

PLANNED URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE THIRD WORLD: NEW DIRECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last 40 years, there has been an enormous increase in the level of urbanization in the Third World. Whereas in 1950, less than 100 million people in developing countries lived in urban areas, by 1985 this had reached billion. Estimates for the year 2000 suggest that nearly 1.9 billion people in developing countries will live in towns and cities; which will represent two-thirds of the world's urban population. (UNCHS, 1986).

The results of this massive growth have and will continue to be profound. It is expected that by the year 2000, eight of the ten largest urban agglomerations will be in the developing world (UNCHS, 1986). This urban growth results in a number of serious problems. These include high levels of urban unemployment and underemployment, extreme pressures upon urban services and infrastructure, congestion, pollution as well as other forms of environmental deterioration, and significant shortfalls in the provision of housing for new urban residents.

Over the last 30 years, shelter has frequently been viewed as the primary weapon in the Third World's fight to improve living conditions among this rapidly growing number of urban poor. As a result, a bewildering array of policies have been initiated in various countries as a means of improving the size of the housing stock, almost all with disappointing results. Consequently, recent urban development programmes appear to be moving in new directions, with increasing emphasis being placed on the provision of low-cost infrastructure schemes, and as a result, environmental improvements.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the process that has been followed to meet the challenge of rapid urban growth and to explore the success of such processes. This in turn may well have implications for the training of planners who will be working in the developing world in future.

HOUSING POLICY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Prior to the 1960s development economists gave a fairly low priority to housing issues in the national development planning process. The reason for this was

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straightforward: the sector was considered to be unproductive. Instead, such economists favoured investment priorities which were directed at industry, energy generation and transport, sectors which were viewed as growth generating and hence able to pay for themselves over time.

In the 1960s, however the low priority according housing began to change, although this did not necessarily mean that more housing would result. Although we can see the contributions of people like Charles Abrahams beginning to emerge into the urbanization and housing debate (Abrams, 1964) the loudest voice heard was far more likely to be that of Oscar Lewis, the American anthropologist who was interested in determining how individuals at the very bottom of the economic pecking order viewed their position and the future that they saw for themselves and their children (Lewis 1951, 1961 and 1966). Only an irresponsible government, it was argued, would spend scarce resources on such a group to provide them with housing when the money could be spend on 'nation building' investments such as industry and transportation systems.

By the late 1960s, however, housing policy with respect to the poor was clearly in a transitional stage. Largely as a result of the studies and contributions by John Turner (1967, 1976) and William Mangin (1963, 1967). It was argued that the poor were just as rational as the middle and upper income classes in terms of a response to their situation, but that the squatter shack which had been viewed by Lewis as evidence of social malaise, was in fact a rational step on the way to self improvement. Turner argued strongly that if the poor could be given security of tenure for a plot of land in a favourable location, then through progressive improvement the squatter shack would be transformed into a respectable house and would represent the savings of the particular family involved.

To the governments of developing countries who were faced with almost daily demands by the poor to do something to improve their situation, the arguments of Turner and Mangin had tremendous appeal. Clearly self-improvement implied self-help and to governments, self-help is a free good. Such policies seemed to offer to hard pressed governments a way of solving housing problems on the cheap. Any government, regardless whether it is of a developed or developing countries, places very high priority on anything that can be done on the cheap.

Schemes of this kind involve the provision of tracts of urban land which are divided into plots and provided with basic supporting services. A title to the plots could be either sold or leased to those who wished to build their own houses on them. The World Bank became deeply involved in supporting sites and service schemes throughout the developing world and by 1983, had funded more than 70 such projects (Cahen , 1983).

In retrospect, it is clearly obvious that the major advantage of the sites and services approach have been that it provided a quite economic way of formally shifting the housing burden from government.

Certain inherent disadvantages became associated with the approach of sites and services as well. Almost inevitably, the most important of these had to do with costs.

THE PROBLEM OF COST

A central issue in the cost recovery/cost control processes was the problem of building standards. Whereas developed countries may well be able to afford high standards in construction and layout to achieve perfectly understandable aims, it does not necessarily follow that a Third World nation should adopt these Western standards which might be totally inappropriate to their own climatic, cultural and economic circumstances (Mabogunje et. al., 1978)

The result of the imposition of such standards inevitably means that costs begin to rise. As costs begin to rise, it becomes increasingly difficult for poor families, the target group for such shelter provision, to meet the repayments required under full cost recovery policies and as a result, places their hold on such property in jeopardy. In one sense, this entire issue is related to the degree of involvement of government in cases of this sort. From the point of view of the poor, two extreme points along this continuum of possible points of government involvement would seem to be optimal. The first of these, at one extreme of the continuum, is for governments to build the house and give them to the poor free of charge. The second point on the continuum, at the opposite extreme and no doubt somewhat less desirable to recipients, is for government to stay out of the shelter provision altogether and to merely let people get on with providing their own houses with guarantees of secure tenure. To governments, on the other hand, although the former may be financially unfeasible, the latter seems to be bureaucratically undesirable. The result is a middle of the continuum compromise which increases costs but puts constraints on the freedom of the people involved.

It is land standards that seem to cause one of the most serious cost problems associated with projects of this type. In low income housing projects which are organized by government, plot sizes are frequently larger than necessary as planners wish to avoid the potential criticism of building slums. There also seems to be a tendency for the land provision to be designed not for low cost structures being built at the time, but for some imaginary standard twenty years in the future. As a result, too much land is used and land prices are bid up.

Another problem sometimes occurs if land standards are set too high. In central city areas pressure from the poor on existing land resources is usually greatest due to their understandable desire. Projects in such areas which provide excessive plot sizes are likely to find that the residents sub-divide the plots themselves and rent or sell them to others. This is a particular danger when full economic costs are charged for the plot. The result is the types of overcrowding and possibly even slum creation that authorities were attempting to avoid (Choguill, 1985).

If genuine land provision is included within the project design, then frequently such projects are relegated to the periphery of the area, the only place such acreages are available, and this results jobs in the informal sector occur in the centre of the town, a peripheral location does little more than add to the cost of transport of the project participants and reduces the desirability of the project to them.

CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATION

The inability to control project cost on sites and service schemes as a result of government intervention into the shelter field, frequently results in strict criteria about who is and who should not be admitted to such a programme. After reviewing its own shelter projects in El Salvador, the Philippines, Senegal and Zambia, the World Bank concluded that such projects were affordable of families down to the 20th income percentile. (Kearne and Parriss, 1982, P. Vi).

Although strictly interpreted, this means that one fifth of the income distribution is excluded from participation in such projects, in reality given the small number of people at such low incomes who might through one means or another gain admission to the projects, such exclusion usually means something closer to the bottom 40% of that distribution.

Frequently, the exclusion provisions are quite explicit. For example, in the World Bank's El Salvador sites and services project, partially as a result of a design income range, participation probably extended down to between the 17th and 24th income percentiles, although the majority were from the third, fourth and fifth income decile (Ibid, P. 2). The Indian project at Kanpur was specifically designed for households with incomes between the 15th and 24th income percentiles.

In other cases the constraints which lead to exclusion can be more subtle. In the first Tanzanian National Sites and Services Project, again financed by the World Bank, applicants for construction loans needed to built their own accommodation were required to have saving amounting to Tsh. 2,290 in order to qualify for money from the Tanzanian Housing Bank. As the average income of the low income groups was no more than Tsh. 380 per month, this requirement was an almost insurmountable barrier for the poor. (Bamberger, 1982, PP. 39-40)

The selectivity that results from such financial constraints can be devastating to shanty town economies. Peattie argues that such projects tend to cream off the more established members of the working class, leaving behind in the unorganized system those who are less successful. An advantage of the heterogeneous economic mix in such communities is that demand for goods and services tends to trickle down from the more successful to the less so. If the high income groups are removed from the community to participate in sites and services schemes, the result may be the creation of what Peattie refers to as a 'sharply defined underclass' (Peattie, 1982, P. 136).

It is apparent that although sites and services may offer certain advantages in housing development programmes, in terms of incomes of the target population, it is still an expensive approach to the solution of the shelter problem. Partly as a result of this, the World Bank has shifted its own emphasis from, to use Blair's terminology, 'retailer' to 'wholesaler' in urban development finance, from lending for specific projects to something more like 'lending directly to strengthen national and government-created metropolitan authorities so that they can choose projects themselves' (Blair, 1983, P. 143). At present,

only two national governments, Tanzania and Sudan, are known to incorporate sites and services as part of their national housing policy.

Instead, the search goes on for cheaper alternatives and one such alternative is the upgrading of existing communities.

THE ROLE OF UPGRADING

Upgrading schemes are usually designed for areas of the city which are already built up, such as the edges of central or commercial areas. The objective here is to transform areas which were frequently developed outside the legal system but which continue to provide residences which are convenient to employment opportunities and are popular with their occupiers. Rather than resort to total clearance, emphasis is directed to the installation of infrastructure, such as water and sewers, possibly to the rearrangement of at least some parts of the layout, to the extension of whatever social services may be available, to the legislation of tenure and sometimes to the provision of financial and building assistance which could be used to improve house and business premises.

Martin identifies four advantages of upgrading. (Martin, 1983, P. 52) First, it preserves existing economic systems and opportunities for the urban poor. Second, it preserves the low cost housing stock already in existence at its present location. Third, it preserves the community structure and the safeguards that already exist for the family and the community group. Finally, the alternative, resettlement, is socially disruptive, usually occurs at a less favourable location, involves high community costs and reduces access to informal employment.

Although upgrading has in recent years been attempted by a wide range of governments, in the academic literature on housing and planning, it has received relatively little attention. This is indeed unfortunate, as without doubt the per unit cost of improvement is much lower than can be achieved in the sites and service approach. As Yeh has observed, existing case studies of upgrading are essentially non-comparative, in part because of the diversity of settlements which exist (Yeh, 1981, P. 209). Despite the problems caused by diversity, however, the strengths of such an approach appear to be clear cut and given the potential economic advantages, it would be expected that upgrading should become increasingly popular as a way of improving existing shanty towns.

THE EMERGING IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Even upgrading involves costs which may be beyond the capabilities of a number of national governments. As a result, some authorities have experimented with even cheaper approaches. In Tanzania, for example, an experiment 'sites without services' has been carried out. Obviously this particular approach is based very firmly on the assumption that if secure tenure is provided, through self-help, beneficiaries in such projects will construct not only their houses, but also infrastructure. In fact, the whole issue of infrastructure is receiving increasing attention due to its extreme importance in reducing morbidity, improving health, providing a basis for environmental improvement and possibly most

important of all, in reducing to drudgery and labour that is an inherent part of living in low-income communities (Megerry, 1987, P. 15).

One reason for this increasing concern with infrastructure, in particular water supply, sewerage disposal and drainage, is that many cities of the developing world are woefully undersupplied with such equipment. Perhaps an extreme example of this is Dhaka, Bangladesh, with a population of somewhat over 3,000,000, but which has a piped water supply which reaches only 67,000 houses and a sewerage disposal system with only 8,500 connections (Choguill, 1988). The Dhaka situation is by no means a typical of cities in the developing world. The United Nations Center for Human Settlements recently reported that, in 1983, no more than 57% of the African urban population had access to a drinking water supply compared with 65% of the urban population in the Asian and Pacific region and 78% of the Latin American and Caribbean urban population. In rural areas, the figures were much lower (UNCHS, 1987, P. 79).

One reason for the low provision of service is the high cost of providing utilities to communities in developing countries. In a recent study, Franceys and Cotton analysed eight housing projects in four different countries. In these studies they concluded that the average investment cost in infrastructure was 64% of the total site development cost, but this percentage varied from 54% to as high as 70% (Franceys and Cotton, 1989). The authors suggested that one of the reasons for the high cost of this infrastructure was that it was usually designed by engineers according to conventional standards and bye-laws appropriate for contractor-built middle income housing. This seems to suggest that in designing for low income communities, a unique form of infrastructure may be required. Indeed, it is possible to differentiate between 'town systems', that is water and sewage disposal systems built using conventional Western, technology, and 'low cost systems', a category which may be based on appropriate technology, such as hand pumps, pour-flush latrines and similar approaches. A failure to recognize this important distinction has led frequently in the past to wasted investments.

Although infrastructure based on such intermediate technology may be considered by some to be inferior to the more expensive, engineer designed equipment, there is little doubt that the low cost approach meets the basic objectives with respect to health of such infrastructure. At the same time, such low cost approaches frequently involve the self-help of the recipients in planning, design and implementation phases of such a project. It follows that whereas engineer designed systems in developing countries are frequently plagued with maintenance problems of one sort or another, the same does not hold true of the low technology approach. Sophisticated infrastructure which cannot be maintained produces no benefits and when used in low income neighborhoods, frequently deteriorates very quickly. Franceys and Cotton suggest that the ideal approach to infrastructure provision is 'to maximize the involvement and responsibility of householders and minimize the role of the urban authority and/or any external agency' (Ibid, 1989).

Although some might argue that this emphasis placed on the role of infrastructure is a classic case of planning imperialism and that such activities should be left to engineering specialists, it is argued here that the physical planner must be involved in

such development. The skills required to develop housing areas which incorporate low technology infrastructure still involve land-use planning, but also the ability to promote community development from below and an understanding of the economics of housing development. There is no reason to believe that such skills are incompatible with those of physical planning. Although engineers must be involved in these processes, there has been a tendency in the past for them to seek high technology solutions to the problems they face, and again, this may be one area where the planner can be of value in the development debate because of his own training in more human-related fields.

Thus it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the current emphasis on low-cost infrastructure based on appropriate technology is little more than a natural progression which begins with the 'culture of property', passes through 'progressive improvement', 'self-help' and 'upgrading' and has finally become a variant of approaches to 'community development'. Urban physical planning has been involved in each step of this progression. Although new skills may be required if the planner is to continue his involvement, such has been the case of each step of the progression.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper an attempt has been made to trace through the major policy influences and instruments which have had an effect on Third World urban improvement programmes, particularly housing, over recent years. It has been a period of significant change. As noted, in the 1960s those charged with housing responsibilities interpreted their task as one of building houses for the poor. The houses produced were too frequently inappropriate for the needs of the target population and were, unless generously subsidized, too expensive as well. Under the influence of the writings of Turner and Mangin, by the end of the decade there began a gradual withdrawal of government involvement in housing provision and a greater reliance on self-help principles. In terms of government housing policy, these ideas were translated into sites and services schemes and slum upgrading programmes. Certain problems associated with the approach have been identified and considered within this paper. As a result of these problems, increasing emphasis has been placed on the role of infrastructure on urban development within the developing world.

Three conclusions would seem to follow from the analysis which has been presented:

First, it is apparent that government has not been particularly successful in meeting the shelter requirements of the urban populations of developing countries. In fact, there appears to be some evidence to suggest that the relationship between involvement of government in shelter provision and the accomplishment of objectives concerned with shelter may be an inverse one. The most recent developments in this field which have been identified, in particular, the 'sites without services' approach, government involvement is almost at minimal levels.

Second, the importance of economic problems and constraints in achieving objectives with respect to housing and urban development are very important indeed. In fact, it has been costs relative to income that have prevented further accomplishments within this

area. It must be realized that housing is merely one part of the development process and without a comprehensive approach which will lead to income generation and further and better jobs for the poor within the community, accomplishments within the housing urban development field are likely to continue to be disappointing. It is only if real incomes can be increased that progress within this area is likely to result.

Third, the analysis included in this paper would seem to have certain implication for the training of planners from developing countries that is currently place within the European schools of planning. Too frequently we are content at providing for our students general principles on land use planning and the knowledge of our national laws and regulations which constrain and govern the planning systems in our own particular country. If my interpretation of history in the housing and urban development field is correct, it would seem that new skills would be required for planers from developing countries who are currently being trained by us. These would involve the skill to promote and co-ordinate community development, particularly development from below, in contrast to highly centralised government-led efforts that have characterised past endeavours within the field. Anyone who is involved in community development must have the skills of a diplomat and this is something that we should attempt to develop in our students. It is evident that economics is a key subject within this area and the skills of economic analysis, particularly with respect to low income housing and urban development, should be central to our teaching curricula.

Finally, further knowledge of infrastructure, including at least some introduction to the technology of such equipment, would seem to be an essential input to our training for students from developing countries if they are to fulfil their full role as planners in the poorest cities of the developing world.

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