

TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local

e-ISSN: 2386-9968

Number 7 (2020), 1-23

DOI 10.7203/terra.7.17188

IIDL – Instituto Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Local

Community policies, urban consolidation and social housing. An insight from Colombia and the city of Tunja, Boyacá

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ARTICLE SECTION

Community policies, urban consolidation and social housing. An insight from Colombia and the city of Tunja, Boyacá

Abstract: Latin American cities present multiple urban problems, among them a growing process in leaps and urban gaps left by the self-construction of houses, all within a framework of inequality in the distribution of land, with insufficient planning solutions, far from the reality of communities, and not very effective in mitigating the quality deficit of housing and urban habitat. The case of this medium-sized city, the analysis of its urban and social housing policy, the gaze of public managers and the perspective of the community are studied to find improvement proposals that seek to consolidate the urban environment, thought from the neighborhood unit and the community leadership, that allow the social development and are not limited only to the physical determinants.

Key words: Public policies, urban development, human needs, qualitative housing deficit, community empowerment, neighborhood diagnosis.

Reception: July 13, 2020

Review: October 22, 2020

Acceptance: November 16, 2020

Citation:

López, D. M. (2020). Comunidad, consolidación urbana y políticas de vivienda social. Una mirada desde Colombia y la ciudad de Tunja, Boyacá. *TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local*, (7), 1-23. DOI 10.7203/terra.7.17188

IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. El crecimiento de la ciudad no planificada en Latinoamérica deja vacíos urbanos que no son resueltos por las políticas urbanas ni de vivienda social.2. Existe una desarticulación entre las políticas urbanas y las de vivienda social.3. Las comunidades no tienen participación en las políticas públicas y las necesidades de vivienda no están siendo resueltas.4. La mejora integral barrial es una herramienta de intervención pública que debería vincularse a las necesidades para la mejora de vivienda.5. Las organizaciones populares de vivienda deberían ser empoderadas y tenidas en cuenta en los proyectos urbanos y de vivienda social. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Unplanned city growth in Latin America leaves urban voids that are not being solved with urban policies or social housing.2. There is a disarticulation between urban policies and social housing policies.3. Communities have no participation in public policies and housing needs are not being secured.4. Integral neighborhood improvement is a public intervention tool that must be linked to home improvement needs.5. The OPV, community-driven housing associations, should be empowered in urban and social housing projects. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. El creixement de la ciutat no planificada a Llatinoamèrica deixa buits urbans que no estan sent resolts per les polítiques urbanes ni d'habitatge social.2. Existeix una desarticulació entre les polítiques urbanes i les polítiques d'habitatge social.3. Les comunitats no tenen participació en les polítiques públiques i les necessitats d'habitatge no estan sent resoltes.4. El millorament integral barrial és una eina d'intervenció pública que hauria d'estar vinculada a les necessitats per a la millora d'habitatge.5. Les organitzacions populars d'habitatge OPV, haurien de ser apoderades i tingudes en compte en els projectes urbans i d'habitatge social. |
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Latin American cities, particularly those in Colombia, are characterized by sporadic growth that has created a large number of urban voids and the presence of unfinished buildings. The causes are the low-income level of the population and the evident inequality, with the results being low quality housing and cities with very weak urban infrastructure. In addition to the economic gap dividing the population, urban policies and social housing do not have the coordination and planning that would; firstly, manage to create tangible results in the cities, and secondly, enable more comprehensive solutions for the population.

The predominant interventions in social housing currently in Colombia may help to mitigate the quantitative deficit but fail to mitigate the qualitative deficit. The needs of precarious homes developed by self-construction are precisely the subject of this study.

Therefore, the research perspective is focused on integral urban consolidation; both, in the physical characteristics of the cities, as well as in the criteria for selecting consolidated cities, those being social, economic, environmental characteristics, among other factors. Poverty levels define the need and relevance of the study, and the positive impact that the proposals to improve social housing policies could generate in cities, if it is possible to integrate them with urban policies.

The current conditions of the diagnoses on which urban planning is based, denote the lack of information used in the development of a proper housing policy in Colombia. This prevents evaluating its impact on the urban environment and makes it near impossible to monitor the growth process of cities and understand the real needs of the population.

The study, in a local context, focuses on the medium-scale city of Tunja, the capital of the province of Boyacá, with research centered on neighborhoods that apply for integral improvement neighborhood projects. Three questions were raised: “How are urban social housing policies and the housing programs (Sitio Propio) structured in the city of Tunja?”, “How do those responsible for public management contribute to the issue and what does the population think about these housing programs?”, and “how could social housing programs contribute to an improvement in the urban consolidation of cities?”

This analysis is not limited to solving the housing unit, but also, defining its relationship with the city and within an urban context; by analysing the developed homes by self-construction in neighborhoods with public services, located in different parts of the city. Starting at the state government level, the party responsible for ensuring equity in the territory, as well as understanding territorial planning that improves quality of life, opens up possibilities of unified projects for neighborhood improvement and social housing.

The neighborhood is then that immediate context and the most appropriate part in which the cities may intervene, in order to seek urban consolidation that links the community.

The methodology of the study proposes a classification of the neighborhoods that defines the basic characteristics of the urban environment, the internal and external quality of the dwellings and the sense of community of the households surveyed in each neighborhood. The questionnaire holds a predominantly local community focus, while the survey of public policy managers allows a review of managed projects and the possibility of promoting joint urban and housing policies, linking various administrative units for interdisciplinary work.

The results found from the theoretical framework, the perspectives of the communities and public policy managers, highlights the need to find planning solutions that integrates urban public involvements with social housing interventions. Finding on the part of the communities, a strong interest to remain in their current neighborhoods and to participate jointly with their neighbors in projects that improve both the public space of their neighborhoods and the quality of their homes.

From the relevant results, it is surprising to find that a high percentage of the community believes their urban environment is in a very poor condition and more than half of the surveyed families inhabit poor quality houses, both internally and externally. Also, there is a lack of credibility in the management of the state, low participation that communities are given in public policy decision-making and the little collaboration they have received from it. The sum of these factors denotes a neglect of the needs of the population by the municipal mayor's office.

The recommendations and conclusions of this study aim to promote a greater interest from governmental entities; since as an authority it is in their hands to manage projects that can link urban policy with social housing policy. However, there seems to be a lack of interest that is inhibiting this management. Although, at the local level the resources required to subsidize housing are more limited, the current strategies used in dispersed projects are not allowing the investment of these few resources to be used efficiently.

A good alternative is to empower the communities, through the Organizations of Popular Housing (OPV), to contribute not only to the supervised self-construction of houses, but also, to promote active participation in integral neighborhood improvement projects. Likewise, increasing public-private partnerships can solve needs that cannot be solved with public resources alone.

On the other hand, planning becomes inefficient due to a lack of instruments and a lack of updated information regarding the needs of the communities and the city. It is here where the methodology used for the analysis, carried out in this study, contributes as a tool to stimulate better clarity in the data; it may also be applied to other cities.

The application of strategies that return tangible data, regarding the identification of benefits and improvements that can be built upon, are applicable across different contexts. The possibility of proposing methodologies for projects that integrate urban needs and intervention in social housing remains open for future research.