Housing Laboratories (LAVs)

Conceptual Note

Housing Lab. Integral Housing and Settlements Upgrading
Wednesday, June 13, 11 am-3:30 pm
Plenary Room Garden Tent

Objective

To discuss needs and alternatives for integral upgrading of dwellings and surroundings, as well as the upgrading of informal settlements, both in terms of physical aspects and the materiality of the habitat, and in terms of the exposure of residents to unsafe and unhealthy conditions for the development of their capacities. During this Housing Laboratory, the cases of Brazil, Paraguay, Ecuador and Puerto Rico will be analyzed.

Key Words

Precarious settlements, dwellings, urban intervention, neighborhood upgrading.

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Description

Issues

Contemporary society seems to be characterized by life in the cities: for the very first time in history, since 2007 the world has been predominantly urban. In addition, by the year 2030, in all continents more people are expected to be living in urban areas than in rural zones – including in Asia and Africa. Latin American countries are not an exception. On the contrary, they currently experience an urban transition marked by consolidation of the urbanization process and the end of the urban explosion. Nevertheless, cities have grown at the expense of lower-income population groups. Indeed, large segments have not been included in the formal city. Thus, the informal city houses between 20% and 50% of the population of large municipalities. According to ECLAC data (2018), in 2017, on average 21% of the region's urban population lived in slums. This means over 100 million people living in urban slums. Informal settlements concentrate poverty, poor environmental conditions, lack of access to urban infrastructure and social services etc., representing the most visible face of social inequalities.

Faced with the situation of informal settlements, governments in Latin America have developed multiple strategies. In the beginning, government policies entailed direct construction and distribution of housing by the State, by financing massive "turnkey" housing projects. Towards the mid-1970s, public programs turned to the supply of urbanized plots of land served by sanitation services and minimal housing solutions. In numerous cases, both initiatives supposed the eradication of irregular settlements with their populations being relocated and having to commute to and from urban outskirts. By and large, these programs did not produce the expected results. As a matter of fact, they were very much criticized both by the residents themselves and by the community of experts, who pointed out the high social costs paid by settlements' dwellers – waste of funds invested in the production and upgrading of dwellings, of social networks, of access to services, etc. Other negative by-products were the impossibility of better targeting the use of resources – often times, the benefits of such programs were captured by middle-class families rather than by poor households –, insufficient resources to ensure an effective scale-up of such initiatives, etc. As of the 1980s and, more markedly, in the 1990s, governments adopted a new perspective – still in effect. This new approach encourages integrated and integral upgrading policies for human settlements, and advocates the adoption of approaches which facilitate the operation of the housing markets. "As a result of experience accumulated with these programs, a consensus has evolved around the fact that strategies based on the establishment of

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residents in areas already occupied by them are socially and more economically desirable. This leads to the implementation of several program modalities, from those limited to regularizing property that was illegally occupied, all the way to integrated neighborhood upgrading programs, with a more complete conceptual approach" (Brakarz et al, 2002: 21).

These initiatives go beyond the mere regularization of plots of land, promoting the full integration of irregular settlements into the formal city. Additionally, they encourage investments to improve infrastructure and urban amenities in the neighborhoods. Lastly, in a coordinated fashion, programs are developed geared to mitigate the main social problems in the communities and to integrally improve quality of life for settlement dwellers. Thus, integral upgrading of settlements seeks to develop better living conditions for the urban poor with the revitalization of their surroundings through settlements' urban organization, regularization, architectural and urban design, building of basic infrastructure and amenities, all of which will not only embellish dwellings and the habitat but also provide elements to foster greater integration of residents into the city environment, greater social cohesion and improved quality of life.

Based on these guidelines, the region accumulates an experience of almost 30 years formulating, executing and evaluating neighborhood upgrading programs. Among them, to be highlighted is the Medellin experience, with the Integral Program for the Upgrading of Subnormal Neighborhoods of Medellin (*Programa Integral de Mejoramiento de Barrios Subnormales de Medellín - PRIMED*) and, more recently, the Integral Urban Projects (*Proyectos Urbanos Integrales - PUIS*), which link neighborhood upgrading with a comprehensive process of urban planning.

The Medellin experience "inspired cities such as Rio de Janeiro […] among others in the region and around the globe, which have introduced similar models aiming to concentrate social and economic inclusion policies on vulnerable population zones that were upgraded and provided with housing and urban infrastructure" (Magalhães y Rossbach, 2017:34). Rio de Janeiro was recognized for its Slum-Neighborhood Program (*Programa Favela-Bairro*) in the 1990s. The Rio experience is linked, in the region, to a new generation of policies, combining and seeking synergies among social, political, institutional and spatial processes (Fiori y Brandao, 2010).[1] The central element of this initiative has been, on one hand, scale – a "sine qua non" condition to attain synergies. On the other hand, its capacity to effectively integrate the provision of infrastructure with social services, and to include community participation (despite the fact that its development was limited).

Also, in Sao Paulo, the Guarapiranga project consisted of the upgrading of informal settlements as part of a broader initiative to recover the quality of water to serve part of the metropolitan

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[1] In the case of Rio de Janeiro, the initiative was also linked to peace and security processes and policies (Magalhães y Rossbach, 2017).

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region population. The project encompassed the network of drainage systems, water supply systems and infrastructure, resettlement, environmental education, sanitation, public lighting and electricity. Belo Horizonte (in Brazil) is another initiative to consider, with the implementation of the *Vila Viva* Program (see Belo Horizonte Urbanization and Housing Company or *Companhia Urbanizadora e de Habitação de Belo Horizonte* - URBEL, 2017). These two significant projects have laid the groundwork for more initiatives. During the 1990s, other countries continued to adapt these models to local realities. For instance, the Neighborhood Upgrading Program (*Programa Mejoramiento de Barrios* – PROMEBA) and Rosario Habitat in Argentina, as well as, more recently, the Housing Upgrading Program, in Paraguay.

Nevertheless, these local initiatives and experience accumulated during their development found an inflection point in the beginning of the new millennium. Again, Brazil was the country that paved the way for future interventions. In the year 2002, with the election of president Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva, the struggle and agenda for urban reform gained political and institutional momentum with the creation of the Ministry of Cities, which triggered a process to restructure the housing sector. In this context, five years later (2007), the Growth Acceleration Program (*Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento* – PAC) was put in motion, with investments in sanitation and infrastructure in the slums seen as priority investment projects (See National Housing Secretariat or *Secretaria Nacional de Habitação*, 2010). "Under PAC–Slums, integral and integrated slum upgrading was adopted as an intervention model supported by federal finance, with fund transfers to states and municipalities" (Magalhães y Rossbach, 2017:43).

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In this way, since the mid-2000s, a new generation of policies was initiated in the region, contemplating the introduction of a more robust social component and mechanisms to promote urban inclusion. "In Chile, urban and housing policies show important innovations aimed at promoting greater urban equality, as in the case of "Quiero Mi Barrio" program, launched in 2006, with a strong social component coupled with urban and housing improvement initiatives and the establishment of a National Urban Development Council, in 2014. The Council gathers representatives from the government, civil society, the academia and the private sector". The "Quiero mi Barrio" program is a milestone in that it builds on this neighborhood upgrading experience to intervene in the formal city. Mexico has also expanded the neighborhood upgrading experience by developing, in recent years, "subsidy-guiding mechanisms which stimulate housing production in better located areas, integrated to the urban infrastructure network, based on a qualification and compensation model for the provision of urban services" (Magalhães y Rossbach, 2017:34).

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A matter of reflection is, then, how outreaching and effective these interventions have been, and what actions should be in place in order to achieve cities without slums.

Experience acquired in recent years as regards the design and execution of neighborhood upgrading programs enables the identification of some challenges to ensure their successful implementation:

(i)   To take into consideration that for neighborhood upgrading programs to be successful and sustainable over time, it is paramount to act on the structural causes of informality and urban inequalities. In particular, it seems indispensable to understand the characteristics and dynamics of housing markets in the region, and the limited housing supply to lower-income segments of the population, etc.

(ii)   Continuing the projects once the Program is finished also seems to be one of the keys to success: "The completion of works in a settlement should not mean the end of the government's attention towards that community. Urban and social integration goals are only attained in the medium-term with continuity of social actions and with adequate operation and maintenance of urban infrastructures and amenities, in particular: drinking water systems, drainage, sanitation and solid waste collection" (Brakarz et al., 2002: 87).

(iii)   To systematically include the ecological dimension – i.e. activities related to green areas, reduced consumption of non-renewable resources, lower greenhouse gas emissions, waste management, and their linkage with safety and health – as well as the issue of climate change seems to be another challenge that these programs have to address (Becerril Miranda, s/f).

(iv)   Monitoring the impact of these initiatives on land prices and the possible effects of relocations seems to be a critical aspect that policies need to take into account.

(v)   Developing a robust social component, which enables monitoring of resettlement and relocation processes resulting from neighborhood upgrading experiences, is another critical aspect in the context of recognizing the right to the city in general, and the social function of the habitat in particular (a review of the types of conflicts in these interventions can be found in de Menezes Regino, 2016). The goal should be to ensure safeguard policies to promote sustainability, with an approach to integrate social aspects.

(vi)   It seems to be necessary to evaluate the reach and impacts of upgrading initiatives vis a vis the guidelines of the New Urban Agenda (NUA), in order to scale up interventions to other cities and/or countries.

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(vii)   It seems to be imperative to connect initiatives to broader scopes of national territory organization policies so as to ensure the sustainability of interventions (cf. the Medellin experience).

(viii) To more accurately define the amount of investments that initiatives will require, how these initiatives will be funded, and the maximum cost to be paid by household.

Key Questions

About effectiveness

1. Which aspects underpin the efficacy in the examples of Brazil, Paraguay and Ecuador?
2. What are the key elements (instruments, practices, strategies) for successful integral interventions to upgrade housing and settlements?
3. How to measure effectiveness in the interventions? What dimensions and indicators should be considered to measure outcomes?

About implementation

4. What economic and political contexts allowed the implementation of neighborhood upgrading programs in the different countries?
5. How were they funded? What was the average amount invested to set them in motion?
6. What role did municipal governments play in neighborhood upgrading experiences? What was the participation of private agents in these endeavors?
7. How to ensure community participation and participatory management in settlement upgrading initiatives?
8. What is the role of social work?
9. How to develop effective safeguard mechanisms for involuntary resettlements?
10. How to achieve greater effectiveness and linkage with extra-sectoral interventions in settlements receiving upgrading initiatives?

About reach and scope

11. Have interventions managed to effectively adopt the idea of an integral development for human settlements? Or were they limited to address sanitation issues, only?
12. What can be done to multiply and scale up projects at a neighborhood level, to expand them to the level of cities and countries?

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13. How to ensure the linkage between neighborhood upgrading initiatives and territory organization and urban planning policies?
14. How to ensure the inclusion of the neighborhood upgrading component in national housing frameworks?

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