

Social production of habitat in Latin America

Enrique Ortiz Flores

What is Social Production of Housing and Habitat?

It's the processes which generate living spaces, urban components and housing that are carried out under the **control** of self-producers and other social agents operating on a **non-profit basis**, both in rural and urban areas and can originate from individual households acting individually, informal organised groups and social enterprises, such as cooperatives.

Different modalities characterise this form of production, from spontaneous individual self-production of housing to self-managed production of habitat. SPHH is a result of community processes that respond to a high level of organisation and social responsibility.

SPHH opens up multiple options ranging from the improvement, extension and consolidation of housing; the construction of new housing, in progress or finished; the improvement of neighbourhoods and rural settlements; and the production and management of large urban complexes and rural communities.

Social production is the general concept that defines this form of production by making the inhabitant a subject in the administration of their housing processes.

Self-production entails self-management and autonomous purposes and characterises most of the actions of Social Production, except those that are also carried out on a non-profit basis in support of victims or people unable to actively participate in the production, improvement or reconstruction of their housing conditions.

Self-construction refers to the participation of inhabitants in the construction of their homes. It can be part of a self-production process when a family or a group decides to actively participate in the construction of their habitat.

There is also forced self-construction in public and private projects, which in no way responds to the logic of Social Production.

Origin and scope of the concept

The conceptualisation of this form of production is based on experiences that have been carried out in various Latin American countries since the 1960s.

In its founding text, COPEVI stated in 1965 that "it is not enough to delve into the financial and technical aspects of the problem", but that it is necessary to "promote the popular action of the affected people themselves as the first interested party". And it added that "such organised action gives people a true sense of responsibility as the fundamental subject in the creation of a new world". This last phrase takes on profound relevance in the face of today's critical panorama.

The first experiences we carried out in those years led us to consider the role of inhabitants as conscious, responsible and active subjects. We also established our role as strategic allies in a shared transformational struggle, far removed from the concept of assistance.

From these approaches and from very diverse experiences, we conceived and consolidated the concept of Social Production of Housing, based on a logic radically different from the mercantile one, both in its objectives, times and processes. While the latter is limited to seeing housing as an object (floors and roofs), a machine for inhabiting, a massive industrial product and as merchandise, Social Production starts from conceiving housing as a process of satisfaction, a social good that prioritises the use value over the exchange value; as an act of inhabiting that implies a cultural and even affective relationship with places, without responding to closed norms or prefigured prototypes and spaces; a living product that adapts to the changing life of those who inhabit it.

The social production of housing and of the living, recreational, productive and service spaces that surround it, contributes to generating identity and attachment and, in the most organised cases, leads the inhabitants to remain committed to the community management of their places, from a convivial, supportive and open perspective.

SPHH as an open, flexible and trust-based system

First and foremost, the vision that identifies the SPHH with informality and urban chaos and limits it to self-construction lacking counsel and other kinds of support must be overcome.

The enormous diversity of situations, processes and conditions that characterise low-income housing call to approach it as an open and flexible system. This requires institutions to limit the normative schemes to the strictly

needed, both to protect the safety and rights of inhabitants and to avoid negative impacts on public spaces and ecosystems.

It also requires prioritising trust and avoiding excessive controls, which generally end up favouring corruption and deception.

The SPHH, as a form of production different from market production and as a strategic component of housing policy

Given its characteristics and the fact that its productive logic is different from the logic of the market, the SPHH must be legally considered as a distinct form of production from the mercantile one and as a strategic component of housing and territorial planning policies.

Transformative potential of the SPHH

This form of production proposes the integral management of the habitat by and from the organised community; participatory planning and design; the generation of options adapted to specific socio-cultural places and processes; the informed, productive and responsible insertion of the inhabitants in the determination and operationalisation of public policies; respect for cultural diversity and the options derived from it; the prevalence of organisation, autonomy and values of communality; openness towards forms of tenure that guarantee the preservation of land, water and other common goods for life in the places they occupy.