Different approaches to Slum Upgrading

From Forced Eviction to In situ Upgrading

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1   Factors Shaping Urban Shelter Design

1.1   Background

In many developing countries where the highest rates of urbanization are located, providing shelter is a main issue; high land values and the power on decision maker's hands allow spontaneous settlements, this spontaneous settlements reveal the spatial dimension of contemporary urban stratifications (UN-Habitat, 2003) and this leads to what I consider an important conflict: quality and quantity of Urban Shelters start to become opposite. For the design of these Urban Shelters we should consider economical, political, cultural, social, ethnical and spatial factors, but economical and political are the ones that influence the most regarding the city context in which these shelters are located.

An estimated 1 billion people live in urban slums[1] and this number is increasing by 25 million each year; this means that more than half of the world's poor will live in cities by 2035 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2006). Half of the urban growth corresponds to informal housing sector,

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[1] 'Slum', at its simplest, is 'a heavily populated urban area characterized by substandard housing and squalor'. (Webster, 1994)

is estimated that by 2040 there will be 2 billion slum dwellers and slums will be housing one third of the total of urban population. (United Nations, 2007)

According to Mercado and Uzín (1996) slum formation is originated by: urban migration, concentration of services and resources to a few large cities, and inadequate housing policies for the current rate of urban growth, to this concept UN-Habitat(2003) adds marginalization of poor neighborhoods, inability of the urban poor to access affordable land for housing, insufficient investment in new low-income housing and poor maintenance of the existing housing stock as some of other aspects to justify spontaneous settlements.

Governments have responded to informal settlements in three broad ways – by permanently moving squatters to sites newly developed elsewhere, by temporarily moving them so that existing camps can be bulldozed and redeveloped for their return, or by incrementally improving the community where it stands without relocating residents. (Jiusto, 2012), the aim of this paper is to analyze the different responses to Slums by the government and community itself, the way they can be upgraded and what we should or should not include in a neighbourhood and housing design.

1.2   Features of slums

In cities where the competition for land and profits is intense due to the relation between rapid urban growth and land value expectations (Ottensmann, 1977), the poorest have the only choice to settle in high-risk and barely habitable sites, such as hill-sides, garbage dumps and river banks, those places only affordable and accessible to the poor later become in negative parts of a developing and growing city, slum residents are deprived of several or all of the most basic municipal services, such as water supply, sanitation and solid waste collection, and they frequently lack access to social services (The World Bank, 2004).

However, slums not only have negative features, they are adept at producing the services and commercial activities that the formal sector fails to provide through the mobilization of local enterprise and industry (UN-Habitat, 2003) and fulfill in a better way the poor's needs for shelter with "easy" access to housing, yet with

poor infrastructure. Designing and planning a city anticipating future settlements according to urban growth will not be enough to eradicate the potential damage they cause, a process of slum upgrading seems to be the most convenient decision; an upgrading that according to Jiusto (2012) can be made by the government or community itself.

1.3 Approaches to Slum Upgrading

According to Cities Alliance (1991), slum upgrading consists in an integrated approach that aims to put into motion the economic, social, institutional and community activities that are needed to turn around downward trends in an area, however David Satterthwaite (2012) defines "upgrading" as a term given to measures to improve the quality of housing and the provision of housing-related infrastructure and services to settlements that are considered to be (or officially designated as) 'slums' or that developed illegally (including squatter settlements).

Nevertheless national approaches to slums, and to informal settlements in particular, have generally shifted from negative policies such as forced eviction[2], benign neglect and involuntary resettlement[3], to more positive policies such" as self-help and in situ upgrading, enabling and rights-based policies (UN-Habitat, 2003).

While forced eviction, benign neglect and involuntary resettlement polices took place in a political environment predominated by centralized decision making and a non-democratic urban management, the self help and in situ upgrading policies focus on providing basic services, secure tenure of land and innovative access to credit according to the economic profile.

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[2] The General Comment Number 7 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1997) defines "forced eviction" as the permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/ or communities from their homes and/ or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal other protection.

[3] Resettlement is defined by UN HABITAT Global Land Tool Network (GLTN, 2010) as the provision of shelter, basic services and infrastructure, livelihood opportunities and security of tenure to displaced families in the place of relocation, or, on return, in their place of origin.

Even when Mercado and Uzín (1996) remark that each spontaneous settlement is unique, because of diversities in the social conditions of the residents, in the institutions and the infrastructure of each city, upgrading approaches seem to be done regardless the circumstances they are located, especially those related with involuntary relocation.

With the unnecessary process of eradication and destruction of house blocks, the relocated households tended to move back to slum accommodation where their needs in terms of economic and education were better fulfilled that in relocation areas, creating more problems than solutions; therefore relocation or involuntary resettlement of slum dwellers should, as far as possible, be avoided, except in cases where slums are located on physically hazardous or polluted land, or where densities are so high that new infrastructure (especially water and sanitation) cannot be installed. (UN-Habitat, 2003).

Slum policies should be integrated with broader, people-focused urban poverty reduction policies that deal with the varied aspects of poverty, including employment and incomes, shelter, food, health, education and access to basic urban infrastructure and services. (UN-Habitat, 2007), some of the most successful upgrading programmes have been driven by local NGOs working with residents and their organizations who then built partnerships with local governments. (Satterthwaite, 2012).

As a result of a relocation project we have the clear example of a Forced Eviction and Forced Relocation in Nigeria from Maroko in 1990, where the new homes for most were no better than those they had in Maroko. In all areas of investigation – housing, services, facilities, neighbourhood ties and cohesion – research shows that the situation became worse rather than better, as officially promised (Agbola & Jinadu, 1997).

Viratkapan and Perera (2004) have investigated the factors that contribute to the acceptance or rejection of slum relocation projects in Bangkok and have determined external and internal factors; according to them a key external factor is location, in terms of proximity to the main road, sub center and local market,

some of the internal factors are the strength of both community and leadership, participation of the community members and their attitude towards new location; easy access to livelihood opportunities is one of the main keys to the acceptance of slum upgrading programmes, livelihood strategies should be dynamic in every way to be able to deal with dynamic vulnerability context.

Even when the obstacles remain mostly in the political aspects, the attempt of including the community through beneficiary-led resettlement programmes and the changes in the housing policies towards an incentive for affordable housing is an improvement, such is the case of Pom Mahakan in Bangkok, that illustrates how a small community of 300 people, through action and innovation, has tried to open up spaces for the formulation and consideration of creative alternatives to eviction (Du Plessis, 2005).

During the slum upgrading process not only local governments can be involved, there are NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations) and CBO's (Community Based Organizations) that work with both community and governments and together develop a participatory process, leading the community to a self sufficiency with technical assistance during the housing construction and upgrading.

2   Design   of   Sustainable   Shelter   and Neighbourhoods

After analyzing slum upgrading and the different approaches, we can totally realize that even in time these approaches have changed the way they have been carried out; going from a complete social exclusion to an integrated planning makes us realize the importance of integrating the community in the slum upgrading process.

But this community planning may be more meaningful and comprehensible to local communities than region-wide strategic planning where methods are simpler and inexpensive. (Jenkins, Smith and Wang, 2007), we can say that it can be used

in a neighbourhood and shelter design, and that this approach will ensure sustainability in time just because of being a community-based process.

Participatory plans roles include engaging more proactively with broad population groups on strategic and local planning issues, re-assessing the land rights of indigenous groups or informal urban settlement residents and re-defining the design and management of "public space". This can as well strengthen not only the community feeling but the sense of ownership in a way to secure maintenance of the relocation site.

3   The Role of Architects

After discussing slum upgrading and the importance of including a participatory planning in a resettlement or in situ upgrading process, I've come to the conclusion that architects and their role in urban design go further than just that, design; the social aspect is being left aside and in the end we are trying to solve the social aspects as a problem or a consequence of bigger issues when the main conflict occurs when we decide to not think about it in the first place.

Jenkins, Smith and Wang (2007) describes three paradigms for planning processes; the first one "design-based and reliant on a 'command-control' framework for implementation" and emerged right after the Second World War; the second paradigm that emerged in the 60's focused on "rational decision-making on the basis of large amount of data, seeing urban areas as set of systems guided through structure plans"; and the third paradigm that emerged mainly in the 90's that describes planning as a "political decision-making process in which values are relatives, knowledge socially constructed and contested, and which requires arenas for negotiation and dialogue, this being instrumentalised mainly through participatory approaches to planning". The third paradigm is the closest approach to community planning, where the architects can start to act as community architects and not only as planners or designers.

According to Luansang, Boonmahathanakorn and Domingo-Price (2012) community architects keep a horizontal relationship with people and try to break

the professional−people gap, they not only promote a participatory planning process but describe the architect as a "facilitator" instead of a "decision-maker" actor. With a more human approach like community planning, architects can provide space for community to express their ideas and resolve issues and conflicts; they can help translate people's ideas and relegate the power, opportunity and task of 'planning and designing' to the people.

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