

W063 - Affordable Housing



URVI-98 which took place in Barquisimeto, Venezuela from 5th to 8th October 1998 represented the second W063 International Conference on Urbanisation and Housing and the 9th Annual Rinker International Conference on Building Construction.

The focus of this highly successful Conference was the various challenges created by the migration of populations from rural to urban areas.

The central role of the organisation was played by a team from Centroccidental Lisandro Alvarado University (UCLA), Barquisimeto under the capable leadership of Ms. Liana Arrieta de Bustillos.

Liana has sent us the following message from her Board:

When we accepted the responsibility for URVI 98 we never imagined the impetus it would gain nor the extent of its influence. A great team has put in two years of hard work. Gradually we began to identify with the mission which had been entrusted to us. We had to be able to organise the conference topics coherently, choose the right people to present each one, put together a suitable scenario and guarantee that the actors involved would become aware of the housing problem and understand that we cannot continue as we have done in the past. If we have a commitment to those living in poverty we must devise other alternatives for solving the housing problem.

During the organisation there were moments of tears and great moments of triumph. A spirit of cooperation

always prevailed and the vast group of collaborators who joined us during the process contributed to our enthusiasm. We conducted various educational and organisational activities, seminars, courses and workshops involving in total some 1.200 people and today we feel satisfied that we reached the end of the event with proposals and agreements that guarantee the continuity of the commitment we have with these homeless families. The participants felt well attended and satisfied with the conference and the rights of the inhabitants of the informal sector, in particular, were respected.

As a general conclusion, we feel that if URVI-98 manages to channel the energies of youth, students, leaders and new governors along the lines of the solutions suggested, if they change their concept of the problem and their degree of commitment and if, in some way, URVI-98 has helped some of us to consolidate our commitment to justice and fair treatment for the family and the city, we can say that URVI has achieved its aim.

At the end of the Conference, the participants issued the following declaration:

The City As An Agent Of Change

Municipal governments should rediscover the city as an agent of change, orienting urban administration through strategic vision and promoting the spirit of citizenship. In this way the execution of urban development programmes is guaranteed, regardless of changes which may take place in the government.

Poverty And Housing - The Current Situation

Current world poverty figures estimate that one thousand million people are living in sub-human conditions.

Discussions about how the problem has been faced until now indicate that different mechanisms and strategies need to be implemented, which simultaneously solve the problems of poverty and housing. We have an example of this situation in Venezuela where, without being a particularly impoverished country, 84% of the inhabitants live in total poverty, with an unemployment rate of 17% and a high level of insecurity and social instability.

We propose the establishment of small construction enterprises which would be known as 'Community Contractors'. This mechanism both generates employment and encourages the rehabilitation of depressed urban areas, while at the same time promoting education and social organisation in settlements.

Housing Production For Families Without Resources

The government should stop building homes. Instead, its function should be to facilitate the processes of promotion and community management through the supply and promotion of: subsidies, construction material banks, credit funds accessible to the poorest members of the community and the creation of small community enterprises managed by Community Contractors.

The massive incorporation of the informal sector would contribute to housing production and the elimination of unemployment, this work force being dedicated to a housing programme based on the principles of: low cost, accessibility, production on a scale proportional to the high demand, the generation of employment, efficiency and integrity in the installation of services and public areas.

The construction industry requires a new role which could respond to an attractive offer from the government which would allow formal constructors to join forces with informal constructors.

Land Tenancy And Regularisation Of Urban Land

Faced with the problem of being denied access to the formal housing market, a majority of the urban population in Venezuela has taken the course of squatting on unoccupied land. This leads to insecurity from the legal aspect and the risk of eviction which threatens the most fundamental of human rights. We need to take integrated action, which extends not only to land title but also to credit access, services and all the opportunities that urban life offers. The aim of this is to incorporate informal settlements in the structure of the city where they are located and to improve the living standards of those who live there.

Alternative Sources Of Financing For Low Income Families

Alternative financing facilities should be made available to those with the lowest incomes. The experiences in 'Casa Mejor' in Fortaleza, Brazil, a municipal community support programme, accessible community funds and the initiative of the inhabitants should all be taken into account when backing spontaneous housing processes originating in the informal sector.

The Voice Of The Inhabitant

The opinion and the needs of city dwellers should be recognised and valued to their full extent. Governments alone cannot take all the responsibility without the participation of the population and the cooperation of all those involved in a common project. The inhabitants should be given the opportunity to express their needs. 'We claim the right to be present when we are being discussed'. (1)

(1) Inhabitants' Forum. Istanbul 1996.

The Mission Of The University

The University must continue to further Technological Research, developing materials to reduce construction costs and simplify construction techniques.

Also, at the request of the inhabitants, the University should become involved in technical assistance in Engineering and Architecture through Compulsory Community Internship. In the same way that the Faculty of Medicine, through rural internship, addresses health, these internships would guarantee widespread attention in the area of housing and services in informal settlements.

This could be established as a pre-requisite for a University Degree. There was also a request that a compulsory course on Self Built Urban Settlements should be instituted together with the design of social projects in conjunction with the inhabitants of low income sectors.