

We want to establish with you a global consortium of universities exploring

INCREMENTAL HOUSING AS AN INTEGRAL URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Our goal is to develop and promote effective strategies for urban growth in the Third World in addressing critical development issues

17 Oct 09

A BEGINNING: World Urban Forum (WUF V) NETWORKING SESSION

- A 'kickoff' event is planned at the World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro, March 22-26, 2010. We are proposing a 'Networking Event' entitled: "INCREMENTAL HOUSING: DÉJÀ VU AND THE FUTURE?" which examines basic questions, presents profiles of incremental growth from around the world and reflects on the early trials in the 70s. The SIGUS Group in the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT is proposing the event.
- Universities are invited to participate and present process profiles based on longitudinal surveys of incremental housing. Lessons drawn from these surveys would be proposed and debated at WUF V at the Networking session.
- The profiles from the session would be combined into a publication for widespread distribution. A website is being established at MIT by the SIGUS group as a parallel depository of information, along with a 'Facebook' listing for interactive discussion.
- Participating universities would be invited to continue in a partnership with continued exploration of housing issues.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

- Incremental construction and expansion of housing is the key process of increasing housing stock and housing quality in most cities. In rapidly growing cities informal building and expansion – the pay-as-you-go process – is often the *de facto* pattern of growth, particularly in the majority low-income sectors. Their simple starter makeshift 'cores,' transform themselves to good quality 'middle-income' housing given sufficient time and limited constraints. But they do not stop there, but often add extra units which are a net gain to a city's housing stock and provide rental income to the families. Formal housing often exhibits the same expansion process from a different starting point, and with equal advantages. Incremental housing is not just piecemeal improvement of quality, but is defined as the addition of space, at the minimum a room. What triggers, what catalysts drive the incremental room-by-room growth?
- Information now emerging shows that incremental growth offers a strategic opportunity for an effective increase in housing supply and quality. The informal incremental/staged process of housing growth has not been embraced nor well understood in the past, but new studies have traced the long-term growth and expansion benefits.
- From a formal intervention perspective, a core-house/starter house approach for the low income had been tried. These 'site and services' projects lost favor as a housing policy, but studies now suggest their efficacy and champions have emerged for revisiting this approach. The studies also point out issues that need to be addressed. For example, the quality of individual self-managed house expansion is often deficient, with serious consequences in disaster prone areas. Also, the parallel demands on infrastructure are not well considered.
- Agencies involved in rebuilding after disasters have embraced a strategy of 'relief with development', linking the emergency measures to long-term reconstruction. Essentially this is in support of the efficacy of the incremental development process, and points to the value of an incremental strategy for housing, applicable to cities as well.
- Recent respected studies predicate a doubling of population with a tripling of urban growth in so-called Third World cities by 2030. Even if the reality of the next 20 years is less than feared, the trend is clear: there is a tremendous need for housing, with concurrent demands on land with severe consequences on urban expansion. Costs of building 'instant' housing is prohibitive. Capitalizing and expanding on the incremental expansion process suggests ways for cities to guide their growth in partnership with the many informal and formal homeowners. Cities would focus on vital infrastructure and services, while incremental development offers an increase in quantity and quality, and often a density increase promoting compact cities and lowering demand on scarce urban land.

WHY UNIVERSITIES?

We have a long term interest in understanding housing and urban issues from an educational and knowledge perspective, and are a key depository of information. We are independent in our research and not subject to development agency volatility. Our students of today will be the leaders of tomorrow: immersion, understanding and learning from the real world provides a strong grounding throughout their academic and professional practice in housing and urban development.

SOME QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

How to define incremental housing? How does it differ from 'core housing', staged construction, 'grow' housing, progressive development, starter housing – are these labels all describing the same process?

Is the renewed interest essentially the 'core housing' of the 70s as part of 'site and services' projects? Why did the earlier attempts in the 70s fail, and what lessons could we apply in today's context?

How can the incremental process be directed and made a more effective force toward augmenting needed urban housing and in supporting appropriate city growth? What role is appropriate for the government without stifling individual initiative? How could the other stakeholders – private sector, NGOs, etc. – participate in supportive programs?

What are the options *in providing* starter housing? Does 'one size' fit all? or how can the range of options be tailored to various sectors? How does the incremental process fit with other development initiatives?

And does the incremental housing model offer a way proactive way to effectively cope with the expected rapid urban growth?

SURVEY FORMAT FOR WUF V

A format developed and tested in field trials is proposed as a comparative frame for documenting and understanding the growth process. Early tests in Lima, Peru (squatter settlements), Manila, Philippines (site and services, upgrading, and squatter settlements), and La Presita (El Salvador) refined the format. (See: http://web.mit.edu/sigus/www/NEW/FAUA-SIGUS_Webpage_See-HOME.htm/Communities%20Frameset.htm)

Three families of housing profiles are being considered: early 'site and services' projects which featured core housing, older now established squatter settlements, and independent progressively expanded housing. Sample surveys of each type would give a general understanding, and would assist in the definition of a broader indepth survey.

The following is the composite chart from a squatter settlement in Lima, Peru, and is an example of a common base for global comparisons. The frame links time, family circumstances (family size), income, and room additions as key Indicators of the incremental process.

*Inflection Points:
What were the catalysts
which drove the addition?
How was it done?
What funding and support
was involved?*

