

GENERAL SUMMARY

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HOUSING IN A TIME OF CRISIS

1. Introduction

This document presents some of the main ideas that were expressed, discussed and debated during the 52nd IFHP WORLD CONGRESS of the IFHP held in San Juan, Puerto Rico in October 2008, under the theme "Housing beyond its Walls: Planning for an Affordable and Sustainable Habitat."

It is important to note at the outset that the objectives established at the beginning of the Congress were achieved, beyond expectations. These included attracting representatives from many countries of the world and a huge attendance; there was a demand for continuing education from students and professors; there were multiple parallel activities such as exhibitions, movie and video projections, and, above all, an exciting exchange of knowledge through the formal and informal activities of the panellists.

Without doubt one of the successful elements was the presentation of ninety-nine papers in the panels and plenary sessions, of a high quality, which established a global dimension to the problem, and led to identifying feasible solutions. Those who attended the plenary sessions or any of the thematic panels constructed a vision about the housing situation, approximating closely what is happening in the world vis a vis the housing issue, not only in terms of a diagnosis but also along policy lines. This appreciation confirmed that the objectives of the Congress were satisfactorily met both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

The following discussion is a summary organization of the many proposals around the central ideas and goals of the Congress.

2. Methodology

The methodology that was used made it possible to structure a knowledge framework of what is happening in various countries of the world. This was done through a combination of plenary sessions, with the presence of high level functionaries of various governments who presented the public policies they are developing, and prestigious academics who analyzed the problem and formulated solutions. There were articulated expressions related to the problems and to specific solutions stemming from case studies and general policies.

Often there is a debate if events like this congress should have a participation of heterogeneous or homogeneous exponents and audiences. Judging from the energy of this event one can affirm that the heterogeneous characteristic was very important given that, on the one hand, some presentations were detailed cases of a particular political territory (a municipality) or

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sector (financing), and on the other hand, others were reflections of a general nature with respect to national housing policies and avenues for immediate action. Thus the dynamic between case studies or cause and effect and general policy themes was very productive. Thus we learned about public financing policies, the use of housing and service technologies, as well as learning about the significant impact of the community sector and the private sector. The presentations covered an ample universe from the national, local community and social sector to the private sector.

There seemed to be a thematic imbalance in the sense that there were more papers and discussions about housing than about urban planning, although almost all of the papers talked about the multidimensional aspect of housing, above all in relation to the city. The perspective concerning the relation between the local and global was also discussed, above all linked to the financial crisis of this time.

Finally, in methodological terms, there was an attendance of public officials, of activists from various non profits, and of businessmen from the business sector, among others. In general it is important to highlight that this heterogeneous quality of the Congress was evident not only in the themes and different perspectives, but also in the actors and participants.

The papers were distributed along the following themes:

- 39% of the papers were about housing
- 23% were about urbanism and the city, with some balance between one or the other theme.
- 19% were about the environment and sustainability.
- 18% dealt with other areas.

The breakdown of the attendance at the Congress was as follows: there were 782 people from 25 different countries, including Japan, Estonia, Sweden, Russia, France, Nigeria, The Czech Republic, Poland, The Netherlands, Mexico, and Venezuela, among others. The country of origin of the persons presenting papers included 49% were from Puerto Rico, host for the Congress, 10% from the United States, 9% from Mexico, 3% from Africa, and the rest from Europe and Asia. A cross section of presenters along gender lines showed that: 73% were men and 26% were women. Thus women accounted for one-fourth of the presentations and men accounted for three-fourths.

Although 65% of the people were attending an IFHP Congress for the first time, a significant 35% were persons who continue to attend and participate in the debates of these events. There is a strong probability that many of these people have attended congresses in other countries and/or came to Puerto Rico from other places and this fosters a cumulative effect of knowledge and experiences and an ongoing discussion of the main themes.

Although the representation from different countries was quite ample, the gender representation was asymmetric or skewed. In the future, a more balanced attendance should be promoted, because women's presence in the city, in terms of design and public sector production, is growing and their vision is increasingly important.

There was a common thread among the many themes, above all in the comparison about city, housing and sustainability. However, the themes reflected a limited relation with planning, as there were so few papers on this topic. Evidently planning was taken into consideration in many of the presentations, but in future occasions, it is important to include specific reflections on planning.

There was a notable attendance of high level officials who work with housing polices. There were eight ministers who spoke of their work from the perspective of national governments. Their participation was evidence of the importance which governments place on this type of congress. Also, 12% of attendees were students, evidence of their interest in this topic during their formative process.

3. Content Elements

There are a few parameters to take into account in addressing the housing theme and its importance. The first is related to the fact that by 2008 more than 50% of the world's population lived in cities and this, evidently, changes substantially the optic with which we view the housing problem and the urban question. Furthermore, given a growing demand arising from the growing urbanization of the population, there are policies which still are limited in scope, above all faced with deficits that in many countries continue to grow at an alarming pace. This creates a dual condition -urbanization of the population and outdated public policies -leads one to conclude that the housing theme continues to be a fundamental problem for our population, not only in the cities but in general for world society.

Thus we can infer, from the debates produced, how pertinent the title of the Congress: "Housing beyond its Walls" turned out to be -because it reflects a reality beyond the visible, beyond the immediate and the unilateral. Housing is a multidimensional theme because there are links with culture, with technology, with financing. with demographics, questions which also are clearly present in the city and at long range.

Housing scarcity and poverty has a history in the planet. and is expressed in different ways in time and space. Today, for instance, one can no longer view the housing problem exclusively as one of those "without a roof (those people who do not have a shelter in which to sleep), as has been the traditional pattern, but now. because of the appearance of a new and greater form, housing scarcity must be seen as one of those "with a roof'.

These dimensions must be taken into account because, in many cases, existing policies have emphasized quantity over quality, a situation that in a short time has led to this new dimension of those without a roof. Programs like sites and services, incentives and subsidies, and progressive housing, among others, were delivered as if they were housing opportunities, but without delivering, properly speaking, a house, and when finished housing was offered it was of poor quality. Furthermore, it was highly densified, subjecting the home owner to an inflexible financing system that immobilized the homeowner, among other effects.

The housing problem composed of those "with a roof' and "without a roof -today impacts more or less one third of the global urban population, a highly significant quantity.

In this Congress, one could appreciate the absence of urban planning. That definition of planning as the "social object with a conscious wilt" appears to be disappearing, unfortunately, with negative results. The *social object*, that is to say, the institutionalization which took responsibility for putting this into practice, at least in Latin America, has become less pervasive, in terms of Bauman, or it has undoubtedly eroded because the traditional and classic offices of national and local planning in many cases have disappeared and in others have lost the importance they once had.

The product of planning has changed and today we view planning as large urban projects (LUP) which also have been debated in this Congress, and many of which, without a doubt, have led to good results. Nevertheless, it is difficult for an inexistent or weak social subject to have a *will*; that is to say a sense of projection in time and furthermore that this will would be conscious, which is to say set out in a thoughtful and objective diagnosis with respect to the problem. Because of this, we have a serious, large, and complex problem with an institutional planning structure that is very weak and lacking in meaning.

Another theme observed in this Congress is the possibility of understanding the multidimensionality that underlies the comprehension of the housing problem, and of thinking of respective solutions. The relationships between housing and city as well as that between housing and technology, financing; and housing and demand have also been mentioned in the presentations

Given the context which surrounds us, the topic of the world financial crisis must be mentioned, as occurred during this event. Perhaps this is one of the most important or most significant crises in recent history on a world wide scale. We are living the first great urban crisis. This crisis was born out of the housing mortgage financing, and later transformed into incentives and a pyramid game. The original cause of the financial crisis should not be lost from sight, because if this happens, as it appears to me that it is, a financing solution will be sought, but not a response to the housing problem, to the problem of mortgages and the problem of cities. That is to say to a majority of the population.

The amount of resources directed to the financial system gives the impression that in a relatively short time there will be many less resources for housing and a contraction of public investment in cities. The dynamics of consumerism on products linked to housing, such as refrigerators, furniture, kitchens! etc. will also be reduced, and the problem of employment, being felt at the moment, will be evident. In the case of Latin America, if this solely financial approach is maintained, there will be a very strong impact on unemployment, even more so if a key sector of the labour market is the construction sector.

Another of the regional impacts that will be highly significant will be with the remittances our countries receive. If one departs from the hypothesis that this is a form of insertion of some Latin America countries in the globalization process, then what will occur -by force -will be a redefinition of these ties. In the short run these countries will receive fewer resources in the remittances category and this international link could be reduced, with the problems that would entail.

In any case, the policies that are proposed to resolve this crisis will have such a strong impact that housing will become something absolutely different that what it is today. In this sense, we realize that housing is a political topic: the answer to 'where do we put more resources?' is a political decision. "How to manage the issue of finances, of mortgages?" is also a political decision that has been clearly established in this Congress.

The question that has been raised in the Congress is how to obtain benefits from this crisis; how to convert the crisis into an opportunity. In other words, we shouldn't lose the opportunity that has been opened for housing and human development to be greater protagonists; and so that those who have less will be benefited. In other words, we must see the crisis not only as a problem but also as an opportunity.

4. A Few Conclusions

A first aspect to mention, in terms of diagnosis, is that housing has a global dimension with local particularities. Obviously if a third of the world population experiences housing scarcity and poverty, this means that while the world population is living with this situation because of the mutual interactions that exist, there are specific conditions in each place, for instance in respect to tenure or technology. There are countries like the United States that appear to be countries of home owners and then there are countries like Spain that give the impression that there is an equal distribution of home owners and renters. The same occurs with cities, where some have a predominance of one type of tenure over another. Thus tenure is an interesting topic because different policies are formulated according to the place. *The dimension of the problem is felt around the world, but takes a specific form in each place, and the policies have to respond to their local condition.*

The housing deficit is another aspect which is quite distinct. In Latin America, the main problem is of people who do not have a roof over their heads, they are "sin techo" but in Europe or in the United States, many more problems are for those with a roof over their heads, and this dichotomy means that we have totally distinct realities.

Technology was clearly noted in some of the papers, but with different options. Whereas some papers proposed a search for appropriate technologies, other papers proposed the need for a cutting edge technology. There are differences and obviously this leads to different policies in each country. In other words, the solutions have to be individual also, but without doubt generalized at a worldwide level. We must not continue with the idea that many international organizations apply: that is *focusing*, or addressing only certain sectors in particular. Why is this so? Because basically as has been established in the papers, we are dealing with a right that is absolutely universal. No one has more right than another; all have the right to a house. This is an important consideration in respect to the situation.

A second aspect which was mentioned in all of the debates has to do with not only the relationship of housing to the city but also with the need to understand that producing housing is producing cities. The act of densifying the suburbs with housing, in order to lower prices, does not mean that at the same time we are making cities. It is not possible to produce housing without cities, because if we don't make citizens we also do not make cities. There is a relation between housing, city, and citizens which must be articulated because the concept of citizenship is born in the city, and because this brings rights and duties. If this link is clear, then the right to housing is also a right to the city. These cannot be separated; one cannot stand without the other. The concept of habitat is also related. Housing must be provided in a habitat which has services, infrastructure and community institutions, provides work opportunities, has a public space and creates an identity, among others.

A third aspect brought out strongly in the presentations is the relation between the urban land market and housing. On the one hand there is built-up land, which has a price established by the market -a central component of housing. The land price results, from, among other things, the production of services and infrastructure and from the speculation that is carried out; this calls attention to the strong weight this has on the final price of housing, to the extreme that the price of the land rises higher in relation to the total production of housing. This is a big debate; because not only are we trying to produce land in good conditions, but also land with a price according to the cost of land preparation or at least correlative to the process of producing

housing. This leads one to think that urban land is one of the most important elements in the production of housing.

In regards to land it is important to keep in mind the place in the city where housing is built that can be ordered in three spaces:

- 1). In the periphery of our cities incentives have more weight, which doesn't mean that in other places this will not happen, but here they have more weight; as has also been established with the sites and services program, progressive housing and new housing. In other words in the periphery, lower land prices compared to the built-up city tend to lead to a larger and more diversified housing offer.
- 2). In the built-up areas, public policy has given priority attention to improvements in the production of certain deficient services related to transportation, recreation and the environment, mainly through the use of bond emission. Also new housing has been constructed on the land where old buildings have been demolished.
- 3). In historic centres the principal policy has been housing rehabilitation, while population decreases, land use changes and the habitat deteriorates. Even more, if one thinks of Latin America where the population living in historic centres is mostly of low income sectors. It seems there is the dilemma of gentrification, which is nothing more than improving infrastructure and improving housing in order to achieve a population turnover -or a proposal for social mobility of a population which lives there in order to improve the conditions and quality of life. In the first option what happens is a process of population expulsion towards the periphery (which doesn't resolve the problem) and the replacement by high and middle income sectors that move to these central areas. With this space clearly it is necessary to fight against segregation and urban fragmentation throughout the city, because housing policies in one place are connected to those of other urban spaces.

The gated or closed urbanization must be mentioned, practically sovereign places, as a new element of stigmatization and generation of new forms of segregation, unknown until recently. It is the other face of housing scarcity and poverty, but it is also part of the breakdown in the rationale of making a city through housing. The production of costly housing for high income populations does not in any way guarantee making a city.

The fourth aspect, stemming from the previous conclusion, is the relation between patrimony and housing, a theme that requires greater debate, because in the context of the return to the built-up city, now a product of a decreasing rhythm of urban population growth (less migration from the country and less agricultural growth), the built-up zones, and the historic and central centres gain greater importance.

Patrimony, by definition, is that which exists and that which one has. There is patrimony more attached to the notion of antiquity, as well as patrimony that has a greater aesthetic quality; but in general patrimony is everything, including the good and the bad housing. Concerning this, the problem that exists with gentrification processes is that they are not democratic processes of the transfer and appropriation of patrimony. This then becomes rather exclusive because what gentrification does is involuntarily displace some sectors of the population so that other people will come with more resources, without resolving the problem of the displaced. To the contrary they are put at a greater disadvantage because they move to places where their participation in the surrounding work and service sectors is more vulnerable and more complex.

If there were a democratic understanding of patrimony one would comprehend that housing is the greatest social patrimony which our cities have. For this reason, the thesis which is currently discussed in Latin America of building active central cities is a key; it is vital to not build museums but liveable housing that people can acquire and live in. In this sense, one does not try to conserve patrimony but to transform it, to give value to the past, as an historic value; to give more time to the present, and to give greater historic value to that which exists because in that way we will not only generate a greater quality of housing, but also a built patrimony to be occupied both socially and democratically.

In fifth place, I want to point out -because it is not discussed -the need to debate housing in the nomadic world in which we live, establishing the importance of redefining what housing is in the context of the globalization process and of demographic and technological transformation.

International migration is substantially modifying the sense of what housing is because families transform housing: the patriarchal or single parent household is changing and disappearing. Today the mother or father is not the head of household; this may be the uncle, the grandmother or a close neighbour; bringing about great changes in the relations of the nuclear family. There is a marked demographic change caused by the migration phenomena which tends to modify housing. It is probable that in many cases one family may have two houses and this brings up an interesting policy question. Families and houses have to be rethought in different places given situations in which the same family may live in two different places, in different spaces, one at a time. What we have today is the same family which lives in one house here and another house there, which are for all practical purposes the same residential unit.

In this context, it is important to understand the role of the remittances: in many Latin American countries, houses are in reality sold in New York, San Francisco or Madrid markets for immigrant families, for whom no money has to be sent home because families are not paying for houses where the house is located but rather they are paying directly where they now live, at the place of immigration not at the origin of emigration.

Furthermore, observing the technological changes of recent years, it is clear that there have been serious consequences in housing construction and, above all, in its concept. Formerly, the kitchen had to be a big space because cooking was done with charcoal and this required a large amount of oxygen. Later cooking was done with gas, then electrical energy and today there are microwave ovens, with the effect that kitchens become smaller and integrate other spaces. For this reason, the spaces of the kitchen and dining room are today practically integrated -and the development of lofts is nothing more than the result of technological evolution.

With these two examples (changes in the families and in technology) we have to begin to understand the house not only as a static product but also as something highly flexible and dynamic.

In sixth place, departing from the definition of the city as a public space, as defined by Oriol Bojigas, the housing discussion take place within the public realm. If we accept that housing is a right, obviously we are then talking not just about housing but about public space. The public and the private are not differentiated by title but by conditions of citizenship, that is to say by rights and obligations. For instance, there is a debate in respect to the housing facade: is the facade part of the private space of the house, or part of the public space? The impression that exists is that the facade has more to do with the public space and less with the individualization

which one seeks in the collective world.

In this context of the public space, the themes of mobility and accessibility of the population for improving their housing were discussed. According to Manuel Castells, with globalization we are moving beyond the space of places to the space of flows. This leads us to build even more space for the automobile and mass transportation, in detriment to spaces for bicycles, pedestrians and getting together in parks. This becomes even more so if priority is given to the flow of information, of persons, and of goods above gathering places. What is happening is that we are losing the city.

In Latin America, the public plaza is an urban product on the way to extinction. The plaza has almost disappeared with modern urbanization. There is a marvellous definition of Ortega y Gasset which says that the plaza is like a rifle that has an empty space to be filled with iron. This metaphor allows the author to say that the plaza is an empty space to be filled with city. If we lose the plaza, if the plaza disappears, the city disappears: then we have to make spaces where people can get together, where people can talk, with which they can identify, and establish a presence; where the city can find a certain order and definition.

In seventh place, there is the need to produce new housing for the new urbanism. A great many of the components which have been analyzed during this Congress indicate that there is a new housing and a new city; that is to say a new relation between these two, even more so when the greater part of land use of our cities is for housing. If we have new housing, obviously we have new urbanism, but if we have a new city, then obviously we will have new housing. Housing must be understood with great flexibility, due to the multiple changes which contemporary society is undergoing. From this vantage, there is a key question: what should be housing policies in the context of the flexibility of housing and cities?

In eighth place, it is important to establish policies in the scope of the newly emerging government models. In this field, the first distinction must be made with two elements of state that have been around in recent time: on the one hand the privatization process and on the other, decentralization. This raises the question with respect regarding who should produce housing: the public or private sector, the local or national level. There is also the issue of establishing policies where national financial proposals are interlinked with the development of local programs, leading to a situation where national policies are carried out locally. We must not forget this aphorism: uTell me with whom you are financing and I will tell you who you are.1) Furthermore, one must bear in mind that in Latin America there are notable societal transformations and they have a significant influence when drawing up housing policies; that is social participation.

4. Recommendations

To conclude we can formulate some recommendations:

First, the need to bring back the theme of urban and land use planning, one that has been lost with time. It is absolutely necessary to maintain these topics in these congresses. Along these lines, there was a meeting of a group of people from the Inter American Planning Society (Sociedad Interamericana de Planificacion, SIAP) and we have decided to re-establish this institution. Unfortunately, SIAP lapsed into too long a recess, almost ten years without any activity. We have decided that SIAP must be brought back to life, bringing together the people who established it and new and younger people who can envision in a new planning scenario in the inter American context of this organization. It is good news that we will once again have SIAP in Latin America and in the United States.

A **second** recommendation is tied to the financial crisis topic, which originally was associated with mortgages and in this way to people's access to housing and the city. The problem of these people must be resolved because if it isn't, they will not have access to housing nor to the city. We will, instead, have an exodus which will increase exclusion and increase world wide poverty.

A **third** recommendation relates to an element present in many of the papers, and that is the need to incorporate social participation. Without the users, without citizens, it will be very difficult to survive the housing problem of great magnitude. We have to find new channels for representation and we have to build new channels for participation for this process.

In **fourth** place, housing must be thought of in a comprehensive framework: "Housing beyond its Walls". I believe that the metaphor of the Congress theme is very apt as it enables us to understand housing beyond building bricks. Housing must be seen in this dimension of multiple interrelations: the city, the family, technology, culture. policies; because of this housing is without doubt a universal right.

To conclude, I thank the people who helped me to gather the information from each one the sessions in which the ninety nine papers were discussed. I am not a notary who can swear to that which was discussed in all session of the Congress; and for this reason each one of you must draw your own conclusions.

I cannot end this intervention without recognizing the immense effort of Martha Bravo of the Puerto Rico Planning Society. In many conversations people have told me of her work in organizing this Congress. I too have been witness to her dedication, organization and knowledge. A special thank you to this Ecuadorian without equal.

Many thanks to everyone.