Critical realism and housing studies: An explanation for diverging housing solutions.

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Ambrose (1994) proposes a model of state – market – civil society relations, illustrated below, that underpin any chain of housing provision. In his book *Urban Process and Power* he analyses the shift in power balance between the state and market and the influence of these shifts upon the built environment (1994:12-13). A polarised characterisation of the state and market are proposed: on the one hand the state is perceived as democratic, responsive to need and allocating on this basis; and on the other is the market, undemocratic, responsive to effective demand and allocating on the basis of capacity to pay. This abstraction ‘floats’ beneath the chain of provision, as illustrated by Appendix 1(b).
Appendix 1 (a) Ambrose' Chain of Provision (1991, 1994)

- Flows of money
- Flows of influence, management and control

Assessment of DEMAND

NON-DEMOCRATICALLY ACCOUNTABLE - 'PRIVATE SECTOR' AGENCIES

Commercial and voluntary
Private sources of finance
Private construction
Real Estate Brokers
Private construction

Stage 1
Stage 2
Stage 3
Stage 4
Stage 5

PROMOTION
INVESTMENT
CONSTRUCTION
Market ALLOCATION Non-Market
Maintenance Repair Conversion Re-allocation

SUBSIDY INPUT

Central State funding
Authorities with statutory authority
Public revenue sources
State/local government construction
Health, housing, education departments etc
State/Local construction departments

DEMOCRATICALLY ACCOUNTABLE - 'PUBLIC SECTOR' AGENCIES

Assessment of NEED

Savings level
Spending level
'Cultural factors'
Economic factors
Effective DEMAND
Demographic factors

Statement of NEED
Economic factors
Demographic factors
Statutory responsibilities
Appendix 1 (b) Doling's (1997) elaboration of Ambrose' Chain of Provision


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In particular he stresses the necessary relationship between labour, materials and the construction or production phase and land title and the allocation of consumption phase. Further, it is actors, operating in open economic context, that undertake the process of housing provision. He cautions against ontological isolationism, that ignores important contextual conditions. Specific examples of influential contexts are provided, including wage developments, interest rates, prosperity, rates of return in other sectors of the built environment, demographic developments, technology, and lifestyle changes.