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Spanning the spectrum: infrastructural experiences in South Africa's state housing programme

Charlton, Sarah

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Abstract

State development interventions in cities of the global South can attract criticism for imposing norms at odds with ordinary people's needs and practices. Yet complex relations with state-provided infrastructure can emerge, as shown in people's interactions with South Africa's mass housing programme. Findings from qualitative interviews in Johannesburg exhibit a spectrum of interactions, forms of 'everyday infrastructural experiences' that extend well beyond either rejection or celebration of the housing. Some interactions involve adaptation: of the house, the property or the household itself, both on-site and involving distant locations. Unwelcome and at times unseen by the state, these changes are argued here to maintain the relevance of the housing in people's lives. Thus at the same time as households are sustained by the housing, to an extent, people's practices also sustain the infrastructure, facilitating its functioning and enabling its relevance in everyday lives.

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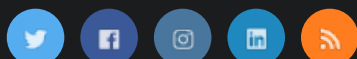
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