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Social Integration as the Goal of Housing Policies[i]

The author questions conventional models for policies on housing for the poorest sectors of the Latin American population, models which focus on solving the shortage of goods and services, and calls for the active intervention of the inhabitants themselves in the process of urban and housing design.

Housing policies are the outcome of decisions regarding redistribution of wealth (whose origin can in turn be found in a wide range of political motivations and strategies with varying purposes) and of the affirmation of the urban-modern pattern of configuration of society and habitat, thorough actions involving the production of social housing.

The premise of redistribution of wealth, at least in its most common public interpretation, predominantly orients actions towards sectors with the greatest shortfalls and greatest difficulties in satisfactorily overcoming them through their own resources.

Housing Actions viewed as Production and Transferral of Goods and Services

The strategies and actions implemented within any given particular model of housing policy reflect the specific notions adopted by its authors regarding the nature of the shortages and the nature of the actions required to solve them, based on a concept of redistribution. In the type of housing policy that predominates in Latin America, the result of these notions is that shortages are interpreted as a lack of availability of certain types of goods and a lack of access to certain types of services, and the actions required to solve them are considered to consist of the production and transferral, towards the deprived sectors, of goods and services with these characteristics[ii]. This conception leads to a search for efficiency and effectiveness through mass operations subject to the playing within the rules of business production and welfare distribution. When viewed in this way, the actions produce significant side-effects on economic mobilisation, which are also considered in the decisions on redistribution as profits that are channelled, in accordance with those playing rules, towards sectors that are unconnected to the "beneficiaries" of the actions, thus forming a second category of beneficiaries. The explicit goals of housing policies are thus considered to have been attained if the products are appropriated by the predetermined "primary beneficiaries" (the sectors lacking housing goods and services) and if the spin-off benefits of the processes of production and transfer are appropriated by the (also predetermined) "secondary beneficiaries"— sectors of production, trade and finances.

Urban-Modern Poverty as the Result of a Set of Greater and More Complex Shortages than those of Immediate Physical Survival

However, the reality of our societies is not reflected entirely either in this conception of shortage or, consequently, in that of its solution. There are sufficient examples among our poorest sectors to show that their shortages are not limited to a lack of availability of basic goods and services (which they evidently do suffer): the real situation of their lives and their presence in our societies shows that there are other, equally pressing, categories of shortage, which hinder their access to situations of full satisfaction and social hierarchy, and hinder access of our society to a genuine structure based on democratic and equitable relations. These categories are identified as lack of power of administration and negotiation.

"This lack, which can be seen to be just as degrading as the shortage of survival resources (goods and services) itself, even if the relations of cause and effect are not as evident, can also be interpreted as being an excessive devaluation within the play of transactions of the formal society, both in the global and structural social arena and in the personal, everyday inter-sector contacts: work, provision and receipt of services, simple side-by-side coexistence..."[iii]. This lack (or devaluation) marks a powerful obstacle for autonomous (i.e. non-dependent) procurement of solutions to survival needs by the people who live in situations of poverty and for the autonomous striving for means of growth.

Lack of Satisfactory or Equitable Social Inclusion
Beyond the obvious situations of territorial separation which can be seen in our cities in both spontaneous and planned structures, this condition also manifests itself in intangible aspects such as the effects of discrimination derived from ignorance or imperfect or insufficient mastery by the "popular" sectors of the codes of coexistence, communication and/or management that belong to the social sectors which establish the guidelines of inter-relationship in urban society. This ambiguous and unstable situation of subordinated inclusion or of aggregation without insertion, or of physical presence with social exclusion, is part of the framework of urban poverty and in itself forms a scheme of contaminating and obtrusive inter-relationship in the shaping of a democratic social fabric.

Conventional Housing Policies, as Intensifiers of the Situations of Lack of Empowerment in Administration and Social Integration
Just as the action of production and transferral of housing goods and services generates important side effects in terms of economic mobilisation, explicitly recognised, given their scale and their symbolic weight in family histories, housing actions also involve a strong inductive and affirmative (or reaffirming) capacity of patterns of inter-relation and social organisation. The processes of housing arrangement can also express and activate, through the complex and intense structure of transactions they generate at their different stages (diagnosis, design, production, financing, transfer and use), and within very different sequential and organisational "scripts", a certain conception of the place that each of the different players has in the social dynamics and of the way in which they are to inter-relate. For example, with the usual mechanisms of housing schemes, in particular those targeted at the poorest sectors, the residents take the passive role of receivers of homes about which they have had no chance to express an opinion, and the handing over of the dwelling is presented as the fruit of the generosity of the government, and subject to its mechanisms of decision. Here, the implicit "script" only serves to underline the role of total subordination of the "beneficiary" social sector to the generosity and decision-making criteria of the social sector that wields the mechanisms of administrative power.

In the conventional and predominant models of housing policy, which focus on the lack of goods and services, the "script" of transactions contains strongly conditioning features in this regard, which underscore the patterns of inter-relation between markedly asymmetric predominant sectors in our society, whereby the sectors with greatest or total availability of resources and administrative power reserve the right to say what the basic definitions of the problems and solutions are, and to decide on strategies to bring these solutions about and to determine who is to benefit and under what conditions. The sectors that lack resources and administrative power are assigned the passive and

subordinate role of "beneficiaries", receivers of benefits in the form of closed packages of goods and services; but they are still denied the roles as decision-makers, controllers, organisers and opinion-makers (with regard to what is, after all, going to be their home). This basic positioning of actors and actions results in the adoption of schemes of inter-relationships and organisation of management (paternalism, charity, welfare, vote-catching or plain bribery) the capacity of which to retard or, in more defined cases, to distort the development of poorer sectors (the "beneficiaries" of the housing policies) towards an equitable and democratic inclusion in society, has not as yet been discussed.

However important the effects of transferring goods and services (developed plots, services in underdeveloped plots, seed-cells, individual or joint "turnkey" homes, etc.) may be, these effects are only partial in terms of reducing urban-modern poverty, and may even be completely neutralised or made worthless if the production and transferral of those goods and services contributes, though other channels (as in the cases of blatant vote-catching, so fashionable in the period leading up to elections), to the reiteration of the excluded and subordinated (in some cases, directly submissive) role of the sectors "benefiting" from social management.

In an event of such great symbolic and economic value as the solution of a family's housing needs, not only is a chance deliberately lost to use the capacity generated to generate new forms of conduct and social inter-relationship, the direct benefits of the quality and effectiveness of the housing arrangement which might result from application of those systems is also lost.

The Anodyne Effect of the Introduction of the Premise of Participation in the Models of Housing Policy Oriented exclusively towards Solving the Lack of Goods and Services

A more recent version of the models of housing policy applied in our countries allows for the introduction of the premise of participation in the structure, but does not change the essential features of these structures, nor their objectives, nor the definition of the problems to be resolved[iv]. In this version, the problem continues to be the lack of goods and services; the solution continues to be their production and transferral; and the structure continues to leave the decisions and control in the hands of the player who provides the resources and the institutional decisions. There is not enough room for the inhabitant's participation to be exercised authentically; instead it is reduced to an atrophied version, limited in most cases to the provision of labour and, in slightly more sophisticated cases, to contributing materials and guiding operating decisions and options (such as choosing the location of a sanitary unit on the plot already defined by the developer). With slight variations, the same arrangement is preserved: developing institution = active and leading agent / "beneficiary" = passive and subordinated agent. Nonetheless, we should acknowledge that there is already a great difference between a housing solution in which the "beneficiary" is decided on by a lottery after the product is finished and ready to be handed over, and one in which this "beneficiary" is identified and present in the production process, even if his or her involvement is subject to strong limitations.

The possibility (and need) of inducing, through the "script" of housing policies, patterns of inter-relations that tend to correct the shortages in administrative power and social integration that form part of the situation of urban-modern poverty

Housing policies, with their sights set exclusively on solving shortages of goods and services, are rooted in the decision, by the sector that has an accumulation and a surplus of resources, to surrender part of those resources, in one way or another, to satisfy those objectives. Similarly, we might also say that housing policies, with their sights set on the simultaneous and integrated solution of shortages of goods and services, and of spaces of administrative power and of satisfactory social inclusion, cannot be implemented if they are not based, not only on the decision by the dominant sector to surrender resources, but also on its decision to surrender spaces of administrative power and a share of social inclusion. The decision to include the inhabitant — albeit in a strongly restricted way — in housing management represents, indeed, a first step in this "new" type of concession: the strongest player, the developing institution, has made a concession (albeit rigorously restricted and controlled) of power by "accepting" the materialisation and presence of the "beneficiary" in the process of management. As we have already mentioned, this surrender is not enough to guarantee the effectiveness of management (for example, achieving effective adaptation of the product — the dwelling — to the needs of the real user, through his or her participation in any discussion on the decisions) and the efficiency of the administration (for example, giving access to control or at least to observation by the "beneficiary" through his or her participation in administration).

Models of housing policy which focus on urban-modern housing poverty through the three categories of need indicated here have to be designed from the outset on the basis of this approach. The participation of the resident (the "beneficiary") in the process is evidently the prime element in that design, but the key lies in the authentic surrender of a share in power (empowerment)*? and in the reduction of distances and barriers, as well as in knowing how to achieve it in a context such as that of Latin American societies in general, which do not tend to take favourably to this type of alteration in their systems of inter-relation (this includes the "beneficiaries" themselves, backed as they are by centuries of training in subordination).

Within this criterion, the template of organisational structure, explicitly or implicitly impressed on the alignment of housing policy, must provide suitable spaces, instruments and interlocutors for the hierarchical inclusion of the "beneficiary" at the core of management, but at the same time must also include provisions to ensure that inclusion is effective and authentic.

In the first case, this translates into the assumption, by the "beneficiary", of protagonist and hierarchical roles of decision making, control and administration and, in the second case, in the construction of a support structure that fulfils the protective, empowering, and authentifying functions of the participative work. By definition, participative management is an asymmetric association with the task of achieving (or, more realistically, of tending to achieve) a situation of symmetry, so that it must be accompanied by the structural and political resources that allow it to overcome the strong natural obstacles to that change in positions. A housing policy like this, which distributes wealth and administrative power, and which seeks to integrate, cannot be confined to the expression of a structure of definitions and guidelines for action. In the present state of our societies, this expression will never go any further than paper if it is not, on the one hand, supported by the social conviction of the need and urgency for its application, and by the political decision to implement it by the sectors that wield power; and on the other hand, if it is not (as we have already mentioned in "knowing

how to achieve it"), accompanied by a strategy of preparation, implementation, protection and support, all indispensable for building and holding up the scenario without which a housing policy like this is only an abstract, vulnerable and naive (or consciously sterile) complex with unattainable purposes.

This is not the right place to put forth a specific proposal for a strategy for implementing housing policies with these characteristics; but perhaps it is the right place to say that, even with the conviction that this is the right way to proceed, we have only limited experience ~~that~~ in this area, and that the conceptual clarity is incipient and the number of people trained to work properly with these guidelines is very small. It would be hazardous to state that, for these reasons, the public arena is not yet ready to sustain, develop and apply a housing policy of this kind: this requires a broader analysis and further debate. But we are on more certain ground when we state that the university arena, within its, by definition, anticipatory role, or more exactly a more structured version of this spontaneous combination of sectors from universities and non-governmental organisation which has been performing this role to date, one encounters what might be seen as a synthesis of obligation, opportunity and privileged possibility of tackling the task. This is the task of conceptual clarification, critical accumulation of experience and training of properly oriented human resources, all of which is indispensable to provide the bases for a housing policy that, going beyond its usual goal of accumulating and delivering sites, affects the intimate fabrics of housing poverty and the deep distortions of urban society.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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[i] Edited version of the paper presented at the International Seminar on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development, organised by the "Alfa" Network CARDHUS and the Environmental Research and Technology and Housing Studies Centres of the School of Architecture, Planning and Design of the National University of Mar del Plata, Argentina. Mar del Plata, April 1997.

[ii] In most housing programmes, this production and transferral of goods and services is still viewed directly as construction and delivery of houses with access to infrastructure.

[iii] PELLI, V..S. "'Soluciones alternativas' de vivienda, sus diferentes versiones, y sus alcances", papers presented at the international seminar "Housing policy in Argentina, global restructuring and sustainable development", Buenos Aires, 7, 8 and 9 June 1995.

[iv] PELLI, V.S. Op. cit.