

# Promoting social cohesion for housing relocation projects

Possible tools and strategies for architects and planners in  
developing countries



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## 1. PRESENT SITUATION

Urbanization in developing countries has continued steadily during the last ten years. The rate of growth of the cities has been increasing and its projection for the next decades continues in the same direction. Slum areas are concentrated in the surroundings of the working centres and in risky areas exposed to natural disasters and health problems. Crowded areas without possibility of intervention in case of emergency and, in consequence, focus of health problems, floods or fires. In addition to all this risks, eviction is a possibility since most of the informal settlements are illegally squatting private or public land.

Providing housing for the population has become the biggest problem for governments of cities and municipalities, and massive housing programs are being developed. The lack of land in the cities has increased the prices so much that makes impossible for authorities to provide it in a nearby location. Quantity has taking precedence over quality and in most cases the solution has ended in simply moving the problem out of the city. Relocation projects have become marginal

cities disconnected from the urban fabric or enclosed within a different physical and social context. The total disconnection with the last location and the lack of communications causes the break with the old lifestyle and economical support.

#### Relocation, an economic problem

Sometimes the only benefit of the relocation project is providing a land title to the families through subsidies and mortgages that families have to pay in a period of time. But reality shows the big difficulties that beneficiaries have for making the payments since the beginning of the process. The possibility of getting a new job and an economic source becomes almost impossible since the projects only focus on housing. In addition, most of the projects do not provide commercial areas or forbid extensions and mixed use of the housing unit. All these factors block the possibility for setting up small businesses and hire people and in consequence to create an economic activity in the area. The result of all these limitations was the boom of a spontaneous informal economic activity, both on the streets and within the housing units, changing the character of the area. If the goal of these rules was to maintain the original appearance of the area, the final result was the blossoming of small and informal stands expanding the houses on the street even when it is forbidden.

#### Relocation, a social problem

Relocation projects have a huge impact in social relations breaking the social networks existing in the previous community and blocking the process of strengthen them. Lack of facilities, poor management, no economical income, very weak social ties, absence of local organizations and no relation with government agencies creates a situation of marginalization and the problem persists in the new location.

Danish Minister of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, Rikk Hulshøj explained the strategy against the situation of isolated neighbourhoods in Copenhagen in this way:

“The Danish government find it vital to stop the continuing trend towards “ghettoization”. The development of areas that are physically, socioculturally and economically isolated from the rest of the society is unacceptable. There are areas

where far many residents are outside the labour market, where far too many people altogether lack contact with the rest of society and where the imbalance in social and ethnic composition is too evident. In such areas there is a risk of parallel societies emerging.”

Relocation projects have a huge potential of failure so it is unacceptable taking as a solution for the cities in development countries what is the creation of a new problem. Other ways of acting in slums areas are being implemented like on site upgrading or self-help housing but the reality shows that in many cases these solutions are not possible, so the relocation is the only option.

#### Field trip to Metro Manila. The community as a solution

The field trip to Metro Manila in 2013 was included in the course Urban Shelter of the School of Architecture of Lund University in Sweden. The experience in Manila allowed to discover part of the reality of the relocation projects. The program included visits to several relocation projects of different levels of income and also an upgrading project. It was possible to do some interviews in every visit not only with the beneficiaries but also with the authorities, organizations and NGO's. The main conclusion was that the community has an incalculable value in the process, creating social networks, solving conflicts and offering help to special cases, managing facilities and infrastructures, and setting the frame where ideas from people participation can be developed and implemented.

#### INTRODUCTION

This paper tries to show how to promote the social cohesion and the creation of social networks in new neighbourhoods. Focusing in relocation projects, the aim is provide a series of tools and mechanisms that combined with the active action of the neighbours, NGO's and government agencies to make successful projects. The goal of the project is not only provide housing but also create the social networks, strengthen the community for promote democratization and independence in management and decision making, promoting the relation between neighbours and having a voice in the municipality.

The paper exposes some possible tools and strategies for architects, planners and government agencies focussing only in relocation projects. The goal is to change their minds, always guided by criteria of time and quantity instead of sustainable long term processes of quality, setting the community in the center becoming the main actor of the project.

In the case study of self-help housing in Costa Rica, the main actor is the community, or the group of families, at organizational, administrative and executive levels; contributing, in this way, to their own development. The evolution of a work model that aims at developing a neighbourhood: a community where social organization and mutual help give the residents a chance to break the stereotype pattern, where they can become involved in their new environment and create a better quality of life. (Astrand and Rodriguez, 1996)

The final goal is always to develop the community's ability for analyse, recognize, discuss and solve its own problems, without the involvement of external agencies. Participation processes of the community will foster decision-making in a democratic environment, becoming the basis of joint work on community tasks. Architects and planners must provide the frame to develop community strategies and government agencies must support the process to make possible to build both housing and the community. As the infrastructure for housing is built, social networks must also be built to allow the development of the community. Transform the construction of a house into build homes and communities. (Astrand and Rodriguez, 1996)

## 2. DESIGN OF SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS

### KEY ISSUES FOR RELOCATION PROJECTS

In this part, the paper exposes parameters that are important for relocation projects, most of them related with the location of the new neighbourhood and the job opportunities that the new area offers.

The most important concerning when we study relocation projects is the enormous economic difficulties that beneficiaries have to find a job. These situation becomes critical when people is relocated far away from their original location. Since they lose the ties with the old economic activity and the new area

normally doesn't offer job opportunities, the monthly payments become unaffordable for the families.

The paper explains some strategies that can be considered when planning and implementing the project in order to offer job opportunities and occupation, making easier and encouraging the families to move to the new location.

## 1.COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE BUILDING PROCESS

The field trip to Metro Manila showed that government agencies usually prioritize quantity over quality in the process of housing design and construction. They focus in reducing building costs and looking at the project in a very short perspective without considering the maintenance of infrastructures and the sustainability in a long perspective. The implementation is negotiated with private contractors and the process is closed until the delivery of the houses so the costs the developer invests in each step are not known by the authorities. Community stays apart until it is relocated so people are not involved neither in the design process nor in the construction

“The same happens in Peru and Latin America: the government deliver new houses, and eventually those people miss the shack where they use to live miserably.” (Rodolfo Livingston,2011)

The paper explains in this part how the building process can have an impact in the community, both in economic and social aspects. Relocation projects can take advantage of this impact not only during the construction of the housing units, but also before, with design participation processes, and after with improvements and incremental implementations.

### Organized self-help housing

Construction is an opportunity to involve the community creating an economic activity for the new inhabitants but also involving them in participation design processes promoting the creation of ties in the community. Johnnie Astrand's experience in self-help housing shows that “one positive impact of the construction process is that the participants often re-establish confidence in their personal, collective and community abilities.” (Astrand and Rodriguez,1996)

Even the proposal of self-help housing is not new, it is presented to the authorities as an alternative to the mainstream way of providing housing. The result is not only a cost reduction in the building process of the housing units but also contribute to build and strengthen the community ties

The method of implementing housing programs in developing countries, whose aim is meet housing needs, can be transformed in order to make community development possible. Organized self-help housing promotes the enhancement and organization of the resources of the community and institutions involved, through mutual help and personal effort.

## 2.DESIGN CONCEPT FOR RELOCATION

The participation of the community in the construction processes should not stop here but continue in improvements and extensions of incremental housing. Involving the community in the first step of construction entails a cost reduction of the construction investment by the government. Think in a longer perspective should include thinking in improvements and extensions. Providing the basic core for the house in the first step and then, allowing the transformation of the housing unit is a way of maintain the activity in the area, reducing building costs for the authorities and encouraging investment of other sectors. All these consequences make the new houses more accessible for the urban poor.

### Improving and incremental processes.

When we talk about construction we think about building new houses or improving and extending the existing ones. This is a way of providing better housing units and mobilizing the community but a secondary economic activity is appears. The market has to provide construction materials and tools, manpower and products. A huge business opportunity blossoms and it has to be canalized to benefit as many people as possible.

The local commercial activity like small shops, stores and workshops is the main income that most of the families earn in relocated areas. The house and its outside space becomes the working area for most of the householders that stay at home taking care of the house and the children. Several activities like manufacturing

carpets, peel garlic, selling prepared food, hairdressers, internet cafes etc. are realised in the housing units.

Most of the times the government agencies provide houses without possibility of extension and normally these extensions were not allowed. Our experience in several relocation projects in Metro Manila showed the huge potential of economic activity existing in the areas and even when it was not allowed, extensions with small shops appeared. The absence of enough commercial areas creates informal markets on the streets and every kind of activity has going on.

The potential of economic activities can be promoted providing the possibility of having a mixed use of the housing unit or allowing regulated extensions to the street. In consequence a vibrant activity of the street would create a source of income for the families and in addition a safe place of relation.

“but also we need an outside, because with a house without an outside someone is enclosed in his house, and an outside without house is a homeless. We need outsides because the human happiness is in the family, in the personal and in the social. The stage of the public is the street, the square...” (Rodolfo Livingstone, 2011)

#### Secondary economic activities. Prefabrication

Prefabrication of elements is the most efficient way of provide materials to the housing program and also open an exterior market. In this moment are needed workshops and training courses for manufacturing construction products, setting up some enterprise and regenerate the area in order to make construction affordable and also generate income to the families.

“ The families decided to construct their houses with simple, locally produced prefabricated building materials. An open tender among the suppliers led to a 50% rebate in the price of floor materials and a donation of materials and labour to build 100m<sup>2</sup> meeting room. The initial training of the families, allowed them to take responsibility for the budget, schedule, control of the stores and cost of the materials.” (Johnny Astrand and Mario Rodriguez,1996)

### 3.FINANCING

This section explains the important role that the financing systems have in relocation processes supporting all the strategies that were exposed in this paper.

The credits allow families to improve their life conditions but the financial programs cannot be implemented without helping mechanisms.

For encouraging the families to do improvements or extensions in existing houses and involve them in the construction of the new housing units is needed a continuous support of local organizations and government agencies through technical assistance, financial systems and materials supply.

“The cash flow needs should also be determined, based on the need to hire construction equipment and external services and to procure building materials. The community should participate in this process and approve the construction work program.” (Johnny Astrand and Mario Rodriguez, 1996)

#### Facilitation organizations

The construction, process based in self-help housing, improving or extension of the housing units cannot appear spontaneously. “Only good planning based on realistic assessments of the capacity of the participating households, bureaucratic hinders, availability of building materials, etc. can assure holding the schedule.” (Johnny Astrand and Mario Rodriguez, 1996)

The study case of Barrio San Jorge in Buenos Aires, Argentina shows how the Housing Materials Bank is the clue to encourage all the processes of self-help construction, improving and extension of the houses. A financial system of microcredits is the catalyst for the development of the area in which the community and the families are the main actors.

The Housing Materials Bank works in the relocated area offering three different activities that work together:

- 1- Supply construction materials. The bank can offer all the needed materials at a much lower price supporting the processes of construction and improving. Since it is located in the settlement, families can buy small quantities without need to transport or storage them.



- 2- Technical assistance. A group of professional technicians assess families with the renewal of their houses and also train the community for their own development.
- 3- Microcredits fund. Administration of a microcredits system for supporting the families in the construction and improvement of their houses.

(Florencia Almansi and Andrea Tamarazzo, 2008)

The Housing Materials Bank works as a facilitating organization managed by local people. It is set in the area as soon as the project starts and becomes the centre of activities.

It gives advice, must have the professional capacity to develop and recommend specific solutions concerning house design, site layout, technical solutions, legal solutions, financial solutions and social development.

It gives support, analysing and discussing the problems existing in the area and solving conflicts.

Through training the community improves its knowledge and skills in technical, legal and economic matters. The training process should also aim at changing attitudes and improving management skills. Negotiate with other institutions and solve conflicts. Practical and specific, like: social development of the community and families, organization and coordination of mutual help, conflict management and control, planning, organization and management of housing and infrastructure projects, programme and budget control, construction techniques for infrastructure, procurement and stores administration, basic use of tools and equipment.

“The facilitating organization should aim to assist the participants in a self-help housing project in such a way that the process will be efficient and the end product is a housing area of good quality and with a dynamic neighbourhood. Advice, support and training” (Johnny Astrand and Mario Rodriguez, 1996)

“The technical assistance was the most innovative part that PRODEL introduced in the micro-lending process for housing improvement and it had enormous acceptance among clients, especially women, who acquired new knowledge on how to negotiate and identify the typical mistakes that masons and builders usually commit.” (Elizabeth Edwards, 2009))

### Microfinance

The Housing Materials Bank is born to administrate a microcredit fund. The government or different agencies provides a fund that local administrators distribute to the people in small loans depending on the capacity that they have to pay back.

### What is microfinance?

Microfinance is defined as financial services to low-income people, who are usually excluded from formal financial services offered by mainstream banks and financial institutions. Products and services are similar to formal banking however have different characteristics: low income levels of target, scale and methods of finance product delivery, acceptance of alternative collaterals, non-financial services like training and technical assistance. [Alfredo Stein Heinemann,2010]

### Microcredit programs

The microcredits programs have been implemented in the last decades as catalyser of improving of slum areas all over the world with very good results. They help to build social capacity allowing families to improve their conditions. They strengthen grassroots organizations engaging community participation, in a relation of dependency. As a result, the relations with local government agencies are improved and the community have an own voice in the municipality.

The Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 was given to the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and Muhammad Yunus “for their efforts to create, through microcredit, grass-root economic and social development”

### Micro-lending for housing improvements

The main goal of the microcredit programs is to improve the conditions of housing for the urban poor. The credit is taking as a reason by beneficiaries to move in the new neighbourhood and star the construction but also increases the demand for extending houses or improving the existing ones. It is the catalyst for urban development.

Housing improvements loans are usually complemented by the efforts, savings and resources of the borrower: in kind (building materials and tools),monetary

resources (for purchasing building materials or hiring a specialized labour force), and a labour force. [Alfredo Stein Heinemann, 2010]

#### Microcredit for productive activities

Another goal of the microcredit programs is to promote the creation of economic activities in the area. The construction and improving of housing entails lots of secondary activities and the creation of small enterprises can be supported with microfinance. The big potential of commercial activities and the need of the families to get an income as soon as they are relocated make necessary the destination of part of the funds to this aim. The idea of providing commercial areas in addition with the possibility of a mixed use of the housing unit and extensions needs the support of microcredits to encourage the families to set a formal business.

Ismael Rodriguez, responsible for the credit components managed by PRODEL in Nicaragua, explains in an interview the viability of support productive activities with microcredits:

“The experience of PRODEL during the last 15 years in Nicaragua tells us that people who borrow resources for microenterprises are more aware and have a clearer picture in their minds of what they want the credit for, while with housing improvement loans, people tend to think that what they invest they will probably not be able to recover, while in microcredit for productive activities, people expect and probably know beforehand that they will recover the investment in the very near and not distant future (interview, 25 March 2009)

#### Farming investment

The experience in Tunisia of ASDEAR shows that the microcredits are not only for construction of commercial activities but also for promoting farming and improving its production. The support for farming and urban agriculture works like the Housing Materials Bank works assessing the construction and upgrading of houses, supplying materials and financing the investments. In this case subsidies to purchase equipment and seeds that are supplied in the area goes together with technical assistance to make the process efficient and successful.

ASDEAR'S work in Rohia (Tunisia) began in 1974, and was related to agricultural development. The main method was teaching older primary students how to make the best use of the land. Through the children, a natural contact was established with their parents. The families were able to increase yields from their farming, through improved farming methods and by cultivating of new crops. In conjunction with these activities, ASDEAR subsidised the purchase of equipment and commercial seed. A watchword in all of ASDEAR's operations is "to help people to help themselves" The families must contribute both economically and with their own labour to receive assistance. (Johnny Astrand and Mario Rodriguez, 1996)

#### 4.INTEGRATION

We have been insisting in the importance of strengthen the community ties involving all the actors in the same project: the single person, the family, the community, the local organizations and the government agencies. The aim is to make the relocation project success and provide not only a house, but a way of income to the families and a strong community organization able to manage the neighbourhood and the challenges in the future.

On the other hand this new neighbourhood cannot be disconnected from the urban context and the social context. Integration is a goal and the relation with the surroundings and the city is a challenge to deal with.

Anger Munk says about the "kvarterloeft projects" of urban regeneration in Copenhagen: One kvarterloeft objective is to minimise the trend for "cities within the city", so it is interesting that the cross-neighbourhood networks have also been strengthened. This could also be described as strengthening the areas' social capital, both in terms of social capital between the area and the outside world"

#### Public-Private Partnership

Foster the inclusion of private developers in the projects can help to integrate the relocation project in the urban and social context. The mixing of different levels of housing can do a transition with the surroundings avoiding the creation of an enclosed community

Change the role of state in housing, from provider to enabler. A level of subsidy was necessary to stimulate the demand for housing and as an incentive for private

developers in supplying better and affordable housing according to the paying capacity of different socio-economic sectors, including the urban poor .( Anger Munk, 2007)

#### Community organizations

The community organizations have a non-questionable value in the management of the community and solving problems of the families. But also these organizations make the link between the families and the government agencies, a way of integrate the project in the agenda of the municipality. The local area has a voice, empowerment and strengthens of local organizations, creating a local social capital. (Lykke Leonardsen, Head of Communication, City of Copenhagen)

### 3. THE ARCHITECT ROLE. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explained different strategies to develop in relocation projects in developing countries. Governments, architects and planners have to deal with unique characteristics of these locations that force to face the project from another perspective. Long term processes and social approaches are needed to analyse and identify the situation; design and solve the problems; and predict and allow the variability in the future. It is evident that the architect that faces a relocation project need new skills, and universities have to offer new education systems.

Interdisciplinary approaches are needed in the project. It is not only important a good design for the housing units or the public spaces but also a design of the process of relocation. This means designing and economic strategy for giving the beneficiaries opportunities to get a job; designing social strategy strengthen community ties and self management of the neighbourhood: and designing an integration strategy that relates the new housing area with the urban and social context and with the rest of the city.

#### Pre-construction. Participation process

The first steps of the relocation projects are very important in the whole process. The architect must do a close approach to the communities and the beneficiaries. The experience of Rodolfo Livingston in Cuba shows that the involvement of the people that is going to be relocated in the beginning of the process is a key issue to have a better knowledge about the physical conditions of the site, the social networks within the community and the goals that they want to achieve. A good design considering these aspects can save money, meet expectations and create a community able to manage their own neighbourhood. (Rodolfo Livingston, 2004)

During the construction. Organized self-help housing

The experiences in organized self-help housing of Johnny Astrand and Mario Rodriguez shows the impact that the building process has. It means not only saving money for the municipalities and investors but also, and more important, it strengthens community ties through mutual help and personal effort. The assistance by architects during the construction is essential and the design of the housing units and construction systems must allow a process with these characteristics.

After the construction. Improving and incremental processes

Thinking in a long term perspective is not only something that municipalities must do to design the relocation project, but also the architect with his/her design must take into account. The design of the housing units must allow variability in the future, responding to the different stages of the family characteristics.

Affordability at the beginning of the process cannot block the possibility of improvements when the family composition changes or the economic situation improves.

Relocation projects are processes where government approaches, architects design decisions, financing systems and local organizations must work in the same direction following a guideline where every decision has a consequence in the social situation of the people and the city.

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