Third World Cities Insights.
Urban dynamics, composition and practice initiatives.
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> By the year 2050, 75 percent of the eight billion earth's inhabitants will be urban, a figure totally away to last century situation (just a decade ago) considering that 90 percent used to live in small villages or at country side. (Burdet, 2007)

> Nowadays, 70 percent Latin-American and 80 percent European inhabitants live in cities. Particularly at third world real scenario, 13 Latin-American cities have more than three million inhabitants, 9 of them have more than five million and 4 of them have more than ten million.[1]

> Even when humans control the natural world by creating the artificial, by designing tools and artefacts, including buildings, social institutions, and symbol systems[2], uncontrolled phenomena appear constantly, but we do not find enough time to generate particular solutions, it seems, trend is following the easiest way, forcing newcomers and people to adapt themselves to built environments supposedly suited to the average.[3]

> Then patterns resulting from the fast-evolving global network are shaping cities in ways we have largely failed to anticipate, causing urban places to mutate into new forms that we do not wholly understand and that we certainly have not yet attempted to plan, manage, or design (Russell and Gallis). Consequently actual solutions rely on copy + paste foreign concepts or schemes from different contexts causing adaptation difficulties on local inhabitants.

> But what if, instead of favouring homogenization and cultural assimilation we started from the premise that the preservation of cultural specificities and hence the maintenance of cultural diversity in design is crucial to humanity as ecological or biological diversity?[4]

The importance of this topic on urbanism field relies on its characteristics as a discipline, functioning like a system interconnected with multiple fields and sources, having a totalitarian perspective of our context which opens innumerable opportunities for transforming human settlements according to actual situation.

As urbanism' work scale comprehends a wide universe, going from basic cells (housing) until complexes systems (infrastructures), it must take advantage of its wide vision to bring broader considerations of the network of public streets and public spaces, the permeability of blocks…and questions of the quality of the public realm (Punter and Carmona, 1997:169)[5]

Signs of alternatives that match the moment a city is living, can be detected, nevertheless each represents a worldview, a perception of the best way to go about addressing the urban problems of the world in the public interest. None address the question of how one goes about identifying problems and their potential solutions; they deal with products not procedures. The development of each paradigm, nevertheless, involves considerable creative thought. The difficulty is that each tends to become frozen into a formula of patterns that are applied without much thought because they are perceived to represent the "best practice" and being "up to date" modern.[6]

During last decades reform movements for acting against contemporary complexity have born and evolved, like New Urbanism, which main intention is to improve urban life, providing it with authenticity, efficiency, sustainability and concern, though the recovery of community concept for rescuing coherence, continuity and stability of life (Harvey, 2000).

Despite diversity of approaches these movements have adopted, it has not been found any model that ensures complete success; instead some of them have collected interesting advances. But repeatable problems lie at design field and urban planning, where proposals have being incompatibles with daily reality of social groups who are the main actors of the project (the users).

It can not be implemented a "cuisine recipe" in order to attack this design weakness globally; nevertheless having a global panorama on how is this issue have been treated inside different cultures set the fundaments for improving obtained results. Because future models need to be culture and climate specific. Much can be learnt from the generic qualities of case studies.[7]

Theoretical Insight's

One of the first steps relies on planning a different way to face habitat production issue, 20th century design and urban-architectonic planning had been set over rationalist thinking. On the contrary, contemporary scenario demands the creation of a new participative strategy, whose objective is reaching deep changes and solutions related with models of specific development, emerging from conflicts with complexity and people.[8]
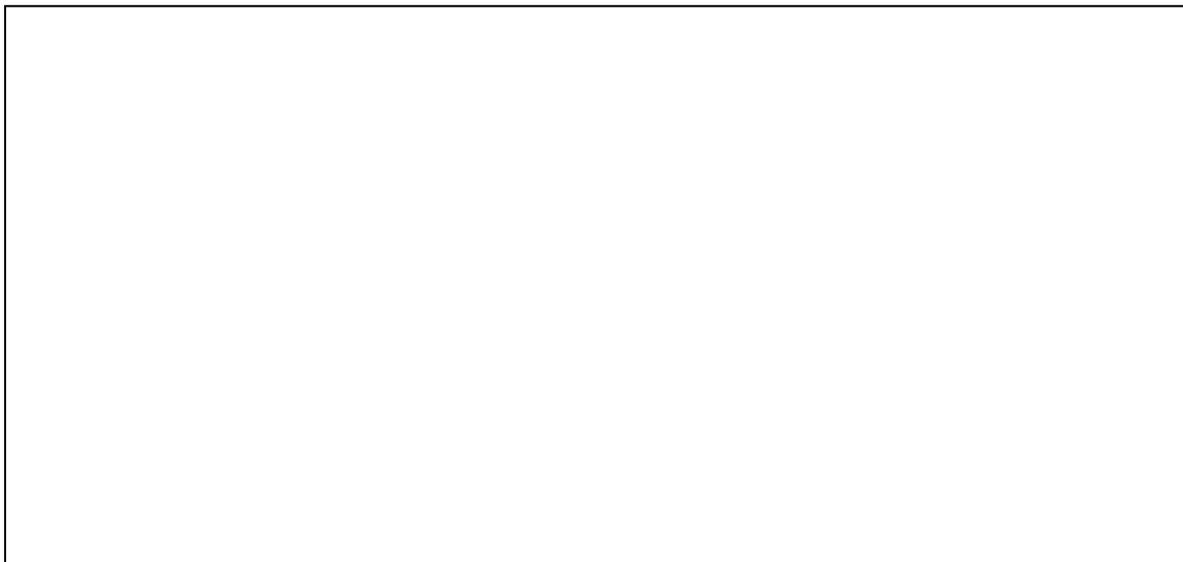
Chart 1. Thinking´ evolution´ synthesis.
Source: Romero, Gustavo et al. (Coord.) La participación en el diseño urbano y arquitectónico en la producción social del habitat, CYTED-HABYTED-Red XIV.F, México 2004., p. 18

It means we ought to formulate new ways to focus and understand actual urbanisation and peopling processes at the same time of finding new ways to improve their development, thereby putting local people at the centre of design and development activity, considering that most scientific and artistic innovations emerge from joint

thinking, passionate conversations, and shared struggles among different people, emphasizing the importance of the social dimension of creativity (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; John-Steiner, 2000).[9]

Initiatives

Several examples of communities can be identified, because they have started to react; looking for making their living space fit specific needs. Even though, they appear under different circumstances, some distinguishing characteristics have been found (as the chart explains), but the most interesting fact is that main actors from these cases belong to less favoured society groups.
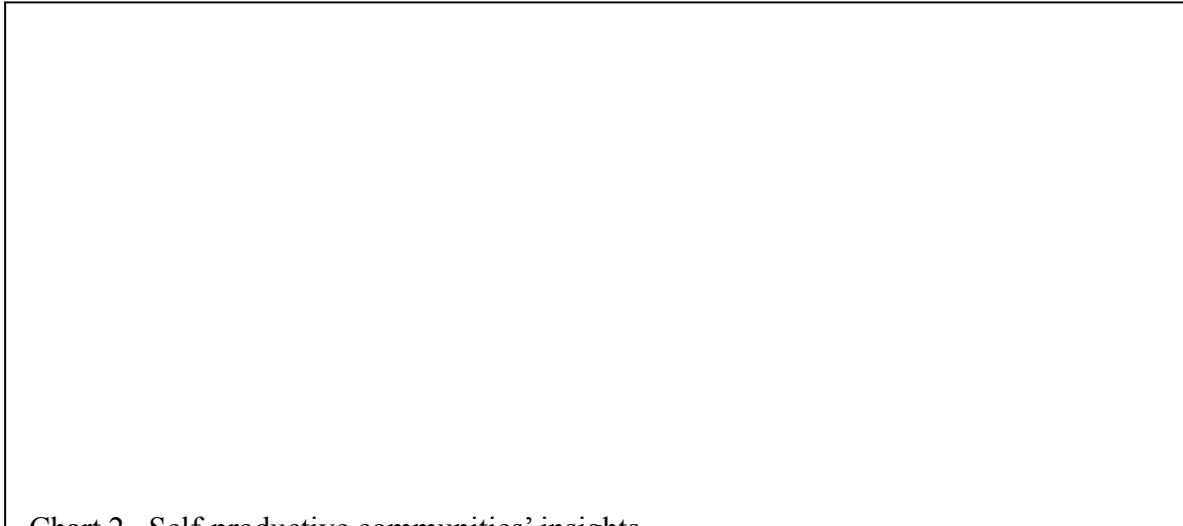
Chart 2. Self-productive communities' insights.

Less favoured groups, experiment a kind of social exclusion, referring to it as a citizenship deficiency, and the importance of active citizenship, often described as community involvement[10]

Social exclusion it is attributed to the failure of particular social structures in society. These structures are defined as: the democratic and legal system, which promotes civic integration; the labour market, which promotes economic integration; the welfare system, which promotes social integration; and the family and community system, which promotes interpersonal integration (Atkinson, 1997, p. 16). A definition of social exclusion produced by the British Government's Social Exclusion Unit2 defined it as "a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a series of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, poverty and family breakdown" (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000, p. 9). The usefulness of this definition is that it emphasises the relational aspects of social problems where individuals can become trapped in a downward spiral that is hard to break out of. Social exclusion is further defined by Makela (1998) as the inability to take part in the full life of society. It is when considered in this way that links between social exclusion and citizenship become apparent.

Refusing to become spectators of their unsatisfied situation, these groups find an alternative on self-production, which refers to an individual, familiar or group process organized by their own initiative, for their own benefit and using their own means.

These communities are getting common all over the world, but first world cases have had a high level of success, because their socio-economic-cultural context influences then in positive ways, supporting and allowing them to have a better control over their participants. A remarkable achievement is that they have reached the possibility to be heard by their authorities (government) and negotiate a pacific co-existence inside their well structured societies.

Some of these cases have gone further, by developing an identity for their community through the rescue of traditions, behaviours, aesthetic expressions, and so on.

Using a method different to the one of aesthetic or rational structures (architects and planners main concerns), these kinds of initiatives have filled their own demands, giving them choices to have better living conditions, more sustainability and easiest maintenance at final phase of their projects' progressive development; and also involving them during production provoking attitudes of solidarity and commitment, a reaction that does not happen at projects: planned, designed and built by professionals.

Third world' insights

So far, third world urban development processes have not considered seriously local sensitivities either economic or social design. This lack of attention is reflected increasingly at our context and society; many of the spaces created recently do not fill population necessities nor preview its social influence (e.g. interaction, identity or security perception).

It ends in a situation, where the city grows following public politics and norms, and on the other hand, the formal city apparently planned gets full of disarticulated blocks, that can not establish a dialogue with scale or cultural patterns.

Latin-America's case

Last paragraph explains actual scenario, inside and outside Latin-American cities, there is "another" city in growth process. Generally constituted by popular families, who face big efforts and socio-economical high prices, in order to raise individually or collectively numerous neighbourhoods and communities, and at the same time generate their own alternatives for satisfying their demands. This way, almost anonymously, an informal city has arisen, spontaneous and unfinished, emerging and growing progressively.[11]

An important part of this scenario is constituted by a retrospective of how cities evolved, for setting a background to understand the causes of disparity among its zones. Development inequity appears after certain places attract more attention to all kind of investments while the outskirts keep expanding without a defined trace, bringing along consequences over social interactions and becoming a source of segmentation and segregation of classes.

So far, this paper has been addressed, seeking enough data to understand what happens inside third world in relation with social initiatives, but it represents only the first part of a PhD research whose final objective is to analyze how these phenomena are evolving at a given context which is the biggest Latin-American city (Mexico City), setting the limits around housing topic as the minimum component of the urban system.

Therefore, some examples are extracted from a real context, referred to Mexico's city particular case, as it happens on next model.
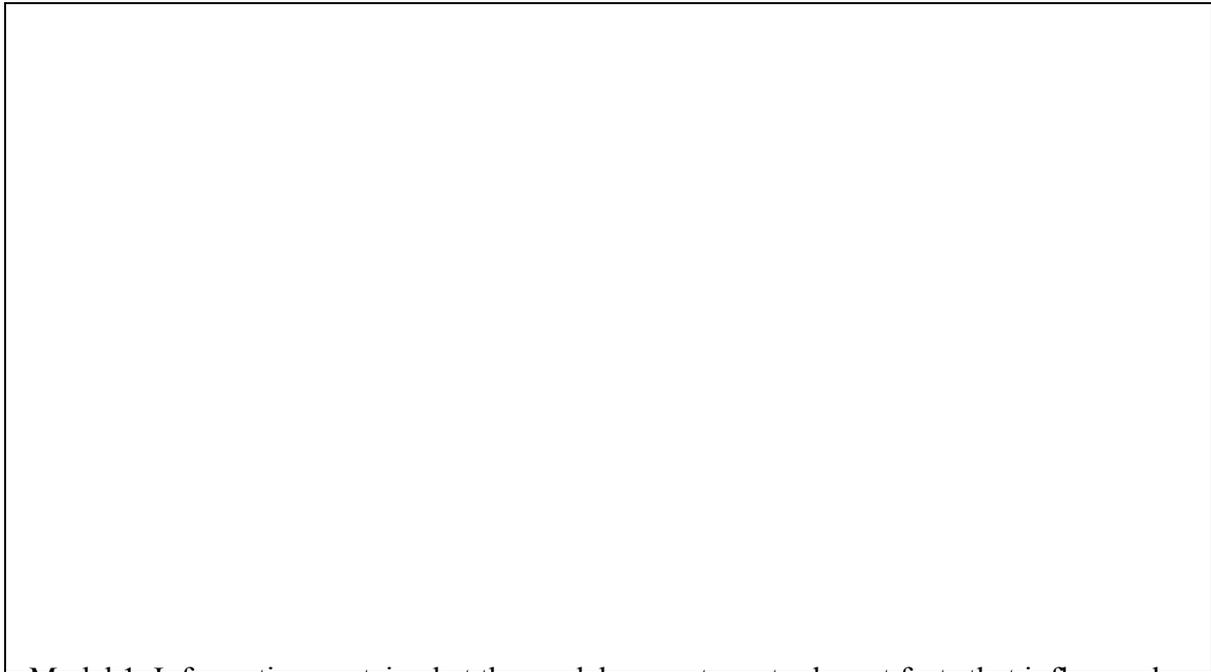
Model 1. Information contained at the model present most relevant facts that influenced Mexico City expansion.

The research has almost accomplished preliminary phase, dedicated to gather previous information in order to build a general view of the topic, contextualized in space and time.

At these phase discovered facts can be classified, referring to its affectation level. It has been observed at general level that popular settlements conform most of build environment at biggest Latin-American cities. But, there are facts more complex than being conformed as they are, such as the impact of development model and globalisation, summarized on next lines.

A) Fast and deep trend to uncontrolled urbanization, in a context of high fragmentation and inequity between rich people and the rest of population.
B) Instability of development levels at interconnected cities, because of mega-cities growth.
C) Multidirectional fluxes at urban areas.
   - Re-centralization. The poorest at urban periphery emigrate to city centres.
   - Concentration and de-industrialization.
   - Sub-urbanization. Higher and medium classes move from central zones to periphery
   - Metropolization of functions, favouring industry – city relation.
D) Differentiated urbanization, causing fragmentation at social and urban tissue, after the appearance of two different spaces superimposed that require different intervention models and rhythm.
E) Abandoned public spaces transformation, into semi-private and semi-public spaces. Semi-private: closed urbanizations, of restricted access, with all services and equipment according to inhabitants needs.
Semi-public: Malls, amusement parks and supermarkets.

F) Automobile' domain over pedestrians.
G) Increase of inequity and marginalization that generates spatial fragmentation.

Facing realities

Through analyzing real cases at different contexts this research will show different world faces, and the feedback will process a larger amount of data, to enrich what has been already studied by other specialist on the topic.

Data obtained from first world' cases will be compared with generated from third world's, bringing out unexpected insights considering that richer countries have taken previous measures on urban design, which gives them better control over lately changes at their context.

To start working on this design reform that actuality is demanding, a couple of statements should be followed:

Interaction of humans with other humans and with artefacts and tools is not only needed but central to social creativity.

The inclusion and participation of the different social actors involved with the project nature must include actual and potential ones.

Adoption and implementation of new concepts and theories like trans-discipline and complexity, because any intervention in habitat's production, independently from its scale, is part of a biggest system conformed by social, economical, cultural and physical context.

Beating boundaries, even though some authors emphasize definition of disciplines that work inside the same field, at real process these activities can not be identified that easily, so they can be interconnected. Therefore, our professional performance should cross all existent boundaries and become conscious about importance of adopting a trans-disciplinary thinking, opportunities to isolate our context interventions are unthinkable

The use of technologic transference inside communities, as a potential tool for generating, adapting and transmitting knowledge collectively that pursues permanent and evolving results.

Conclusions

At third world notables results have been reached through technical advices and the co-work among design professionals/technicians and members of a community or group. However, participative praxis implies a change at the involved actors' attitudes

Through reforming roles of actors and actions at design work, the achievements will favour a controlled growth of cities, providing people with opportunities for transforming their immediate contexts on sustainable tissues.

In order to start changing, it is needed a different way of knowing the reality, akin to the manner in which historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists reconstruct or represent a past or present reality, as an exercise of empathy and imagination.[12]

Also we need to be aware of context variables, cities are a collage, with distinctive parts and others resulting from mixes, the relevant fact is they are a source of behaviours and aesthetic samples that enrich the life of their inhabitants. Multiculturalism makes design particularly difficult even more when community interests do not match market forces, because the diversity of principles, ideologies, beliefs and experiences increases the information of analysis.

Here relies the reason why is important for designers to acquire skills from other professionals. We need to set aside what we "know", looking past tradition and even preconceived notions. Having the wisdom to observe with a truly open mind, like anthropologist, without judging, but empathizing.[13] Through the well implementation of participatory design as a high-level feature of design methods that can be implemented in a myriad of ways, conceiving it not as a single but integral design method. And considering the following dimensions: domains of human activity, roles of stakeholders in a design, types of shared design representations, the scope and duration of participatory interactions, and the relationship of users to design activity with respect to changes in their knowledge and skill.[14]

The finality is to make decision processes become clearer, in order to share control with citizens during development phases from planning until project execution, using proper collaboration models, appropriate community structures, boundary objects, process models in support of natural evolution of artefacts, and meta-design, to integrate individual and social creativity. Creativity does not happen inside a person's head, but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a socio-cultural context (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

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[4] Idem.

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[6] Ibid., p. 54.

[7] Ibid. p. 27.

[8] Martin, T. and Cassault, A., p. 15,16.

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[11] Romero, Gustavo et al. (Coord.), p. 7

[12] Martin, T. and Casault A., p. 6.

[13] Kelley, Tom. The ten faces of innovation. IDEO`s strategies for beating the devil's advocate & driving creativity throughout your organization. Doubleday, 2005., p. 17.

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