

Access to Housing in Spain and in Philippines

One common need for two different realities



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1 Factors Shaping Urban Shelter Design

The factors of housing design and its consequences differ from country to country. While in The Philippines, almost one housing unit is missing every eighteen people, in Spain there are three units empty for the same amount of people.

According to Raquel Rodriguez, the analysis of housing stock and its evolution in each territory is determined by the relation between the capacity of the stock (people per unit) and the size of the units (people per unit). Data from FEDERCASA and Eurostat statistics of 2005 place household capacity in Spain to 1,9 people per unit, and the size of the dwellings to 2,9. The mismatch between the two rates leads to a big amount of empty dwellings in the country.

It means that in Spain the average size of each housing unit is able to accommodate almost 3 people while it is being built around 1 unit for 2 people. So, 2 shelters are needed every 6 habitants and 3 shelters are built instead. For every 6 habitants, 1 unit will be empty.

The National Statistic Office in Philippines place the size household to 4,6 people and “there is an estimated housing need of 3,7 million units” (Ballesteros, p.5), which means that, considering the whole country

population 92 million; around 17 million people are homeless or living in informal settlements. So, 1,3 shelters are needed every 6 habitants and there is instead 1 shelter. For every 6 habitants, 0,3 shelters are missing.

These inequalities are significant according to the facts exposed, but if the average unit sizes in square meters are added, the differences between the two countries will be more revealing. The average size of a unit in Spain is 80sqm and in The Philippines is 30sqm. If the information is combined, in the first study case 160sqm are needed for every 6 habitants and instead 240sqm are built, while in the second case, 39sqm are needed for every 6 habitants and instead 30sqm are built. That means that in the whole first country studied there is a surplus of 61330 hectares and in the second, there is a lack of 14430 hectares.

Between both countries, the difference of housing situation is extreme. Moreover, out of this data, it's seen how different are the urban shelter shapes related to density and built heritage within diverse territories.

Spain and Philippines have been in different contexts. The first has been part of the considered “developed world” and the second, part of the “developing world”. Both countries faced or are facing, respectively, a rapid urbanization process. According to Jenkins, there are “main issues that need to be faced concerning planning and housing in situations of rapid urbanization:

- a) How do the **contextual trends and histories of urban development** condition the realities of urbanisation, urban land occupation and forms of shelter?
- b) What **forms of investment** are likely to be available in urban areas for public and private interventions, this being affected by: overall economic possibilities; governance structures which can guide and distribute economic surplus; and the socio-cultural forms of need and demand?
- c) What are the current (formal and informal) **processes for planning and housing and who benefits and how** – with a

particular focus on how can rising values of property in urban areas benefit the majority?” (Jenkins, p.298)

Based on Jenkins’ points and according the study about Spanish housing situation by Ada Colau and Adrià Alemany in the book Vides hipotecades, and the study Innovative Urban Tenure in the Philippines: Challenges, approaches and institutionalization by UN-Habitat; the factors of housing will be analyzed.

1- Contextual trends and histories of urban development

Political trend

According to Jenkins, housing development in the north during the period 1960-1990 “was in line with the dominant macro-economic state management approach of the time – Keynesianism – which advocated the stimulation of economic growth through supporting increasing demand.” (Jenkins, p.154). The business dictionary defines that “Keynesian economists urge and justify a government’s intervention in the economy through public policies that aim to achieve full employment and price stability.” (Businessdictionary.com).

In Spain, from Franco dictatorship period (1939-1975) till the beginning of the actual crisis (2007) the government’s intervention consisted in encouraging housing demand, since housing industry was a way to reduce unemployment and was gaining strength due to technical innovations and availability of investors. Nowadays, even if the empty housing stock in Spain is considerable and homeless increase every year, the trend should not be about housing demand encouragement. Government’s intervention ought to be addressed to housing accessibility.

Property as a social control

The encouragement of housing demand in Spain was severe and redirected to homeownership instead of leasehold ship. The aim to be homeowner became a trend that settled gradually but deeply in people minds during the second half of the twentieth century. Based on the data exposed by Colau and Alemany, in 1950, in Spain there was five

homeowner for every five tenants and it grew till nine homeowner for every tenant in 2007.

“The (Spanish) Government in all its law and policies needs to acknowledge the right to housing and the social function of property” (Kothari, 2006). The right to housing it's recognized in Spanish constitution, but it has not always been observed. The property in Spain has not had a social function as Kothari declares, but it has been encouraged as a mechanism of social control of the popular sectors. As Colau and Alemany explain, during the end of francoism, to have the majority of the population being homeowners was a way to reduce the revolts of the working class. While during the period that goes from the end of the dictatorship (1975) till now, the property has been people's conviction to work during all life to be able to pay their mortgages.

This trend is a limitation of the tenant possibilities. A sector of the population has thus been excluded to housing accessibility.

Decrease of the public interventions

When the dictatorship ended in 1975, democracy was established in Spain. Between 1982 and 1996 socialist party (PSOE) governed, and it was during this period that The Welfare State was developed. After these years, right oriented party, Partido Popular, won the elections and it was during their governance (1996-2004) that the private sector started to gain terrain in opposition to the public interventions. This trend will be significant in the evolution of urban development in Spain.

2- Forms of investment

Property based on mortgages

The financial innovations and the entry of Spain in the European Union (1986) meant the integration of the national market in the global economy. This brought foreign investors, which drove the housing sector to make it an economic engine in the country. In 2002 the pesetas were displaced for the euro, which became the common currency in the country. This episode allowed the flow of credit coming from Germany to Spain and together with the reduction of interests, it helped to substantiate and

emphasize the property trend.

Housing sector was getting more and more active: developers were producing housing to supply people's demand (which was fed by the government and private developers), while a big percentage of the population was buying dwellings by getting into debt. The facilities that allowed the increase in the purchase by companies and individuals and the reduction of unemployment through the housing industry, contributed to economic growth in the country.

These forms of investment brought prosperity in the country and shelter for a big majority of the population, but housing was not treated any more as a human need but as a tool for economical growth within the state. As Miloon Kothari, an expert from United Nations on adequate housing declares after a visit to Spain in 2006, declares, "housing should be recognized as a basic human right and not as is currently the case, a mere commodity, to be bought and sold." (Kothari, 2006)

Public sector feeding private sector

As we have seen so far, the urban development in Spain during the last three decades was pushed mainly by the private sector. Even if the state's implication in housing development was not meaningfully, his role was to promote and support the private initiatives, to guarantee a constant economic growth. The main beneficiaries of the housing industry income were the private developers and the administration.

"Until this period (around 1950), public housing investment had been seen by most governments as predominantly a consumption expenditure and was not highly prioritised, but it now began to be seen as a potential motor of wider development and employment generation." (Jenkins, p.156). Considering the sentence of Jenkins and the definition of consumption expenditure: "expenses incurred in consumption, as opposed to expenses incurred in production of goods and services" (Businessdictionary.com), the practice of development concept in Spain worked during some decades, but after seeing the consequences of the process, its success should be questioned.

As Raquel Rodriguez says, the aim of housing policies in Spain should have guaranteed the accessibility to dwellings instead of guaranteeing a constant economic growth by building housing, which are not functional.

3- Processes for planning and housing and who benefits and how

The entrance of credit in Spain, the policies promoting the accessibility to the credit, the low mortgage interests and the spread ownership culture enabled and encouraged people to buy. The mortgages were available for a significant part of the population, even people with middle-low incomes, which were condemned to pay the mortgage for 40 to 50 years. As Colau and Alemany exemplify, the mortgage in Spain became a symbol of professional success, contrary to rentals that became a symptom of inferiority and failure.

These factors affected the processes for housing and its beneficiaries. As Alejandro Inurrieta explains, the administration was only mandated to provide the land for the private promoters, which were developing the project and managing housing offer, because for the public sector it was a process too complex and too expensive to carry out. That explains the lack of social housing in Spain, especially for rental, compared to other European countries.

“Spain seriously lacks public housing. The current housing programmes do not address the needs of the bottom 20-25% of the population. (...) Virtually all of the very low proportion of rental housing is in the private sector with only 2% of dwellings classified as social compared to 10-30% in other countries of the European Union. Moreover, although around 18% less than in the private market, the prices of public rental housing tends to be too high for some sectors of the population. Paradoxically, Spain possesses the largest number of vacant houses of the European Union.” (Kothari, 2006).

The overproduction of housing by private sectors didn't enhance accessibility because prizes were high compared to the salaries and they were constantly going up, to promote housing as a long-term inversion.

The fact that the conditions were more favorable for buying than for renting and housing prizes were high caused a reduction of possibilities to access to a dwelling. The social composition of a society was not into consideration.

It is interesting to see the relation of these figures. According to INE, the Spanish population in 2012 was more than 46 millions, including 22 938 of homeless. These shocking facts go hand in hand with 3,4M of empty living units.

The factors described above explain the unbalance between empty dwellings and homeless in Spain; the size and density of the dwellings; and the big heritage of housing stock.

2 Design of Sustainable Shelter and Neighbourhoods

Taken in consideration Spain and The Philippines study cases and the gravity of their actual housing situation, it could be affirmed that the processes of urbanization and shaping shelter design haven't been sustainable.

The Philippines and Spain are exposed to the same problem but in different contexts: In The Philippines there is a big housing deficit and the high cost of land in relation with the income of the majority of the population together with the inefficient land administration system, causes a limited access to urban land and a lack of tenure security for households. In Spain there is an excess of housing but the high cost of housing and mortgages doesn't guarantee shelter access for the homeless and tenure security for the habitants with low incomes and big debts.

“With regard to ‘development policies, the theme of poverty already emerged in the 1970s, when the president of the World Bank dramatically described the condition of those living in ‘absolute poverty’ and proposed that their ‘basic needs’ should be met in order gradually to integrate them into the economic system” (Rist, p.227)

During the last decades, facing the problems of housing access,

mainly for people with low incomes, and regarding 'development' aims, there have been innovative approaches about land management, tenure policies and housing provisions in developing countries. These approaches have been put into practice, although the constraints in social, economic and political realities in these territories, not always guaranteed the success of the implementation and the extension of beneficiaries.

According to UN-Habitat, in the Philippines, three approaches have been implemented to provide security of tenure and land accessibility: Community Mortgage Program, Presidential Land Proclamations and Usufruct Arrangement, with the purpose to supply "the increasing demands of their residents for services and secure tenure." (UN-Habitat).

As it is explain in the UN-Habitat report, The Community Mortgage Program helps groups of citizens to "buy and develop land, and own lots they occupy or wish to relocate to 'under the concept of community ownership'" (UN-Habitat, p.10) through loans.

Residential Land Proclamations is described as a "disposition of government-owned lands to their informal settler occupants through a land proclamation (...) some proclamations also involved privately-owned lands which the national government could acquire through expropriation or a simple negotiated purchase" (UN-Habitat, p.10).

Usufruct is a "property right that entitles beneficiaries to enjoy nearly all rights of ownership, except the right to have a legal title and to alienate, transfer or dispose property" (UN-Habitat, p.11).

These three approaches have different requirements and cover very diverse sectors, depending on their needs and possibilities but they all have the same aim: provide accessibility and secure tenure to the population. Ensure secure tenure is a way to reduce poverty among the citizens.

As a complement to the public investments and approaches, and thanks to the strong Filipino community organizations, it appeared, in the country, private alternatives of financing like community savings, microfinance and cooperatives.

Besides possible mismatch between theory and practice in the Philippines, “the assumption in the ‘developed world’ that it cannot learn from the ‘developing world’ is also false and arrogant” (Jenkins, p.307). For the Design of Sustainable Shelter and Neighborhoods, Spain may learn the sense of community of Pilipino society and of its initiatives as well as the complementation of public sector through the private.

In Spain, the private sector uses the public sector as a promoting tool and governmental policies serves the private initiatives to guarantee the economical growth of the country. In opposition, in the Philippines, the private sector complements the public. Private initiatives appear to overcome the constraints of the public capacities. Through policies, the production of social housing by the private sector is being encouraged: “Government policies have been largely instrumental in boosting the growth of private, developer-built social housing so that although they are not part of the housing bureaucracy, private developers producing and selling social housing units are becoming increasingly important actors in the social housing sector.” (UN-Habitat, p.29)

A strong sense of community is essential for the design of a sustainable shelter and neighborhood and as well for the improvement of it. I believe that a group of people with common context and needs can require a better accessibility and affordability to land and housing. Community may represent, also, an important indicator of needs and consequently of functional design criteria.

3 The Role of Architects

Considering that the main designers of sustainable shelter and neighborhood should be the people occupying them, based on their environment, context and needs. The Role of the Architect ought to be a technical advisor for the group of people sharing interests and necessities. The architect would be people’s tool to shape their suggestions.

According to Rist, the economic growth it should not be a requirement for a ‘better life’: “at the beginning of the new millennium,

when people with a background in advertising launched the ‘degrowth’ slogan and helped to lift the debate out of the quagmire of ‘sustainable development’ (...). It was as if, after years of torpor, a new form of protest was carrying the sword to the heart of the dominant system, doing battle with the belief on both right and left that economic growth was needed to absorb unemployment, preserve social gains and inspire everyone with the hope of a better life.” (Rist, p.241).

I firmly believe in Rist’s opinion and applying the ‘degrowth’ concept to architect’s field, architecture must be linked again to the ground and the context of each village, and above all, it should be humble. Jenkins wrote that the ‘developed world’ could learn from the ‘developing world’ and I think this relation of dependence is applicable to architect and customer. The association between them needs to be from equal to equal in order to learn one from the other. Humility, honesty and equality are the way to improve housing situation relating the design of urban shelter with people’s demand.

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