

### **Urban Shelter and Services: Public Policies and Management Approaches**

G. Shabbir Cheema. Praeger, New York, 1987. 221 pp. \$39.95.

### **Spontaneous Shelter: International Perspectives and Prospects**

Carl V. Patton, editor. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1988. 380 pp. \$39.95.

### **Shelter, Settlement and Development**

Lloyd Rodwin, editor. Allen & Unwin, Boston, 1987. 476 pp. \$39.95.

Benign but nevertheless pointed neglect has been the recent fate of the physical in the planning profession. For example, the need for and ability to help provide shelter and basic infrastructure in the developing countries have received low priority. We seem to have agreed, consciously or not, that, if poor people in developing countries valued roofs over their heads as protection from the monsoon rains, they would choose to invest accordingly. Surveys of poor people's expenditures have led us to conclude that, because poor people give priority to feeding their families and to remaining near employment, shelter is not very important to them. Architects, town and country planners, and geographers, sensitive to the significance of space and environment in people's lives, have persisted in arguing that adequate housing, clean water, sanitation and garbage disposal, and good roads are essential elements of development. But it is difficult to translate this kind of development into productivity gains, efficiency, and gross national product growth rates. The prevailing perception of public investments in shelter has continued to be that such investment is a social-welfare, nonproductive investment in consumption goods.

Yet, if the recent increase in the number of books about shelter and settlement of the poor in developing countries is an accurate indicator, one might conclude that the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSHI) -1987- was a success. Its purpose, at least-to renew political commitment to the improvement of shelter for the poor-has been given wide publicity. Moreover, there may be additional

grounds for hoping that shelter is now coming to be seen as a basic human need, central to development planning. The three books under review here provide examples.

The territories covered in these three books overlap considerably. All three authors describe the evolution of practice in the shelter sector during the past two or three decades, and the lessons learned. They agree that past efforts to house the poor by investing available resources in the construction of a small number of complete, "low cost" housing units, built to technically high, Western standards were inappropriate. All three authors acknowledge that available public-sector resources are inadequate to meet even a fraction of the shelter needs of the poor or middle-income, rapidly urbanizing population of the Third World. In addition, all three recognize the contribution of what they variously term the "informal," "spontaneous," "unorganized" activity of people sheltering themselves. All three seek strategies by which the public sector can reinforce this activity. Access to land, the importance of land tenure, the need for the public sector to be flexible and to accommodate incremental building activity are all discussed. But here the similarities stop. The books differ in the orientation and experience of their authors, who emphasize different aspects of the need for, and efforts to provide, shelter.

The intended audience for the Rodwin book, which was sponsored by the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS-Habitat), is high-level public policy makers in developing countries. The authors of the 15 chapters of the book include many heavyweights in the field. Mayo and Renaud (the World Bank) write on housing preference and shelter finance, respectively, in terms that will be familiar to those who have followed World Bank Staff Working Papers. There are three good chapters on shelter issues: Moanvenzadeh's chapter on the construction industry; Doebele's chapter on land policy; and Gakenheimer's and Brando's chapter on infrastructure standards. Burns and Ferguson write about criteria for future policy, and Schon applies his ideas about learning systems to settlement policy. Richardson and Hall look at spatial settlement issues at the national and the metropolitan levels, respectively.

As one might expect from this list of distinguished contributors, most of whom consult or work with aid institutions, the discipline of economics and discussions of economic efficiency dominate the arguments. There is also a great deal of First-World expert's confidence that the right issues are being addressed in appropriately rational and scientific ways. Peattie (MIT) represents a lone voice asking if the shelter process by which the poor house themselves is being accurately defined and adequately understood. She asks if the important questions about shelter systems are currently being addressed. Hardoy and Satterthwaite trace the colonial history of Third World urbanization and raise questions concerning political economy and class. Regrettably, there is no discussion of appropriate design and technology for sheltering the poor or of the role of community and community participation. This omission reflects long-established attitudes that learning from project-level experience is tedious and not useful in considerations of important national policy. John Turner, who since the early 1960s has spearheaded action on and discussion of poor people's shelter activities, is not among the contributors. Moreover, environmental issues and the role of women are not included in the book.

Although several of the contributors draw heavily on previous publications and present few new arguments, readers familiar with the literature will find this book a useful, even valuable, contribution. It enables the academic, the practitioner, and the administrator to obtain relatively quickly an understanding of the current arguments and posture of the World Bank and other international aid institutions regarding the shelter and settlement sector.

While Rodwin's contributors address general policy guidelines, Cheema is concerned with effective implementation of policy. Cheema attempts to describe how different countries go about implementation. Examples draw on country papers, case studies of upgrading and sites-and-services projects, and concept papers on specific themes that were sponsored by the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) as part of a cross-national research project on managing urban development. Cheema, who is development administration planner at UNCRD, was the project coordinator. Unfortunately, the author describes the case studies quite colorlessly, with little elaboration

of the political, economic, or social context that has helped to shape the process observed in each setting. The flesh-and-blood understanding of process that good case material provides—well illustrated in Hirschmann's classic

*Development Projects Observed* (The Brookings Institution, 1967)—is conspicuously absent. No doubt, public administrators and policy makers at national and regional levels who are confronting questions of affordability of shelter and related urban services will value the list of seven steps in determining affordability and the citation of a relevant manual. But this level of detail, unaccompanied by a lively conceptual discussion, will frustrate the interested but more general professional audience.

Patton's book, a collection of 16 chapters on spontaneous shelter, presents a broad and eclectic set of issues. The book is not cohesive, but the rich array of topics partially offsets this problem. There are two chapters on history and context. The first, by Palmer and Patton, provides a typology of the evolution of shelter policy and the development of ideas, actions, and learning. McTaggart gives a useful overview of the conditions in which spontaneous shelter seems to *occur*, concluding that it is primarily a phenomenon of Third World countries that have adopted a market economy. Three chapters on planning and environmental issues follow. Page's chapter underlines the extremely degraded environment of spontaneous shelters specifically, and of Third World urban contexts more generally. A chapter by Rapoport on spontaneous settlements as vernacular design takes a circuitous path to establish that such settlements are culturally supportive. Glasser's chapter on self-help technology lists indigenous materials and strategies for self-help, but downplays the systemic reasons why these materials and strategies have not generally been adopted by public policy makers.

Eight chapters cover contemporary examples drawn from Latin America, Indonesia, the floating settlements of Hong Kong, Liberia, Kenya, and Italy. These are followed by some refreshing attention to the experience of socialist countries in Pleskovic's chapter on squatter housing in Yugoslavia. The chapters vary in quality of prose and clarity of argument, but most contain useful country-specific data

and references. Amis's chapter on commercialized rental housing in Nairobi effectively illustrates the dangers of encouraging capitalist rent relations in the informal sector of the poor. Unfortunately, there is little attempt to develop a common framework to help the reader to compare and analyze the varied experiences described in these eight chapters. Consequently, each chapter will probably be read carefully mainly by planners interested in the geographic region.

Three chapters on policies and prospects conclude the book. Handelman discusses the role of the state in housing in Latin America. Hansen and Williams, in elaborating a progressive housing development model, suggest differing planning strategies for large cities and small towns. In the final chapter, on future prospects, Patton attempts to weave this diverse array of positions and findings together, listing some very general policy proposals. As he concedes, the difficulty is not in their listing but in their execution.

None of the three books shifts the paradigm of development thinking and its important subset, shelter. However, the books do embody a significant and healthy move toward consideration of the provision of shelter and of poor people's role in it. The Rodwin book may be the "best buy," as it will have staying power, but Patton's may be the most useful in stimulating thinking about alternative paradigms of development.

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