones (Johnston and Bernstein 2007).

Geological Situation

In 2002, a series of sinkhole formations in Khutsong attracted attention to the geological situation in Khutsong. A detailed report in this regard was submitted to the municipal council later that year. As a result, the council suspended further development on geologically unsuitable land in Khutsong (Nieuwoudt 2013). It was also decided to declare the high-risk zones within Khutsong a disaster area in order to prevent loss of life and property. The West Rand District Municipality (WRDM) communicated the matter to the National Disaster Centre for evaluation and implementation, as well the Gauteng Provincial Government (Nieuwoudt 2013). The community was informed accordingly through public meetings and leaflets that their residences were situated in a high-risk area due to the dolomite sedimentation.

The community was urged to be vigilant and report signs of ground settlement, depressions and the leaking of public and private water infrastructure. Emergency services personnel also underwent orientation on the ways sinkholes are formed, how to seal off an area around a sinkhole and when to evacuate houses. The WRDM informed the National Disaster Centre who, in turn, notified the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG). The National Disaster Centre advised that the Khutsong area should not be declared a disaster area due to negative connotations linked to such areas and the adverse impact on investment opportunities (Nieuwoudt 2013).

Political Ambiguity

Although the interventions were seemingly comprehensive in dealing with the problem, the messages from local government were ambiguous. On the one hand, the dolomite issue was emphasised; on the other hand, the municipality still allowed development in the area, thereby ignoring its own embargo. Such an ambiguous approach caused confusion and distrust about the nature of the geological risk. The result was varying and conflicting interpretations, which transformed the power relationships in the project from a uni-directional negative sum towards a multi-directional positive sum. Eventually, a different outcome was forced on the project.

In view of the initial Interconsult report, further investigations and evidence of sinkhole formations, the municipality compiled a business plan for the resettlement of Khutsong to the value of R1 573 400 000 and submitted it to the WRDM, Provincial and National Government in 2003 for funding and implementation. This was a comprehensive plan, which included geotechnical investigations, township establishment, bulk services, internal services, environmental authorisation, a bridge over the railway line, pedestrian cross-overs, and social infrastructure (Nieuwoudt 2013). The national Department of Provincial and Local Government instructed the Gauteng Department of Housing to aid the resettlement of Khutsong.

The initial reaction of the Gauteng Department of Housing was to approve a project of 4 700 subsidies, but later the GDH extended it to 18 000 subsidies (Nieuwoudt 2013). Due to the severe geological instability, the Merafong Municipality agreed to relocate the entire township (Nieuwoudt 2013), which included 21 485 informal settlement households and 3 600 formal housing units (Nieuwoudt 2013; PSCM 2008–2016). The new Khutsong housing project, also known as Khutsong South Ext 1, 2 and 3, became a major presidential initiative in 2003, when Mr Mbeki declared it a Presidential Project. A regional professional team (RPT) was appointed to execute the project. In 2004, this team found that only 14 854 of the stands were suitable for township establishment.

Demarcation Dilemma

It can be argued from the high profile of the mentioned housing project that it was set up as a "sweetener" to pacify Khutsong residents in view of the demarcation issue that began gaining momentum in 2005. Whereas the project enjoyed a high profile before 2005, during the protests of 2006–2009 this issue diminished in importance on the agenda of local politicians, leaders and community members. This was due to the Constitution Twelfth Amendment Bill signed by President Thabo Mbeki on 22 December 2005 for commencement on 1 March 2006, and the Cross Boundary Municipalities Laws Repeal and Related Matters Act of 2005. According to these legal frameworks, Merafong City Municipality was relocated from Gauteng Province to the North-West Province. The community members were dissatisfied and vented their anger. As a result, only 232 of the 29 540 registered voters cast their ballots in the local government elections held on 1 March 2006.

The decision of the national government to transfer Merafong City Municipality to the North-West Province presented a major funding problem for the housing project. The North-West Province had a much lower budget than the more affluent Gauteng Province. North-West Province could only provide 5 500 subsidies for the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 financial years as the first two phases of the original 18 000 project. This deficiency annoyed the community members of Khutsong further and contributed to the violent and continuous protests in the township until 2009.

Power Dynamics

Eventually, the Khutsong Township got its way regarding the demarcation matter. The Constitution Sixteenth Amendment Act (B1 of 2009)—that transferred the Merafong City Local Municipality from North-West Province to Gauteng Province—was published on 15 January 2009. After the demarcation matter had been settled, the housing project got underway forthwith.

Khutsong housing became a "Priority Project" in 2009, in which the National Department of Human Settlements (NDoHS) began monitoring the project, while the three spheres of government managed the house building through cooperative governance (Tau 2009). However, by mid-2016 only 5 500 housing units had been

completed as part of the first phase of the project (PSCM 2016; PPCE 2016). Nearly all the roads had been tarred and the houses were provided with electricity (PSCM 2008–2016). Although certain goals had been achieved, these slacked off due to the prevailing power dynamics that emerged in the actions and inactions of various key stakeholders. Unfortunately, as is the case with several low-cost housing developments, the project has been characterised by badly constructed housing units, poor drainage facilities, cracking structures, disintegrated infrastructure and the slow delivery of social amenities (bridges, schools, clinics, shops, electricity and burial sites).

Research Methodology

The empirical study that was conducted to research the power relationships related to the Khutsong housing project was qualitative in nature. This revealed the interpretations of role-players and gave the researchers the opportunity to probe for further information in the interviews. Although quantitative research would excellently complement the qualitative collected information, the instability in Khutsong after the demarcation issue made it not feasible to conduct such research then. However, such follow-up research can now be advantageous for expanding our knowledge of the social dynamics related to the housing project.

Assisted by trained field workers, structured in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions were held during 2013 (20 Aug–10 Sept) and 2015 (20 May–21 June). The aim was to determine how power relationships and interpretations impacted the Khutsong housing project. In addition, structured in-depth interviews were conducted since they allowed the respondents to express clearly and as freely as possible their view of the power dynamics' impact on the present outcome of the mentioned project. Certain interview and focus group questions overlapped, which made it easier to elicit focused responses and deliver saturated data. The focus groups helped the researchers to gather information that was difficult to acquire from individual interviews. The reason was that participants were more willing to discuss with others their personal interpretations and thoughts on the mentioned housing development.

The interviewees' responses provided a clear understanding of the role-players' interpretations of the underlying power plays and how these have led to the different outcomes of the project, other than expected. In addition, government documents, newspaper articles and legislation were reviewed on the housing provision as well as the accompanying power dynamics. For the Khutsong settlement project, the following documents were consulted: the Merafong Housing plan; Merafong IDP; Khutsong Resettlement Plan and implementation; and the minutes and reports describing the settlement processes.

In line with the case-study approach, the following populations were selected for the study: inhabitants of old Khutsong (informal and formal settlement); residents of new Khutsong resettlement; councillors; municipal officials; contractors (local and private); and construction workers employed for the Khutsong relocation project. The study

involved councillors from the old Khutsong Township as well as those from the new resettlement area. The research used purposive, principally typical, and snowball sampling for the qualitative study. Furthermore, key informants from both the municipality and community helped to recruit 55 participants for individual interviews and 30 for four focus-group discussions.

The Khutsong Housing Project: Overview of Findings

The findings of the present study are discussed in detail by Mupambwa (2016). This subsection provides a brief overview of these findings. Four main actors were involved in the housing project. They were the town and planning officials, local council politicians, housing project contractors, and the community members and citizens. Subsequently, each power player's role is explained briefly.

Town and Planning Officials

Those from MCLM stated that their initial interpretation of the Khutsong housing project was based on a technical understanding of the acute need to provide safety to the residents (Nieuwoudt 2013; PSCM 2008–2016; PPCE 2008–2016; Interviews with officials 2013, 2015). The magnitude of the project made it exciting for the town planners to be involved. Potentially it was the largest town resettlement project in South Africa at the time. The motivation for the settlement was the hazardous dolomite situation in Khutsong. The officials considered the geological instability caused by doline formation as uncontrollable. Therefore, they advised that total resettlement of the township should take place. However, due to limited available funding and a lack of political will, the resettlement was not realised; instead, the MCLM implemented a lower-income settlement scheme.

Local Council Politicians

Their political position declined after the debacle of the Khutsong demarcation. Therefore, these politicians interpreted the project as mobilising the benefits of an externally funded project. Thus, the politicians did not concur with the MCLM officials' idea of resettling the entire Khutsong. Furthermore, the local politicians viewed the project as an opportunity to revitalise and transform Khutsong beyond the spatialised apartheid enclaves. This would be done by developing a new, integrated Black housing settlement that linked Welverdiend and Carletonville, two predominantly White towns (Interviewees 13 and 24, 2015). The result was that the local politicians did not follow a process of resettlement. They merely allocated houses in the new area to community members on the waiting list.

The above-mentioned practices were accompanied by councillors' complaints of unfair allocations due to patronage (Nieuwoudt 2013; Interviews with officials 2013, 2015). The politicians shied away from a structured resettlement project for fear of encountering community resistance with this form of social and structural engineering. Furthermore, the politicians were partisan in the allocation of contracting tenders as a

strategy to dominate the town planners. The housing project still remains a tug-of-war for dominance between the town planners and politicians. The politicians dominated this relationship by emphasising their representation of the community as well as the value of transformation and fair community politics.

Housing Project Contractors

These contractors were reluctant to be questioned on their interpretation of the project due to their business focus and lack of community interest. A number of local contractors valued the project as an opportunity to build a credible reputation for future business allocations. To this aim, they formed a group with private interests in the project, which pursued financial gains and future prospects of tender-preneurship (Interview with officials 2015).

It is thus evident that the community's considerations of the settlement were secondary in the local contractors' interpretation of the project. To accumulate capital, the contractors implemented strategies that led to the protracted nature of the project. Payment of contractors in the project was based on milestones reached (e.g., rafts, wall plates, roofing). Profiteering caused the contractors to manipulate the payment agreement. For example, contractors deliberately constructed several rafts in order to increase their claims (Interview with officials 2015).

To illustrate the prominence of profiteering further, officials mentioned that the contractors also delayed the construction of houses to benefit from the yearly increases in housing subsidies. The contractors thus used *non-performance* to prolong the completion of the project and ensured that the payment continued for an extended period. The findings indicated further that the main contractor in the project also exploited the subcontractors through inflated administration costs and by delaying payments. This led to cost-saving strategies, which resulted in the construction of substandard units.

Community Members

Members from this group were well-informed about the fact that Khutsong was situated on a geologically instable area and, in certain areas, dolomite sinkholes were visible. However, the community members viewed the project primarily as catering for the housing need or waiting list since 1994. When asked how houses were allocated, a significant number of members were confused about the working of the waiting list. They found that people who applied for houses more recently received new residences before those who had applied previously. This resulted in discourses about corruption and incompetence in managing the project. The fact that the housing project did not systematically move inhabitants from the dolomite high-risk areas created doubt whether the sinkhole crisis was as acute as pretended (Interviewees 15, 18 and 19, 2013; Interviewees 3, 8, 11, 15, 27 and 31, 2015).

Furthermore, it is clear from the findings that the community members reinterpreted the originally intended resettlement project by viewing it through an opportunistic lens. Vandalism became the norm as both community members and construction workers allegedly sought to earn a living by syphoning off the building materials (Interviewees 10, 18 and 21, 2015; PSCM 2012, 2015). In addition, community members felt deceived into accepting residences that had already accrued debts, mainly due to high water bills since contractors used water from beneficiaries' sites (Interviewees 11 and 12, 2013; Interviewees 9, 16 and 18, 2015). In this regard, the community members expressed discontent with the costly nature of what originally was deemed low-cost housing; this included the lack of coordinated infrastructure and social amenities. As a result, several community members viewed entrepreneurialism as a viable solution. Certain members opted to rent out their new houses, arguing that these were costly and poorly constructed units compared to their stable shacks (Interviewees 1, 5, 11, 25 and 27, 2015). Others rented out their shacks and moved to the new houses, which therefore did not reduce the housing backlog.

In a way, the outcome explained above shows how the community members queried the initial resettlement view and reinterpreted it in terms of entrepreneurism and housing provision. Thus, evident from the findings are the community members' active engagements in and interpretation of the project. Through their active involvement, these members appropriated project spaces and changed these to their own advantage. The reason is that this interpretation gave them the options of owning two properties, acting as landlords, securing an income, being employed, and expanding family estates. This superimposed construct of investment and entrepreneurism underlines the significant interpreting role of the members within their context.

It is, therefore, clear that the housing project was not fully determined by a top-down approach. Each of the role-players contributed to a specific interpretation of the project. Therefore, the outcome of the project must be viewed as caused by multi-directional power configurations, as depicted in figure 1 below.
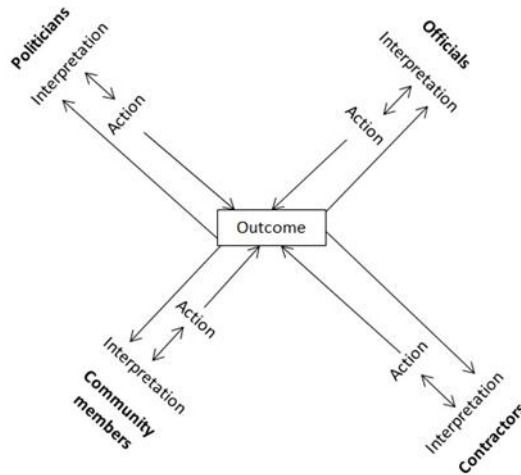
Figure 1: Multi-directional power exercised in Khutsong (Mupambwa 2016, 253)

Figure 1 above presents the different agents in the Khutsong case study who determined the nature of the housing outcome. The agents were the politicians, officials, contractors and community members. These role-players each had a different interpretation and understanding of the project. The *officials* had relocation in mind; the *contractors,* profit; the *community members* followed socio-economic concerns and opportunities; and the *politicians* focused on public services and politically opportunistic notions. As the role-players acted on their own interpretations, their actions impacted the outcomes of the project. This reinforced or changed their interpretation, which again contributed to the outcome, thereby confirming or modifying their interpretations. From these findings it can be inferred that the project's outcomes were not hegemonic but multi-faceted and differed, depending on individual actors' perspectives or reactions.

Theoretical Evaluation

In this subsection the findings are evaluated against the theories on urban politics.

Pluralist Theory

This theory presupposes that various groups actively interpret the housing scheme from different vantage points. Nevertheless, in Khutsong only the town planners and councillors at local level were involved in the decision-making processes. Whereas the pluralist theory focuses on decision-making, it is clear that it lacks the interpretive power to explain the housing politics in Khutsong fully. The pluralist theory focuses on decisions, but the Khutsong case demonstrates that decisions form only part of the outcome of a development.

The way in which citizens and contractors manipulated the major project demonstrates that decisions cannot be attributed solely to agents in the local political arena. Sub-

processes may determine outcomes that are often unrelated to official decisions. This condition implies hyper-pluralism, which emphasises diversity and an increased scope of organised interests. The result is reduced capacity by public officials to control policy processes. Hyper-pluralism reveals correctly those policy-making results from fragmented and unstable problems and policy contexts, which do not deliver well-rounded and integrated outcomes, but include underhand processes. Power is executed by several actors and groups and may produce unstable, complex and diverse policy-making and execution processes. The political dynamics of the housing project in Khutsong manifest such a hyper-pluralist perspective.

Power-elite Theory

The present case study demonstrated clearly that this design (power-elite) is insufficient to describe city politics in Khutsong satisfactorily. The only elite who played a role in the housing project was the ANC with its interlinkages amongst local, provincial and national levels. It was found that the ANC controlled the decision-making mechanisms for the housing project on all three levels (even including the then president). Such interventions made it possible for the project to be realised on the scale it intended. The broad ANC-dominated structures were influential in socio-economic and political processes.

However, even with this elite structure being instrumental in planning and implementing the housing project, the outcome was not fully under the ruling parties' control. While ANC politicians could gain esteem from the project, the manipulation by citizens and contractors added to totally different interpretations and outcomes than originally planned—especially by the city planners. The latter were to a large extent side-tracked after the initial decisions on the project were taken.

Regime Theory

Regime theory emphasises the collaboration between local governments and private business stakeholders in governing urban development projects. No active collaboration between private businesses (excluding the contractors) and local government was found based on the Khutsong study. The only way in which private business could play a role was by passively resisting the idea of moving their properties from Khutsong.

Furthermore, the local government did not consult private enterprises in this regard. The reason is that resources were not unavailable for such relocation and the political will lacked. The businesses also did not see a need to move. They did not consider the dolomite risks as dangerous enough to abandon their existing sites. For example, the petrol and diesel tanks of a local filling station were installed above ground to protect these from underground dolomite risks.

The findings showed the individualistic orientation of business owners and a lack of alliances with local government. Therefore, the regime theory does not seem useful for

this study. Such a theory can rightfully be criticised for failing to recognise how grassroot groups, such as citizens, can influence urban political economy. In addition, this theory overemphasises the local level. Thus, on the one hand, adherents do not recognise the role of individualistic orientations, and on the other hand, the theory underestimates the impact of provincial and national levels on local politics.

Marxist Urban Theory

The point of departure is that a small group accumulates capital at the expense of the working class. This view was not salient in the Khutsong study. The project was planned and executed by the government with the appointed contractors. Other than the contractors and citizens manipulating the project for general and limited capital gain, the study did not find the Marxist theory useful. This confirms the critique by Pickvance (1995, 271–272) on Marxist thought that the state can promote local development autonomously, without capitalists' input.

Regulation Theory

A significant private-public partnership was lacking in developing the housing project for Khutsong. Thus, the regulation theory as a neo-Marxist approach was also discarded as not useful.

Public-choice Thesis

Strikingly, this perspective seems to explain the creative ways and strategies that politicians, citizens and contractors employed to maximise their own utility in the Khutsong project in line with the view of Brennan and Buchanan (1984). Individualistic and utilitarian initiatives for group or personal gain seem to overshadow the whole project. Based on this theory, in Khutsong self-interest was a strong motivational force, where ethical and moral principles were secondary.

According to the public-choice perspective, the municipality should compete to deliver effective services in a service-delivery market place, where the best and most cost-effective deliverances will succeed. In contrast, the Khutsong project indicated a stronger character of *opportunism* due to a lack of belief in and hope for sustainable socio-economic improvement. Due to this deficient outlook on progress and possibilities, the role-players exploited a major government project for self-interest and not primarily for the general social good.

Feminist Perspective

It was clear that males and females both suffered. However, in several instances women were the most active in the community, having to make ends meet and maintain the households. A prominent finding of this study was that amongst the officials, councillors and citizens, women played an important role in the community's interpretation, which was clearly not male dominated.

From the evaluation above, it can be concluded that the Khutsong housing project could be interpreted by applying hyper-pluralism, party hegemony and a negative public-choice perspective. In other words, this housing project is characterised by a hegemonic intervention, namely ANC-dominated and outcome-specific actions. This led to a heterogenic outcome of self-interested action that readily translated into unforeseen diverse, opportunistic and pragmatic results.

Conclusion

This article explored the power dynamics in the Khutsong housing project. An empirical study of the housing project revealed a major change in outcome. From its initial focus on relocation, it became a settlement project. This was possible due to the interpretation power the core role-players exerted in the project. An empirical study was undertaken on these power relationships and the results of the study were compared with urban political theories. The dynamic multi-directionality in role-players' exercise of power that transformed the outcomes, makes Khutsong a topical case study. This study provides an understanding of the power configurations regarding government housing projects within South Africa. Further comparative studies in this regard may enhance the understanding of the mentioned power dynamics.

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