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**BUILDING AND MANAGING CITIES
IN A STATE OF PERMANENT CRISIS**

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IIED-América Latina

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I

Building and managing a city: everyone should have a role and an opportunity

The global discussions in recent years are rightly concerned with preparing an agenda for future action. Peace and disarmament and the end of the Cold War and the nuclear threat, the guarantee of civil and political human rights, and the development and consolidation of independence, democracy, and social justice are ranked high on the agenda--as are certain key environmental issues such as deforestation, destroying the ozone layer, global climatic change, and the loss of biodiversity. International agencies are discussing the creation of new world funds, such as the World Atmosphere Fund, and the launching of the health-in-the-cities decade, the natural disasters decade, and the urbanization decade. More recently, governments have approved the expansion of resources available to certain major multilateral banks for development projects that take into consideration their environmental impact.

We can look forward during the next decade and after to an unprecedented mobilization of economic and highly trained human resources for development projects (e.g., hydroelectric projects, comprehensive rural development schemes, regional infrastructure, etc.). International conferences will try to create an awareness of impending environmental problems and (perhaps) a broader discussion about ways of solving the debt of Third World nations, the circulation of drugs, the

destruction and misuse of natural resources, and the use of the open sea and of forests. However, I am afraid that no comparable mobilization of economic and highly trained human resources will go to satisfy the basic needs of low-income groups and to improve the critical situation of Third World cities. What governments request of richer nations and international agencies too often is not what the needy half of the human species would ask if given a chance.

All Third World nations are becoming increasingly urban, and urban centers are spreading to regions that were sparsely settled one generation ago. In the largest cities of the Third World, many of which have already celebrated their 300th, 400th, 500th, or 1,000th anniversary, the equivalent of a new city is built every fifteen years or less in the periphery of or spread over the old city. The population of Calcutta, which will celebrate its 300th anniversary in 1990, has gone from 4.5 million in 1960 to over 11 million. The population of Seoul has jumped from 3.8 million in 1966 to 9.2 million in 1983 and to over 11 million now. The Mexico City Metropolitan Area is growing at the rate of 700,000 persons per year, and São Paulo's annual growth is estimated in over 500,000 persons; even Lagos, which was not recorded as a city in the Nouveau Larousse Illustré less than a century ago, but as an agglomeration in the British colony of Western Africa on the slave coast, now has over five million inhabitants.¹ Cities with two million inhabitants, like Brasília, or

¹ Nouveau Larousse Illustré, volume V, p. 532, Librairie Larousse, Paris. This is the abridged edition in eight volumes, directed by Claude Augé of the Grand Dictionnaire Larousse. At the time of the publication of the Nouveau Larousse Illustré, Lagos colony was called an independent protectorate of the British, a status maintained between 1886 and 1906.

more than half a million inhabitants, like Ciudad Guayana, in Venezuela, are now found in regions that were scarcely populated in the 1940s and 1950s; small villages with two or three thousand inhabitants forty years ago, like Machala, Quevedo, and Santo Domingo de los Colorados in Ecuador's coastal region, are now midsize centers with over 100,000 persons. The growth of Nairobi, Khartoum, Tripoli, and Dar-es-Salaam over the last three or four decades has been truly phenomenal.

The problems created by these changes are so staggering and their scale so vast that they confound approaches to plan urban growth that evolved in the developed nations over the last century. Planning methods, the search for basic data, the role of institutions, the scope of legislation, selected lines of research, and the training of skilled personnel have to be rethought again and again to deal with challenges that have no historical precedents.

During the last ten or fifteen years we have gained considerable knowledge about how Third World cities are built and by whom, and about how a city is maintained and managed. Governments and financial and technical aid agencies have acted on this knowledge. What emerges is a gloomy picture of vast and swiftly spreading rural and urban poverty that is causing rapid changes in the spatial distribution of the population in practically every Third World country and giving shape to sprawling metropolises and large cities. The spatial distribution of population within Latin American nations, the present social and economic situation of its population, and many environmental conditions of its large cities and metropolitan areas are the result of social practices developed by the

population because of poverty. And poverty will not be eradicated with ineffective and poorly funded national welfare programs nor by international aid, which is insufficient to make a significant impact on poverty alleviation and is often misdirected.

The conclusion is that multilateral and bilateral and nonconcessional assistance have had and in all likelihood will continue to have a limited impact on meeting basic needs and urban development. I was recently told that multilateral and bilateral aid for basic needs and urban development flows at a rate of perhaps three to four billion dollars per year, while Third World governments may be investing nearly two hundred billion dollars, a figure that does not include the great multiplicity of small investments in building materials and of their own time that hundreds of millions of urban poor make year after year in the improvement of their shelters, services, and their habitats in general.

Multilateral and bilateral agencies try to help or to influence governments to adopt better policies and provide funds. But the total funding provided is almost insignificant in relation to the problems: for joint water and sanitation projects, \$3.7 billion for the entire Third World between 1980 and 1987 at 1985 constant dollar value; for water supply projects, only \$3.4 billion and for sanitation projects, only \$1.2 billion; for basic health, \$1.3 billion; for basic education, \$1.6 billion; for integrated community development, \$1.0 billion; and far lower sums for a combination of upgrading sites and services, core or low-cost housing, drainage and garbage disposal. The vast majority of the urban poor,

untouched by these projects, do not remain idle. They cannot afford to be idle. They have become the true builders of Third World cities.

If multilateral and bilateral aid and nonconcessional and technical assistance reflect to some degree the priorities of most Third World governments, then we must acknowledge that neither government programs nor multilateral and bilateral aid and technical assistance projects will, in one or two generations, reach low-income groups with improvements in their habitats, with health and education programs and improved earning possibilities. Neither they nor existing public and private banks will be able to cope with the growing demands of cities that double their population every ten or fifteen years. Nor can they make loans available to the community organizations formed by the residents of illegal or informal settlements or to the nongovernmental organizations working with them to install, run, and maintain basic services in those settlements (e.g., "creches," or primary aid stations, piped water supplies and garbage collection, and health programs), to improve their own living environment (e.g., installing storm drains and paving certain streets), or to increase household incomes (e.g., setting up an artisans' workshop or a consumer cooperative for food purchase).

In thirty or fifty years, Mexico City Metropolitan Area, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bombay, Manila, Jakarta, Baghdad, Karachi, Dakar, Shanghai, Lagos, Calcutta, Cairo, and hundreds of smaller metropolitan areas and large and midsize cities could have populations that are double and in some cases triple the present ones. Quite possibly these will continue expanding haphazardly over sites that increasingly will be unsuitable for

human habitation (e.g., subject to flooding or landslides), with a constant growth in the numbers who live in unserviced shelters and join the unemployed or very low-paid workers.

Mexicans do not know how to build a city for 700,000 people or more every year in the periphery of and over the present-day Mexico City Metropolitan Area. Brazilians do not know how to incorporate into their urban areas over 4.5 million new urban dwellers every year, nor Pakistanis how to build a new city for over 400,000 every year around Karachi. Equally pressing and, perhaps, more dramatic is the situation in most of the forty-one countries listed as the least developed in the world, many of which witness the growth of their urban population at rates above 6 percent per year--like Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Zaire, Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique, and other nations--and have high percentages of their urban population concentrated in one city. Brazil, a country with vast natural and human resources and advanced technology and industrialization, is already losing rural population in absolute numbers. Most of the forty-one least developed countries still have 70 percent or more of the labor force in agriculture, a very young population (45 percent are between zero and fourteen years of age), a rate of population growth that indicates that they have not yet begun the demographic transition, and are little urbanized. Furthermore, most of them are endowed neither with substantial natural resources nor with sufficient arable land, nor have they the skilled human resources and the basic technology to face such problems. All this could change and undoubtedly will change, but worldwide strategies and priorities must be revised, beginning with our value system--putting human beings first, changing the concept of aid to one of investment,

accepting that development is above all a philosophical problem, and that this turbulent but rich era will leave an imprint on the future of humanity if we can overcome present human ethical and moral crises, like the spending of a trillion dollars per year on military expenditures.

II

The greatest urgency: restore dignity to billions of human beings

The average Third World city does not conform to the Western idea of a city. This becomes clear as soon as visitors from the Northern hemisphere leave the airport on their first visit to a Third World country. They enter the city on one of the best roads in the country as it cuts across the sprawling agglomeration that has encircled the new airport area, which probably was developed only ten or fifteen years before in what was then regarded as an isolated and remote stretch of land, far away from the then urbanized area. The more visible impact of poverty is reflected in squatter settlements, decaying neighborhoods, a deteriorated infrastructure, an incredible variety of outdated motor vehicles, a number of informal but also many vibrant activities, uncollected garbage, and a general sense of disorder in the use of the urban space. The modern capitalistic city is an island or an archipelago of small islands surrounded by the effects of poverty.

Squatter settlements are visible everywhere despite the efforts of many governments to hide them. Our visitors will notice that the urban space that supports the urban poor is crowded, without trees or green

spaces, dusty, of an almost monotonous grey color in its lack of diversity. Perhaps they will notice that the use of the urban landscapes of poverty is so intense that only the indispensable alleys and streets remain unbuilt (although even here, on pavements or sideroads, temporary huts or tents have appeared).

Probably they will question the wisdom of the poor in selecting sites for their settlements that are annually flooded or on slopes that can be devastated if the rainfall is unusually heavy or in desert areas without water. It is not easy to explain what makes people risk possessions and even their lives in a squatter settlement that is continually under threat from natural disasters or from eviction by the government, but this usually represents the best site they can find in terms of cost and accessibility to income-earning opportunities. People living in such settlements age rapidly. To fulfil even the simplest needs requires great physical effort and time.

Visitors to Delhi, Bangkok, Mexico City, Quito, Salvador, Marrakesh, and many more will see splendid historical monuments, spacious and well-designed neighborhoods of the rich and moderately rich, civic and university buildings, and an intense urban life in the crowded squares and streets of the central districts. It is only when visitors settle for some time in one of these cities that they will recognize the additional signals of an underdeveloped city: energy cuts, nonfunctioning telephones, streets and sidewalks in need of repair, and all the evidence of cities worn down by lack of maintenance, overcrowding, and general poverty.

When I was very young it was said that poverty was a rural phenomenon and that somehow urban dwellers had much better chances to prosper. At the age of eighteen I became a student at the University of Buenos Aires and I soon found that poverty was urbanizing too, but poverty was in those years less visible because cities were much smaller. I had to look for the urban environments of poverty although, despite my protected ignorance and the attitude of professors (who were exclusively concerned with the design of buildings), it was not difficult to find those environments and talk with their inhabitants. I soon learned that poverty had always existed massively in the city where I was born although its distribution in the city space was different.

In the middle and late 1940s there was not much talk in Latin American universities and in the press about these issues; they seldom make headlines even now. Decisionmakers made us believe (and they still do) that they had the key to success, that we were on the path to consistent development, and that through development, my country and the people of my country were going to solve their social problems. What a vague concept development was forty years ago, universally applied to all countries and to all cultures; and even more surprisingly, it still is! Development was going to be the result of modernization, which meant the activation of our production and its diversification, made possible through modern technology and the economic aid and technical assistance of the rich countries. Few understood that development is not a theory but an historical process. I soon became involved with the still small group of Latin Americans who discussed "comprehensive development"--a concept not so different from today's "sustainable development." In those early

days of the 1950s, "comprehensive development" and planning--national, regional and local planning--were magic words. With planned development we were going to reach higher living standards, but planners and development experts forgot the people.

In their anxiety for success, they forgot the history of the people, their cultures, the institutions and legislation that made human relationships possible. Inevitably, they did not respect the unregistered codes and institutions that these people had cherished for generations. They ignored the accumulated wisdom these people had as croppers, shepherds, builders, and true conservationists. In their ambition to gain and control power and wealth, politicians, technocrats, and bankers tried to promote and accelerate development, which meant forcing economic growth at the risk of depleting natural resources and exploiting labor while squandering scarce capital in an endless creation of overlapping and poorly managed programs, projects, and institutions. Culture was ignored because it could only be altered through long-term changes that no one bothered to identify and understand; history was not considered necessary for an understanding of social dimensions and structures because these were going to be changed through political action and the encouragement of participation. Another magic word participation was, when incorporated with the development literature in the 1960s, indiscriminately applied to rural and urban people living under dictatorial regimes or weak democracies.

It was not difficult to find out, thirty or forty years ago, that the growing scarcity of housing meant the overcrowding of existing slums and squatter settlements and the formation of new ones, and that this meant

less protection against a multiplicity of diseases and more stress and violence. The more a city grew, the more unsuitable sites were occupied with higher risks of floods and landslides, the more evictions grew, and the more travel time and costs and distances increased for poorer groups to have access to basic services.

My great interest was to discover how the city functioned. It did not make sense in those days, as it does not today, to see how governments and agencies attempted grandiose plans for a future city that only existed in the minds of politicians and technocrats. But these grandiose plans lacked the details, the combination of small-scale projects and actions with more ambitious infrastructure projects, the true participation of the people and the humility among those in power to recognize that a city is above all its people. These plans did nothing to truly encourage the masses of anonymous and marginalized people to become true citizens. How could we build a city when 50 percent or more of the city population did not belong to the city?

It was easy to find that behind the pretended empirical approaches of futurologists, planners, and development experts there were false concepts and wrong objectives. The Third World, or most of the Third World, did not remain undeveloped because of the lack of resources but due to social and political constraints. Change always hurts interested groups who oppose it. The urgency of development is above all to save human lives and to restore dignity to billions of human beings. This is the road to the social and economic development to which we aspire and the justification for enhancing the environment. And this is possible only if

Third World leaders accept the change of their role from beggars to builders, impressing on every sector of their nations, and especially on the rich, the idea that no one is going to do for us what we are not capable of doing ourselves.

III

The crisis is cultural and ethical, not economic

The Third World in general is experiencing a prolonged economic crisis, probably the worst in half a century. The crisis has already had and will continue to have enormous repercussions on all aspects of urban and rural life. Pressed by severe recessions, large deficits in their balance of payments, and insuperable problems in debt repayments, most governments, businessmen, and labor leaders seek short-term solutions. We never ask ourselves what sort of countries we want and in what sort of societies we aspire to live. We seldom discuss the future. Sadly, the discussion of utopia is not on our agenda. I often doubt our capacity to formulate the correct proposals. Is it possible to think about the cities I have described and to develop new ideas about how to build, manage, and maintain cities in this context?

According to a recent report by the Economic Commission for Latin America, the region has experienced eight years of long-evident structural problems, including recurrent macroeconomic maladjustment associated with debt servicing, fiscal crisis, and a scarcity of foreign exchange. These problems have been reflected in increased inflationary pressures, a

reduction in investment, and a decreased capacity to manage economic policy.² The gross domestic product per inhabitant in 1988 was 6.5 percent lower than in 1980. During 1988, Latin America's gross domestic product grew by 0.7 percent, far below the growth of the region's population, estimated at 2.0 percent. The already serious social problems became more acute during the 1980s as the decline in economic activity coincided with an upsurge in consumer prices in almost all countries--for Latin America and the Caribbean it reached 472.8 percent in 1988, in contrast to 198.9 percent in 1987 and 64.5 percent in 1986.

Governments tried to reduce their fiscal deficit and control the money supply that originated in an overgrown public sector by cutting subsidies for food and funds for key social services: housing, private domestic industries (which in many countries do not seem to be competitive unless they are subsidized), and public enterprises. But it is not easy to increase fiscal revenues in societies where the discipline to pay taxes never existed or has been lost and legal procedures are slow and cumbersome. Meanwhile, attempts to reorganize the central administration through the decentralization of public functions to the provincial and local governments and through the privatization of public services are difficult to implement. Governments resort to frequent updates of service rates, fuel prices, tariffs, and salaries, in some cases almost monthly. Inevitably, salary adjustments are below the increases in consumer prices, leading to national, regional, and sectoral strikes, some of long duration.

² "Economic Panorama of Latin America - 1989," Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations, Santiago, Chile, 1990.

The mistrust among business, government, and labor unions is best shown in the lack of agreement about practically everything. Each group tries its own strategy for survival or to control power, indifferent to the right or wrong of its claims. The only groups that seem to flourish in these circumstances are the financial groups and the large retailers, speculating in currency, bonds, consumer goods, foods, and anything that might produce a quick profit. It is not difficult to realize that under such conditions, corruption expands and unethical practices are rampant.

This situation struck the urban and suburban areas of the larger cities with particular intensity. Land and housing markets are distorted to the point that they have practically ceased to exist; the building industry, traditionally one of the main sources of formal and informal urban employment, has declined as public projects are cut or substantially reduced and very few can afford the prices of private housing; employment in formal industries and commerce is also reduced as consumption declines. Such reductions in employment cannot be balanced by growth in the number of public employees, nor can increasing unemployment or declining incomes be balanced by the rapid growth of informal activities, which in many cities and activities show signs of saturation.

It is true that governments spend more than they raise in revenue, but cutting public deficits--as Brazil did from 8.3 percent of the internal product in 1979 to 2.7 percent in 1983--means cutting social investments and cutting subsidies on the price of food staples, thereby making them

inaccessible to the poor, or retiring several subsidized products from the internal market to make them competitive in the foreign market.³ The welfare state, which had and has an important role in alleviating, although only partially, some of the worst effects of poverty in Latin America, in most of the newly independent nations of Africa, and in many Asian countries is rapidly pushed into oblivion by the economic situation. Although governments recognize the right of every person to minimum standards of health, education, economic well-being, and even housing, there is little they can do and in many cases are willing to do.

It is quite typical for central governments and parastatal agencies in Third World countries to assume responsibility for water supply, telecommunications, electricity, and housing in urban areas in addition to highly subsidized higher and technical education, while local governments are responsible for garbage collection and disposal, traffic regulation and sometimes public transport, increasingly primary health services, and traditionally land use planning, city maintenance, and urban environmental control. The national and state governments and the private sector share most of the responsibility for primary and secondary education, specialized health programs, inter-regional transportation, and research and development projects. But fewer investments, the frequent overlapping of programs, and poorly managed projects have led to a general deterioration of urban services. Urban consumers who can afford services increasingly criticize their quality, as maintenance is poor or

3 The forecast of inflation for Brazil in 1989 is close to 1,000 percent; also forecast are a negative growth in the economy, an increase of 1.5 percent in the official estimate of unemployment, and an impasse in the payment of interest on the foreign debt.

nonexistent and their expansion is slow despite rising prices in comparison to the incomes of most of these groups. Such criticism and the economic crisis of the 1980s have led many governments to pursue the privatization of these services and even to subsidize the private companies who manage them. Such shifts in maintenance practices and the obvious increase in real prices for the consumers can be an impossible burden for many or most lower income groups. Access to health care and adequate nutrition are so limited that in many poor urban districts child mortality may be increasing. The gap between life expectancy at birth in rich and poor districts could be growing.

The worst hit by the economic, political, cultural, and ethical contemporary crises are the Third World urban and rural poor. For the urban poor, life is an endless struggle. Frugal meals can take three-fourths of the household's income; one-fourth goes to transportation, medicines, washing products, and essential clothing. This also means encouraging children to leave school and earn an income. As security against unemployment does not exist in Third World nations, the support of family and social networks is crucial to subsistence.⁴ Poverty is the source of their virtues and vices and molds their attitudes toward other human beings.

Poverty makes wanderers of people. They move seasonally from their urban homes and small farms to places where sugar, grapes, cotton,

4 See, for instance, in a growing literature, Orlandina de Oliveira, Reproducción social, población y trabajo, El Colegio de México, México, 1986, and Larissa Lomnitz, Como sobreviven los marginados?, Siglo XXI, México, 1978.

or other commercial products are picked, or they move seasonally to a city to pull a rickshaw, work in the building industry, carry loads on their backs, or simply beg. Migration is a permanent part of their lives. They escape the rural environment of poverty, which is so intimately connected in small towns with the production of food or of only one crop and under such precarious conditions that no other activity seems able to take place. But they also move between poor urban districts searching for a site that is more convenient, more accessible to transportation, and less distant from the sources of income. While this life pattern affects hundreds of millions, the gap between rich and poor in practically every Third World nation is probably increasing. At least in Latin America there are groups with income levels higher than the European average, while half of the population is below the level of poverty, as in Chile, where the higher 10 percent receives almost 50 percent of the income while the lower 10 percent receives 1 percent.

IV

There is a need to broaden the debate about cities

Is there a new thinking about how to build and manage cities in the Third World? My answer is yes, but it is diffuse and still hidden because it reflects the experiences of many community groups, research groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that still have scant contacts among themselves and few or no contacts at all with governments and international agencies or even with universities and the press. The members of these groups are like islanders who operate in very limited

urban and rural spaces, still largely disconnected. These groups rightly claim that social urgencies lead them to act, to solve problems, even if they are aware that the small scale of their programs and projects, even aggregated at the scale of a city, hardly have any impact on overall problems. Such groups are still regarded by many as ill-adapted to a world that seeks success and likes to talk of pragmatic approaches in order to prove that events can be controlled, guided, and replicated to justify demands for a higher budget or a new role for a ministry or a new agency division. That world also wants order, rules, and legality because of fear of the uncontrolled forces of the "illegals" driven by poverty.

In recent years nongovernmental organizations and community organizations began to be heralded as the great hope for the improvement of living conditions in the urban and rural environments of poverty in the Third World. But no government is willing to decentralize existing planning, administrative, and financial powers to community organizations. International banks and agencies are not capable of providing NGOs and community organizations with enough funds for small-scale projects that seem to be the more effective in reducing the effect of poverty. Communities and NGOs strive for new ideas, for a single idea that could turn to them part of the billions of dollars used by governments and agencies in gigantic projects (in their fear of running risks) and verify the futility of multimillion dollar projects in solving many city problems, at least those that are the result of poverty. Everybody asks what would be the result of a totally new approach that sought to support tens of thousands of small projects and efforts of community organizations formed by poorer groups and advised by NGOs. This might appear foolish to

bureaucrats, but how long can we condemn billions of human beings to live in squalor without hope?

Perhaps, we should follow Miguel de Unamuno's advice: "we could attempt a holy crusade to rescue the grave of the Knight of Folly [Don Quixote] from the control of the nobles of Reason....They watch over him so he cannot resuscitate."⁵ We could find a meaning in Unamuno's words: to fight back against the technocrats, the squanderers, the petty, insensitive politicians. We cannot reason with those who are unreasonable because they think that as long as they keep the poor hoping for an opportunity, for a breakthrough in their struggle to escape poverty, they can keep them content. Perhaps we should aim to produce a shock, announce that we will do something terrible and then do it. Sometimes nature strikes us with an earthquake and the best traits of a national society and of the people in a city partially destroyed become evident to save lives, to house and feed and heal those who have seen their houses and possessions destroyed, even to create innovative laws and projects. But these traits vanish when the worst effects of the tragedy retreat with time. When a drought or an economic crisis condemns millions to hunger and deprivation, the world or a society organizes itself almost overnight to provide food to the needy, only to forget them as soon as the causes of hunger and deprivation have apparently disappeared.

How do we start to build more humane and equitable cities? Gone are the days when a king could order a viceroy to build a new city parallel

⁵ Miguel de Unamuno, "The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho," A.A. Knopf, New York, 1927, Introduction.

to a thousand-year old center, like in Delhi, just to remind the natives where the power lies. Gone are the days when a president could choose a sketch and turn it into a new capital city, like Brasília, purposefully ignoring the fact that the homeless will themselves build several satellite cities in one generation housing six or seven times more people than in the official capital. You cannot build cities in a state of permanent crisis and poverty with rulers that are so distant from the people. The crisis is certainly economic and political, but essentially it is ethical and cultural.

Can the cities I have described be built and managed under nondemocratic governments? Certainly not on the scale necessary to have an impact on the human environments of poverty. They might, perhaps, initiate a project here or there, shown once and again to demonstrate an image of social concern. But dictators, strong men, representatives of one-party systems, the power elites, as well as many democratically elected politicians fear strong community organizations that gain strength through endless struggles for land tenancy or access to water or better transportation, schools, or health centers. In fact, Third World cities are built and managed under dictatorial or democratic regimes. But we must acknowledge how much more difficult it is under dictatorial regimes and how arbitrariness increases when the rights of poor citizens are denied, their efforts are checked and repressed, and their participatory forms of organization, so basic for their survival, are destroyed. Totalitarian states do not encourage evolution, and possibly half of the Third World nations are ruled by totalitarian states.

Let me give you some examples. In 1981 the military government of Chile decided to subdivide the fifteen municipalities (called communes) that form Santiago into thirty-two, adding seventeen new communes within the existing urban limits.⁶ The objective was to create homogeneous spaces according to socioeconomic levels. The inevitable spatial segregation divided the communes into two groups: those called "free of poverty" and those "of extreme poverty." This decision was reinforced by the compulsory eviction of 35,000 low-income households from the communes with comparatively high incomes to those with low incomes. Another example: over the last few years, massive evictions have taken place in Seoul, Manila, Santo Domingo, and other cities forcing millions to abandon their homes without receiving compensation or alternative forms of shelter. The Seoul metropolitan government undertook the first major squatter clearance project in 1966.⁷ By 1970 roughly half of the squatter settlements had been cleared in a city where, in 1985, the poorest had an average of two square meters per person and three families per home. Over the last twenty years many households have been evicted two or more times and millions of people have been forced out of accommodations they owned or rented. Such practices by the government intensified in preparation for the 1988 Olympic Games when land was needed for the sports stadia, to accommodate the participants, to build hotels for visitors and the press, and also to beautify the city in an effort to enhance the image of South Korea around the world. Squatters have been evicted in Santo Domingo during the last few years to provide

6 Alex Rosenfeld, "El municipio y la organización del Estado en Chile," Medio Ambiente y Urbanización, No. 28, Buenos Aires, Septiembre 1989.

7 Information about Seoul in The Asian Coalition for Housing Rights; "Evictions in Seoul, South Korea," Environment and Urbanization, No. 1, London 1989, pp. 89-94.

space for a new highway to be built with European funds to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus to this continent. The list is endless.

There is a logic here that goes beyond the far more open possibilities offered by democratic regimes. A poor urban household is extremely vulnerable. Its vulnerability increases or decreases depending on the community in which that household is located. The role that the community plays and the degree of organization it achieves are associated with the attitudes of governments, because community organizations know well that the most effective way to modify the environment of poverty is by challenging and changing the urban economy and society. But in Third World nations, even in democratic regimes, public policies and priorities are seldom the result of a deliberative process of consensus building, a more prevalent tradition in the Northern hemisphere.

V

The essence of how to build and manage cities--go and talk with the people, live with and learn from them

We could go on for another generation or two, building and managing cities in the way we do now: on the one side, the governments (national, state, and local) often announcing the grandiose schemes and projects and economic possibilities of their countries (although unsure about how they will be funded), saying they are going to improve their inefficient and ineffective, poorly paid and uncommitted bureaucracies in building and

managing services and collecting taxes and rates in order to reduce their deficits; on the other side, the growing number of low-income masses trying to earn a meager income and improve their living condition; and in the middle, a minority profiteering from whatever possibility is open to them and also vast numbers of grey and anonymous existences, passively accepting what is offered to them in terms of jobs, services, housing, and recreation. The only problem is that most Third World cities will at least double and many will triple their population in one generation or less. This means that there will be many new cities or metropolitan areas or conurbations with the same problems, although greatly increased, and many new problems as a result of the use of more unsuitable places for squatting, more difficulties in bringing water and feeding tens of millions of people concentrated in small areas.

Perhaps the first step is to change the attitudes of governments and to severely punish profiteers, squanderers, and tax evaders. A series of positive signs from governments, business, labor, and the academic community showing that they are concerned about their cities and about the poor members of their communities could be a beginning. But it would have to be followed immediately by governments empowering municipal authorities and community organizations with resources and the political power that is now almost systematically denied to them and by recognizing that, given the present and foreseeable scarcity of resources, the future Third World city will have to deprive the rich of luxuries to satisfy the basic needs of the poor. Small solutions are not the answer to great problems; the sum of a vast number of small projects planned and implemented by the communities could be, but only if they are integrated

with a far vaster strategy of mobilization of the unused and misused resources that exist in every city and nation with governments helping in their orchestration.

I do not accept the argument that questionable judgements and decisions and ineffectual actions of governments are the result of lack of information or experience. In a democracy, governments are obliged to go and talk with the people, live with and learn from them. This wise early Taoist advice to rulers does not have many followers these days and never had many followers in the past, but it is the essence of how to build and manage cities in the Third World, to manifest their change in attitudes with deeds. They can start building with what they have, slowly and with a more perfect foresight, taking risks with honesty and humility.

True feelings do not grow old and are not expressed with words but with works. What is the purpose of telling people that their participation is not only encouraged but will be supported if the people and their organizations know well how difficult it is to negotiate with distant and unfeeling leaders? We need a great effort to catch a glimpse of peace in the impoverished cities of the Third World torn by groups whose only capacity seems to be to repress their adversaries. I hope I am wrong, but I think it will take a long time before we develop a more constructive and comprehensive idea, a more rational vision about how Third World cities function, that is if we gain the time and continuity to build them with a sense of equity. I see more and more groups competing irrationally for control, impeding access to basic services for those who need them most. Many leaders refer to the unlimited human capacity to create and mold

human destinies when these same leaders abuse concepts such as democracy, human rights, equity in the face of the law, and participation. Are they not implicitly referring to the power of some people over others with the city as a setting?

We can make a consistent effort to understand better how society works in Third World cities. I am convinced that if the main purpose is to build cities that save human lives and restore dignity to billions of human beings, then the road is through social welfare policies. The poor are not vocationally poor and they are not poor because they are ignorant, as many rich still think, or depraved, as was frequently mentioned in the early nineteenth century. The overwhelming majority of the poor were born poor and never had a good chance. The mere fact that they manage to stay alive and raise families in Third World cities is the best sign of hope.

Social welfare does not need to be inefficient and it does not necessarily need to cover every human being. An efficient social welfare system is the way to return to the poor part of the privileges the rich have had; it means restoring health (can you imagine what it must be like to start the daily adventure of finding an income in poor health?); developing skills (can you imagine how uncertain a recent rural migrant must feel in a huge metropolis?); above all protecting children so that the catastrophic psychological and biological impact of the urban environments of poverty can be minimized; providing loans to community organizations even if they cannot present collateral (can you imagine what it means in terms of their self-confidence for someone to believe in them?).

The idea that self-regulating markets will solve the problems of food prices, minimum wages, access to land, housing, and services has no historical precedents in any large Third World nation. Each society in a particular historical critical moment must have the courage to innovate, to move forward, even to wreck historical precedents. The worst perverse effect of the present policies is supporting the role of a small and isolated minority depriving the population of its role as citizens of democratic nations.

Forced or voluntary mobility and cultural traits have major influences in cities where 60 percent, 80 percent, or 90 percent of the population is poor. But if we are not integrating the poor, their squatter settlements, their informal income activities, we are neglecting key issues. The integration of the legal and illegal city, of the capitalist and the precapitalist modes of production, is essential. In this integration the community must come first. The integration begins with a recognition of the basic needs of the community. It is a different approach to planning the city, one based on reciprocity and broad human concern. Every city is richly heterogeneous. It encompasses a diversity of races, religions and social groups. Policy matters should reflect the variety of views that exist within and among those groups

The city will maintain its contradictions and its rich networks of relationships and its differences, but if the Third World politicians and technocrats remains concerned about buildings and infrastructure then they will forget the people and the environment they create outside

official regulations, norms, plans, and projects. I am afraid that the focus in the 1990s will be on the broader aspects of economic development and the environment. But if we are not capable of broadening the discussion to introduce the question of sustainable development for people and with people, in its wonderful cultural and landscape diversities, including the two billion or more who at present lack the most basic necessities, then we will have failed in launching and building a world with justice, a world with a future.

Suggested Reading

The following list includes only books and readers published during the last five or six years.

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