



# Making Viable Lives in a Southern Context

## Low-Income Housing Dilemmas from South Africa

Urban Talks

2023

### Prof. Sarah Charlton

Tuesday 13/06  
6 pm

### IfA Forum

Technische Universität Berlin  
Strasse des 17. Juni 152  
10623 Berlin

and on Zoom:

<https://tu-berlin.zoom.us/j/62239085674?pwd=MVdrRnZaZkV1TWR6K3lCOVJBU1VaQT09>

[nZaZkV1TWR6K3lCOVJBU1VaQT09](https://tu-berlin.zoom.us/j/62239085674?pwd=MVdrRnZaZkV1TWR6K3lCOVJBU1VaQT09)

**Habitat Unit**

In South Africa, an extensive and relatively generous state-funded home ownership scheme for very poor households faces a conundrum: many households cannot afford to sustain themselves in the homes they are given. Improvised adaptations and modifications follow, making people's lives in the housing more viable but disrupting planned visions. At the same time, despite the extent of formal housing delivery, there are multiple alternative ways in which people are finding urban shelter, mostly unplanned, unsanctioned and little engaged with by the state. Across this diverse landscape of both state-funded and non-state accommodation, some households are clearly driven by a particular concern: to live as cheaply as possible, at times taking extreme measures to do so. Peoples' practices and the priorities underlying them complicate the privileging of 'decent housing' evident in policy approaches. What does all this mean for crafting future housing interventions? I discuss this overall housing terrain as well as the particular strand of ultra low-cost living, and I set this against the 'post-employment' context of severe and structural unemployment, the reach

and limits of welfare assistance, and everyday strategies of hustling for a viable life.

Bio:

Sarah Charlton teaches in the School of Architecture and Planning at Wits University, Johannesburg, and has led its research centre CUBES (Centre for Urbanism and Built Environment Studies). She has worked extensively in low-income housing including in local government and the non-profit sector. Her research includes the interface between urban infrastructure and people's practices, state development initiatives and matters of governance. Research collaborations have included work on housing, youth and mobility with partner organisations in Mozambique and Ethiopia, and with the University of Sheffield. She is a Research Associate of the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies and serves on the boards of African Studies, International Development Planning Review, and the International Journal on Homelessness.

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