



Conclusions

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Expenditure or cooperation?



Government-built and financed neighbourhood unit in Peru
Photo John Turner



Barriada organized by the printing union workers in Arequipa, Peru
Photo John Turner



'Mutual aid' house building in an Arequipa barriada
Photo Pat Crooke

Where are the housing priorities?



Meal in a peasant household
Photo R. Becerra

Almost all the sponsored schemes illustrated here are based on the active participation of householder families supported in various ways by outside agencies. This pooling of means—the result of 'cooperative' or 'democratic' policies—has not only increased greatly the effect of the resources of the outside agency but has also made it possible for these same resources to be repeatedly and increasingly applied.

This reproductive arrangement can only operate, of course, where the potential exists: where this potential is lacking, only outside resources or subsidy, can produce results and these cannot gain any reproductive character. In the Caracas 'Superblocks' programme, before its reform, 'investment' became mere expenditure and a permanent social and economic liability.

Until very recently, most South American government housing projects were becoming permanent drains on state resources that were in any case totally insufficient to deal with needs in this way. This has meant disproportionately small government contributions to popular housing, even though it constitutes by far the largest and most important financial demand in these countries. In the seven years 1949 to 1956 the Peruvian government built 5476 houses: less than 1 per cent of the housing deficit during those years, and at a unit cost that made repayment by the average urban family impossible. And this in an exceptionally active period in government building work.

During the same period no less than 50,000 families, the great majority from urban working-class groups, took matters into their own hands and solved at least part of their housing and community development problems on their own initiative, and outside the established legal, administrative and financial superstructure.

Official policy led, on the one hand, to an authoritarian imposition of public housing and, on the other, to an almost total neglect. Until 1958 no attempt was made in Peru to guide the common people's own contribution into local development programmes.

This situation clearly illustrates two features of rapid urbanization in an under-developed country: no such government—however wealthy, as the Venezuelan 'Superblock' project shows—can possibly finance more than a small proportion of the total demand for housing. Nor under these conditions can any government hold down those immense pressures for land and housing that government action cannot accommodate.

But the outlook changes very quickly as soon as the government's role changes from one of financier/builder to one of promoter/coordinator of all available agents and resources: the present three-year plan of the Peruvian national housing agency (*Junta Nacional de Vivienda*) will serve four to five per cent of the country's population, and 20 to 25 per cent of the actual demand; moreover its programme will continue to grow because it provides both the means and the motives for further individual, community and state investment.

In Colombia, the history of the public housing agency (*Instituto de Crédito Territorial*) is a further illustration of such a change of policy, involving a definition of the housing problem in new terms.

The ICT was created to deal with Colombia's worst housing conditions: those of the countryside. But it was found that peasants' conditions—often outside the money economy of the nation—were so precarious that they could not support the extra burden of debt that improved housing involved. As in all South America, a peasant family typically living on the edge of starvation has many concerns more urgent than the condition of its house, and this can be improved only through an increase in family income. The peasant's problem, in other words, is one of land, work and productivity and until this is solved he can barely afford food and clothing, let alone an improved house.



Schoolgirl residents in a Lima slum
Photo John Turner

An absolute or a relative problem?

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In face of this situation, an agricultural-development agency took over responsibility for rural housing in Colombia, and ICT's attention was shifted to the towns. Here, subsistence living-conditions are less common: an urban family with a regular wage, and living in a slum, has and feels the need for better housing conditions. Blas Quinto in Bill Mangin's account (p. 366) is acutely aware of his housing problem and, given certain minimal conditions and facilities, he is able to solve it.

No agency can carry out a policy without some definition—implicit or explicit—of its terms of reference. In housing, this involves a definition of the problem facing the community. One way of defining the problem at a given time is by establishing a minimal qualitative standard for living conditions, and considering the sum of all houses below that standard as a 'deficit'.

Applying any reasonable standard of this kind to housing conditions, any Latin American country reveals a quantitative problem quite beyond solution by any conceivable housing agency; in 1959 such standards applied in Venezuela showed the 'housing deficit' as being 50 per cent of the total living-quarters of the nation; similar standards applied in Peru showed a 'deficit' of 89 per cent. A numerical problem on this scale was clearly beyond the control of the agencies concerned and, stated in these terms, gave no insight into possible lines of solution. Thus the definition of the problem itself proved irrelevant as a working guide to possible government action outside the orthodox procedure of direct state financing—often by subsidy—of an inevitably tiny number of new homes.

Another way of defining the problem presents a different picture and suggests an entirely different course of action; it recognizes that housing is in fact only one of many problems that a poor population faces, and assumes that the competence of a housing agency embraces only those who actually or potentially feel the need for better accommodation and are able to support its cost without prejudicing even more urgent needs such as food and clothing.

By limiting the problem to one of effective demand, this definition also concentrates attention on the resources available for its solution; a Peruvian housing agency recently defined this 'relative' interpretation of the problem as follows:

'The housing problem is the present difference between the value of existing housing and the value of the material, social and financial capital available for investment in housing.'

In other words, the housing 'problem' is never static, but is in fact a matter of balance and tension between unsatisfied demand and available resources: resources whose mobilization, coordination and guidance becomes the key to any workable solution.

A quantitative or 'deficit' problem in housing exists; but where it falls outside these working limits other factors and other agents have to bring about a change in priorities before it can be tackled effectively. In Colombia, rural housing problems were taken over by the agricultural credit agency which can help raise rural productivity and income, and thereby give access to the resources a peasant needs if he is to have a better home.

When the housing problem is defined in these relative and active terms, ideas of subsidized housing and paternalistic 'charity' tend to disintegrate, and to be replaced by the cultivation of all available resources—those of the individual family, the community and the nation—and their application in socially and economically reproductive programmes of work.

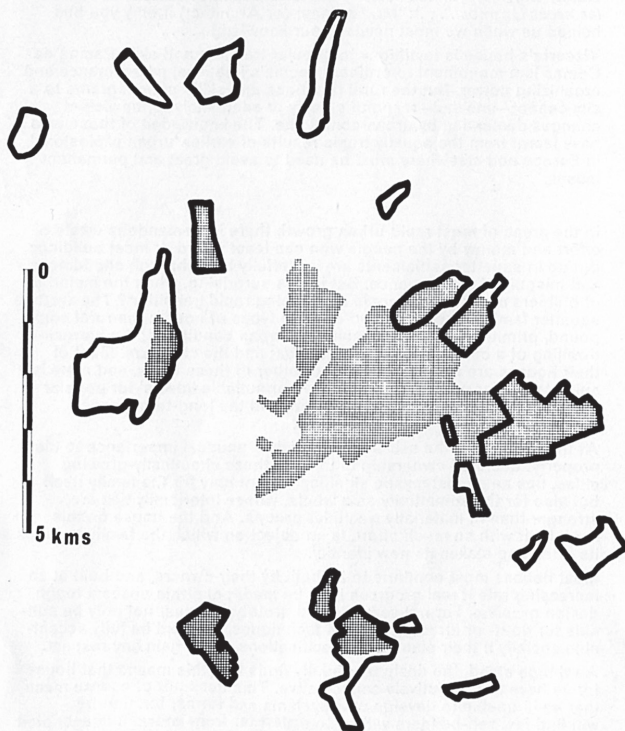
What resources must achieve form?

Once an administration consciously adopts realistic terms of reference of this kind, it can no longer allow its housing agencies to indulge in isolated projects—often of great design merit, but making little or no impression on the real problem—while abandoning city growth to unguided popular initiative.

When housing policy aims at cultivating and channelling all possible resources, the housing agency—and especially the architect—has immediately to ask: 'What are our vehicles for doing this? What, in other words, must be given form?' In this number we have described social resources as falling into three groups: popular, government and commerce. In highly-developed societies it is often more difficult to make such a distinction, but to a Latin American these represent three separate and even antagonistic 'worlds': for where the mass of the people use very little money and have only tenuous links with the affairs of government, the frontiers of these worlds are sharp and clear, separating from one another distinct resources for local development.

The Lima *barriadas* and Vizcarra's house (p. 361) show on different scales that the people themselves have enterprise, skill and organizing ability, as well as slowly-accumulated small savings and growing political influence.

The commercial building sphere has capital and organizing efficiency, but the mass of the people cannot make use of its high-priced services. These prices in turn arise from high risks in a limited market, and until this vicious circle is broken large scale commercial building will be concerned only with rapid-profit jobs for government and private clients.



Above: map of Arequipa showing (hatched) built-up urban area and (solid line) peripheral *barrios*



Left: legal but undeveloped urban expansion in Lima
Photo William Mangin

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Conclusions

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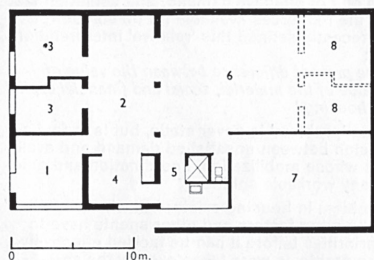
Government funds, even with the maximum of foreign credits, are quite insufficient for the direct financing of all the housing work needed; but they are not subject to the same risks and demands as private capital, and can often be used as the vital 'seed-capital' for a housing project as well as financing the necessary technical assistance. In addition, the government has access to knowledge and the means of communicating it to those who need it; and finally government is the legislative power able to direct and, in greater or lesser degree, to enforce the disposition and use of national land and resources.

Wasted aid and neglected effort

The form of the programme and works which the planner and architect propose must be suitable vehicles for these resources. Refinement of designs and techniques that cannot be effectively used by these resources are a loss of time, money and effort: a loss often made the more tragic when the real 'executive forces'—those of the people—are sowing the seeds of urban chaos, at immense cost and sacrifice, simply for lack of technical aid. It is terrible, and too common, to hear the complaint: '*Ingeniero, si nos habian dado las ayudas y orientaciones cuando las necesitabamos . . .*': 'Mr. Engineer (or Architect) if only you had helped us when we most needed your knowledge . . .'

Vizcarra's house is testimony to popular tradition and skill. Pampa de Comas is a monument to ordinary people's initiative, perseverance and organizing power. But the rural traditions and skills of immigrants to a city cannot—unaided—respond quickly or adequately to the violent changes demanded by urban conditions. The knowledge of those who have learnt from the equally tragic results of earlier 'urban explosions' in Europe and elsewhere *must* be used to avoid great and permanent losses.

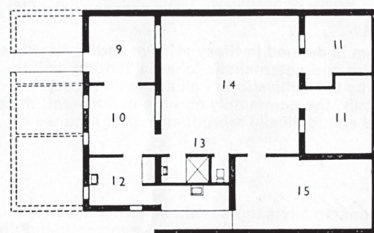
Fixed models and changing circumstances



Left: a prototype house designed for employees of a coastal estate of the Sociedad Paramonga Limitada (subsidiary of W. R. Grace & Co.). It is planned to be built for either peasant or non-peasant use

Above: peasant house

- 1 porch
- 2 living verandah
- 3 bedroom
- 4 cooking area
- 5 washing area
- 6 garden yard
- 7 animal corral
- 8 future rooms



Below: non-peasant house

- 9 parlour
 - 10 dining room
 - 11 bedroom
 - 12 kitchen
 - 13 washing area
 - 14 patio
 - 15 animal corral
- Front garden or future house-extension shown dotted*

In the areas of most rapid urban growth there is tremendous waste of effort and money by the people who can least afford it; most buildings put up in squatter settlements are wastefully built through shoddiness and misguided extravagance. But is this surprising, when the majority of builders are the very people undergoing rapid transition? The average squatter family knows only two or three types of house: the rural compound, primitive and quite unsuited to urban conditions; the barrack-dwelling of a company town or *hacienda*; and the city slum. Most of their houses are modelled on one or other of these types, and none is suitable. So far no generally accepted or suitable 'ideals' for popular dwellings in such areas have emerged, and the long-term consequences of this may well prove tragic.

At the same time, the self-builder attaches unusual importance to his property: declared ownership of land, in these chaotically-growing cities, has an almost mystic significance not only for the family itself but also for the community as a whole, whose interfamily ties are stronger than in materially wealthier groups. And the house on this land, built with so much effort, is an object on which the family lavishes its pride and stakes its new identity.

Most houses must continue to be built by their owners, and built at an increasing rate if real progress is to be made; and this poses a tough design problem. For house types and prototypes must not only be suitable for do-it- or direct-it-yourself techniques, but also be fully acceptable socially if their plans and specifications are to gain any respect.

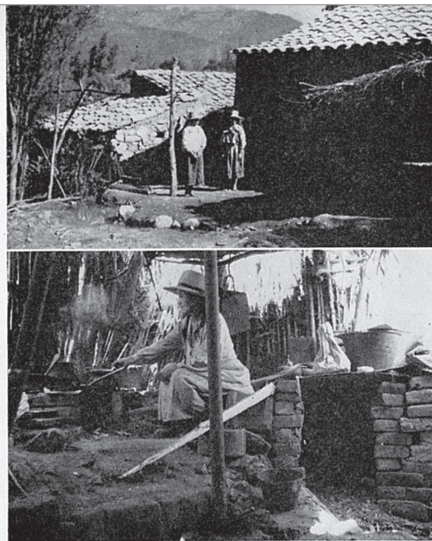
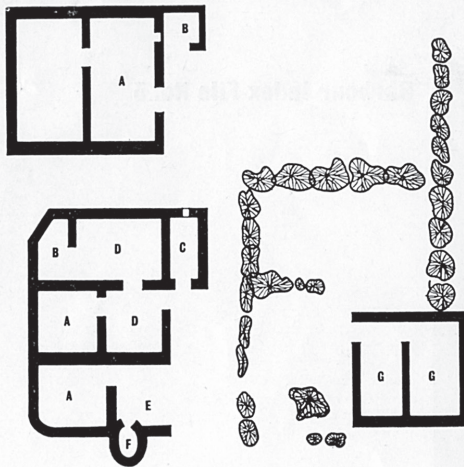
As things stand, the designer usually finds that this means that house forms have to be relatively conservative. This does not of course mean that he is unable to develop new systems and forms, but that he will find few self-builders willing to depart far from known and accepted elements. Within these conditions of local consent, the house must often be buildable in stages from a minimal nucleus in response to future needs and opportunities, and at the same time be able to accommodate changing ways of living as a family gradually discards the parents' rural background in favour of the children's city-bred customs.

Among the profusion of house types designed for low-cost projects, few provide even partial solutions to these requirements; such solutions can be arrived at only through the mutual respect of designer and owner/builder, and present a real challenge to the socially-perceptive architect.

Ordering of needs and contributions

In this context the most interesting illustrations are the Peruvian government projects (p. 379) and the proposals for popular housing in Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela (p. 387). Both provide the family and local community with the maximum freedom to use its own resources; they do this by anticipating the sequence of building normally practised in these conditions, and by respecting people's own order of priorities and felt needs. Of these, the first is *land* and the security and social identity that it provides. With the land come basic utilities: drinking water standpipes and, perhaps, electricity, at a cost that need not hinder the building of a minimal house. Only later, when the house is already operating, is the expense of modern sanitation undertaken.

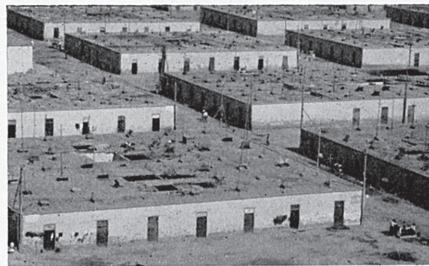
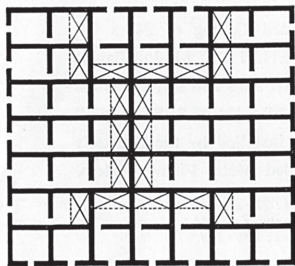
Patrick Geddes insisted in his report on popular housing in Indore, India (1917) that '*the essential need of a house and family is ROOM, and the essential improvement of a house for its family is MORE ROOM*'. He pointed out that there are satisfactory ways of disposing of night-soil other than as waterborne sewage, and that the burden on a restricted family budget of installing costly drains and apparatus at an early stage in building usually conflicts with both the family's own wants and with the overriding need for living space.



Rural housing conditions

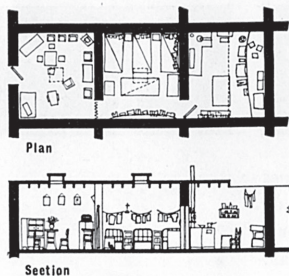
Far left: peasant house plan in Caraz, Peruvian highlands

Key: A animals B store C kitchen D sleeping room
E bakehouse F oven G new rooms



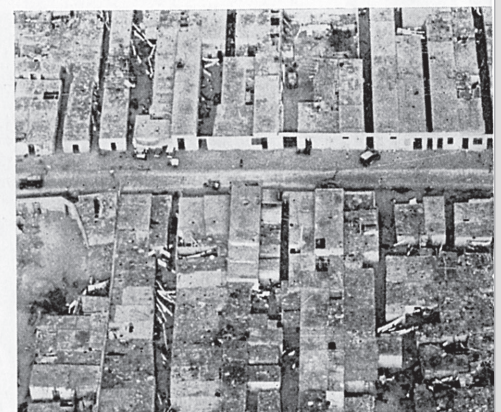
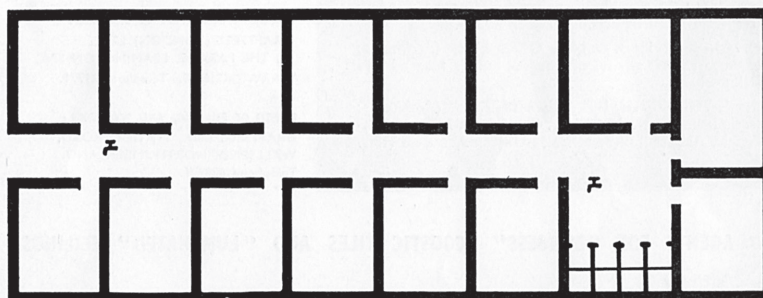
Workers' housing in a coastal company town, Peru

Far left: block plan (top) of 22 dwellings. The crossed areas are unroofed. One of the dwellings is shown in plan and section below



Multi-family slum dwellings, Lima, with narrow alleys giving access from street to rooms

Below: plan of a dwelling group with its access alley, latrines and two standpipes





Conclusions

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This differentiation between land, buildings and public utilities is even more important than at first appears. The provision of each of these elements requires a different procedure and therefore different skills and types of organization, and this not only gives full scope to the contribution of the future owners, but also gives the housing agencies involved much more administrative freedom; by programming the provision of each element separately, instead of treating them as a 'package deal', a housing agency can often call on a much wider range of financial and executive resources and work to a more adaptable timetable.

How to come to terms with popular effort?

In all the active schemes illustrated in this number, the promoting agency is working not 'for' but 'with' the groups and families taking part. The participants in such schemes are from lower income groups, and this means that this cooperation is bound to take the form of 'aided self-help'. Within this term a variety of techniques can be employed for applying individual and collective contributions to the job in hand; sometimes these techniques can usefully be based on traditional work-customs, sometimes a completely unfamiliar work-procedure had to be devised and agreed upon.

Many self-help projects have been proved so far to be extremely slow and administratively costly, and the self-help principle is often the subject of fierce discussion in South America, in the board-rooms of international agencies as much as in the local offices of particular projects. Such discussions show that in many cases popular methods and resources that have proved their productivity under spontaneous conditions tend to wither and die in the more deliberate embrace of outside agencies. This is the main current problem in the housing and local development field in South America: how can the vehicles for popular participation be operated? How to come to terms with local effort?

Assumed and real resources

The great majority of do-it-yourself projects which have been attempted with varying success, throughout the continent leave surprisingly little to the initiative of the participant families. Projects are normally based on the supply from 'outside' of materials, tools and technical assistance to participants who supply the labour. If the lending agency is efficient —by no means always the case—this system can be a great success socially and economically.

But by claiming for itself the main executive responsibility in this way, the agency frequently finds itself acting as general contractor in the building work, and to play this role on a nationally effective scale is often quite beyond the resources of such bodies, with their limited funds, staff and experience; this presents a formidable problem to most underdeveloped countries. This short-coming is often put forward to discredit the whole cooperative housing policy, and indeed its cause is an error common among this policy's protagonists: while they accept, of course, the basic idea of using the contribution of the participants, they suppose that the contribution lies mainly in spare time labour. Yet a few questions in any progressive squatter settlement will confirm the impression that only a small—often very small—part of the actual building work is normally done by owner-occupiers themselves. The owner's role in building these houses is not that of skilled or unskilled labourer, but that of *general contractor*: he begs, buys or scrounges materials, engages workers and supervises the building work—usually very closely indeed. In fact the greatest resource of these remarkable people is in their initiative and ability to *organize*: whole new towns and their multitudinous new houses stand as evidence of this ability.

Few South American projects have yet made use of this potential, and, because of this, cooperative housing policies are not growing and developing as they should. Perhaps the greatest single factor retarding development along these lines is the reluctance of administrators to admit that ordinary families may in fact be able to direct and administer, as well as execute, their own building work without having so much done for them by the authorities.

In spite of monumental evidence of the capacity of ordinary people in building their houses, the authorities (decision-makers of the executive agencies) tend to have little faith in the initiative and organizing ability of such people, whom the agencies are meant to serve. The few available field-workers on a project must gain the confidence and respect of the participants. This essentially close contact creates a mutual bond between them that the project's managers and functionaries—often reluctant to listen to their own field staff, and even more reluctant to leave their offices and see things for themselves—fail to profit from.

Field-workers in building programmes of this kind are not only the spokesmen of government agencies, but also their eyes and ears: until managers learn to use them they cannot hope to learn the real nature of a situation, adopt proper attitudes or take effective decisions. But the projects illustrated here show that an increasing number of managers carry out their jobs satisfactorily in this way, and community and local development in housing and other fields can be promoted effectively by government agencies only insofar as this trend continues.

For it is a trend towards recognition of the ordinary family's capacity, given the right help at the right time, to solve its own problems; and at the same time recognition of the scope and nature of government action that enables such help to be given. This changing attitude—the essential basis for cooperation between people and their government—can unlock resources and energies hitherto too often frustrated or ignored and equip them for the rapid development of these countries.



Barriada house builders, Lima
Photo John Turner



El Augustino barriada, Lima; the sequence from a semi-temporary adobe to completed 3-storey houses
Photo John Turner



Housing field-workers at a public meeting



Government architect and owner builders discuss a house design
Photo Emil Willmetz