

Alonso Alfredo Ayala Aleman

A Theoretical Framework of the integration process of *barrios* in Caracas, Venezuela

This article deals with one of the most challenging development issues in the metropolises of the developing world: the socioeconomic and spatial integration of people living in informal settlements. Caracas is presented as a representative case of the emerging development paradigms aimed at improving the quality of life of informal settlers through urban upgrading projects, political inclusion and socioeconomic integration.

The context of informal settlements in Caracas

The valley of Caracas in Venezuela is characterized by numerous informal settlements, known as *barrios de ranchos*. With a total population of 3,861,239 inhabitants, the metropolitan area of Caracas has about a third of its inhabitants living in *barrios*, which roughly occupy one third of the total area of the city (Negron, Marcos 2004; Gouverneur et al 2001).

Barrios are precarious human settlements developed outside the framework of urban regulations of the formal city and continuously growing on invaded and non-urbanized land, which is topographically steep and environmentally vulnerable. Developed through self-help of its inhabitants as the only mechanism to solve their housing problems, these settlements have gone through a consolidation process lasting in some cases more than 40 years, thus assuring their permanence in the urban landscape (Virtuoso et al 1997; Bolivar 1997).

The inhabitants of the *barrio*, being spatially segregated and socially excluded from the surrounding formal city, must not only struggle with the difficulties of their living environment reflected in the lack of access to urban basic services, infrastructure as well as physical vulnerability, but also with insecure property rights, ambiguous citizenship, unemployment and underemployment, high crime rates, and powerlessness in the decision-making process that affects their lives.

This situation poses spatial integration and socioeconomic inclusion of *barrios* as major challenges to the urban planning and political culture of the country to ensure justice and equal access to the benefits offered by urban development to those urban dwellers who have been deprived of their basic human rights since decades.

The European perspective of spatial segregation and integration

The conceptualization of spatial segregation and integration from a purely spatial perspective does not explain the multidimensionality of the concept in terms of the socio-cultural and the economic factors.

Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel (2001) provide a definition of spatial segregation as the opposing form to integration: "Segregation is the projection of social structure onto space. Based on empirical evidence, it articulates that social groups are not evenly distributed throughout the territory of a city, but concentrate in certain areas and at certain times. Each social group has its typical places of residence, work, and leisure. Thus defined, segregation is a universal phenomenon, which is as old as the city itself. The socio-spatial structure of the city can be read like a map recording the structure of society. Urban space is always socially defined space".

On the other hand, De Boe and Hauquet (ESDP 1999) define the spatial dimension of integration as the expression of opportunities for economic and cultural interaction within and between areas, which may

reflect the willingness to cooperate. Spatial segregation or integration indicates, among other things, the levels of connectivity between transport systems of different geographical scales. This spatial dimension is believed to be positively influenced by the presence of efficient administrative bodies, physical and functional complementarities between areas and the absence of cultural and political controversies.

Albrecht Göschel (2001) explains that an attempt to systematise the concept of integration by breaking it down into its different components would be a very difficult task. Nevertheless, he contends that the three dimensional concept of integration is a widely accepted notion. The first level is material or systemic, which is concerned with the integration of labour in the form of “citizen by participation in economic life” (*Wirtschaftsbürger*). The second level also needs the *Wirtschaftsbürger* as a citizen who participates in the democratic decision-making process, thus exercising his or her power. The third level of integration refers to the informal relationship networks, such as friendships and kinships for mutual assistance in the community at the neighbourhood level. These three levels of integration are considered open and independent of each other. This means that being integrated or not at any one level does not necessarily lead to inclusion in or exclusion from another.

The analytical framework of the URBEX project (Urban Social Exclusion and Modes of Economic Integration, Musterd et al 1999) relates the modes of economic integration to space providing a holistic understanding of the concept. This framework is based on a study of social exclusion in selected European cities and refers to the interrelationship of the three modes of economic integration as means to allow households and communities to gain access to resources within space. These modes are the market exchange, which is closely associated with economic restructuring; redistribution, which is related to the welfare state; and reciprocity, which refers to social networking and solidarity.

In conclusion it can be argued that social exclusion, spatial segregation and integration or inclusion are interrelated concepts, which must be defined as inseparable parts of an urban process related to time, cultural and social contexts, political and economic structures, and space.

Social exclusion and spatial segregation in Venezuela

Venezuela, a highly urbanised country where the political process has been characterised by 45 years of uninterrupted democracy, represents a unique opportunity for analysing the process of social exclusion.

Teolinda Bolivar (1998) introduces the notion of the *Barrio City* to differentiate the informal settlements of Caracas with the formal city, thus highlighting the large social and spatial differences between the two. The *Barrio City* in Caracas offers a socio-physical laboratory of exclusion and spatial segregation where the concentration of poverty generates attitudes, behaviours and values that impede the ability of residents to grasp whatever opportunities exist for social mobility (Cartaya et al 1997). High crime rates, low participation in the education and health system and a host of other problems are seen to be causally related to the spatial concentration of poverty. The spatial polarisation of the population has a potential to harmfully affect the social participation of the individual, who is also stigmatised by those living outside these deprived areas (URBEX 1999).

Social exclusion has been defined as “the inability to enjoy social rights without assistance and the inability to have access to the benefits the society offers (...) It comprises not only the lack of access to goods and services which underlie poverty but also exclusion from security, justice, political representation and citizenship” (Rodgers et al 1994)¹.

¹ Taken from Cartaya et al (1997). Venezuela: Exclusion and integration – A synthesis in the building?, Labour Institutions and Development Programme.

The combination of social exclusion and geographical segregation is therefore an extremely powerful mechanism of exclusion with significance that exceeds material deficiencies. Being located in the *Barrio City* implies reduced or zero access to public goods. Where these goods do exist, their quality will be lower, and this constitutes a mechanism of differentiation and segmentation (Cartaya et al 1997).

Approximately a quarter of the homes where the poor live are adequate in the sense of having minimum habitable space and services. About one quarter and a third of the population suffers from an extreme degree of exclusion with regard to securing the right to education and health. The rights and social entitlements that guarantee access to education and health share a strong link to geographical segregation. Villanueva & Baldó (1995) argue that as long as the deplorable living urban conditions persist, no social or educational effort can make it possible to integrate the inhabitants of *barrios* as equal citizens of society. The inhabitants of the *barrio* are spectators of a city that persistently denies them their right to socioeconomic opportunities and political participation.

The meaning of integration in the context of the *barrios* of Caracas

The integration of inhabitants of informal settlements in the context of Caracas refers to a process where low-income dwellers of *barrios* can experience a sense of belonging to the urban context in which they aspire to achieve an acceptable level of quality of life by exercising their basic human rights. This process is multidimensional:

- In physical terms: the realization of the right to access social and physical infrastructure, and to be protected from crime and physical damage caused by natural and man-made disasters.
- In social terms: the acceptance and inclusion of *barrio* inhabitants who benefit from a conducive social urban environment, and the right of citizenship through the attainment of the responsibilities that come along with it.
- In political terms: the attainment of the right of being heard and to decide about one's life, as well as the right to justice.
- In economic terms: the right to participate in economic life and being productive and benefit from the exchange of goods and services,
- In environmental terms: the process of sustaining a healthy environment where the individual can develop and reproduce, inheriting a continuous better life for future generation.

The political process of *barrio* inclusion in urban planning

Since the 1960s, certain *barrios* of Caracas have benefited from the rehabilitation projects implemented by different governments on a piece-meal basis. However it was only in 1987 that the *Ley Orgánica de Ordenación Urbanística* recognized for the first time the informal settlements in urban planning. This recognition, although mildly stated, marks a major change in the urban development paradigm, which had all along perceived *barrios* as an undesirable outcome of rapid urbanization, and therefore be somehow eradicated. The new paradigm is in conformity with the Millennium Development Goal 7, Target 11², of the United Nations, which aims to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of slum dwellers through upgrading the physical and socioeconomic urban conditions of the existing informal settlements (UN-Habitat 2003).

² **Goal 7:** Ensure environmental sustainability. **Target 11:** By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers. *Indicator 31:* Proportion of urban population with access to improve sanitation. *Indicator 32:* Proportion of households with secure tenure (UNHSP 2003: 7-8)

Based on this recognition, the *Sectoral Plan for the Incorporation of the Barrios into the Urban Structure of Caracas* was prepared in 1994. In a decentralized approach, Urban Design Units were identified, covering *barrio* zones for urban upgrading purposes with the participation of the inhabitants. Although the 1994 Sectoral Plan stipulates participation in the planning process, its importance as a precondition for implementation was reinforced by the creation of the Participatory Democracy of the Fifth Republic in the year 1999. The main statement of the new Constitution is that the country's development process will be achieved through people's participation in the decision making process.

Four main programs aimed at upgrading the life of low-income inhabitants and their housing conditions were formulated at the national level in coordination with the National Housing Council and the Housing Institutes at the local level, namely:

- Program 1: Homeless
- Program 2: *Barrio* Upgrading
- Program 3: House Unit Upgrading (in *barrios* and social housing settlements)
- Program 4: Social Housing Settlement Upgrading

Two main lines of actions were also considered parallel to the physical interventions in the upgrading process of *barrios*:

- The organization and empowerment of communities living in *barrios* and,
- The regularization of the land won which their houses are situated

These political changes and the consequent political will have formed the basis of the institutional framework necessary to activate the integration process of informal settlements in Caracas.

The modes of economic integration and their relation to informal settlements

The URBEX programme directly links the spatial dimension of social integration and social exclusion to the concept of modes of economic integration, assuming that each mode of economic integration requires a different set of socio-spatial conditions. The concepts used in the analytical framework of URBEX were transposed to the *Barrio City* in order to construct a theoretical framework as a starting point to model the integration process of *barrios* within the purview of the current political situation of Venezuela.

Three main dimensions of the geography of economic integration are distinguished:

- *Market exchange*: the spatial dimension of market relations is determined by the range of goods and services available across space. This can be seen in terms of both production and consumption. Access to employment of informal settlers, be it within the settlement or outside it are crucial for production. The availability of all necessary goods and services sold in the market is critical for consumption. The geography of economic integration through the market is related to the classic location theories in which centrality and access (distance and transportation costs) are key factors to measure the degree of integration.
- *Redistribution*: the spatial dimension of redistribution refers to the policies implemented by the Welfare State to provide equal access to the benefits of society across those areas inhabited by the disadvantage sections of the population. This usually occurs within a delimited territory where both collection and the distribution of resources take place. The efficacy of redistribution programs vary amongst *barrios* as a result of the size of the municipality and the quantum of revenue it generates. It is also believed that the arbitrary and discriminative allocation of budget to local authorities by the national government is an influential factor in this regard.

- *Reciprocity*: this implies the existence of networks as well as the material exchange of goods and services within these networks. Therefore, spatial proximity is an asset in that it facilitates the dialectical relationship between exchange and network maintenance thus allowing trust to develop. Loose spatial relations between the members of a reciprocity network can be compensated by strong family, kinship or community relations.

“Each mode of economic integration also involves different forms of social and physical infrastructure. Thus, market exchange presupposes a concentration of population, which forms the basis for production and distribution. Redistribution entails the actual presence of means of collective consumption and agents for redistribution, while reciprocity requires an appropriate arrangement of public and private space, that is, offering places that foster social networks by bundling social relations in space and time”. (URBEX 1999)

This comprehensive approach relating the modes of economic integration to space offered by the URBEX project has more policy relevance, opening a broader field of study, than one which views the problem of social exclusion underlying poverty from a unitary perspective.

Main assumptions and hypotheses of the integration process of *barrios*

Based on the analytical framework of URBEX and cursory review of existing integrationist projects and the socio-political situation of Venezuela the following assumptions and hypotheses are formulated.

Assumptions

- The informal settlements are preventing functional urban development, thus generating and accelerating both “negative” spatial segregation and social exclusion
- The urban development policies and strategies aimed at integration and social inclusion must be designed as a holistic approach to the problem
- There exists a human potential in the informal settlements, which has to be activated
- These policies must be related to the modes of economic integration within space so as the impact of integrationist projects implemented in *barrios* becomes measurable.

Hypotheses

- If a holistic urban strategy geared at eliminating social exclusion and spatial segregation of the *barrio* is adopted, encompassing the integration of economic, social, political and spatial policies, then the integration of informal settlements is possible. On the contrary, if the strategy does not consider this premise, then conflicts arise and the integration path of the *barrio* is endangered.
- If the existing human potential of the communities living in *barrios* are empowered through education, awareness, and active participation at the local decision making level, then their spatial and socio-economic integration into the formal city will be possible owing to the creation of socially responsible entities, which coordinate, plan and sustain the development of the community.
- The degree of spatial integration and social inclusion of informal settlement inhabitants is measurable, if the factors deriving from the modes of economic integration are converted into operational indicators with which the impact and/or results of integrationist policies and projects could be evaluated.

Based on these hypotheses and assumptions, an attempt is made to model the process of integration of *barrios* in Caracas, where the urban upgrading projects are posited as the main mechanism to achieve this (Figure 1). This diagrammatic representation of the process is the result of the conceptual understanding of the spatial and socioeconomic integration process of *barrios* by relating the modes of economic integration to space and then, by incorporating the three key dimensions of the geography of economic integration to the specific process of *barrio* upgrading projects being implemented under the current housing policy of Venezuela. The ultimate goal of the integration policy is urban poverty reduction by the inclusion of *barrio* inhabitants into the socioeconomic, political and spatial formal structure of the city.

The idea behind this conceptual exercise is to create an analytical and methodological framework to guide urban research on the integration of informal settlements through upgrading projects.

References

- Baldó, Josefina and Federico Villanueva: (1995):** Tendencias de Crecimiento en las zonas de barrios del área metropolitana de Caracas y sector Panamericana-Los Teques de la Región Capital. In: Urbana 16-17, pp. 13-30
- Baldó, Josefina and Federico Villanueva: (1995):** Un Plan para los Barrios de Caracas. Premio Nacional de Investigación en Vivienda 1995. Concejo Nacional de la Vivienda (CONAVI)
- Bolívar, Teolinda (1997):** Densificación de los barrios autoproducidos en la capital de Venezuela. Riesgos y vulnerabilidad. Red de Estudios Sociales en Prevención de Desastres en América latina (<http://www.desenredando.org>, 03.04.2004)
- Bolívar, Teolinda (1998):** Contribución al análisis de los territorios autoproducidos en la metrópoli capital venezolana y la fragmentación urbana. In: Urbana, Vol. 3, No. 23, pp. 53-74
- Cartaya, Vanessa; Rodolf Magallanes and Carlos Domínguez (1997):** Venezuela. Exclusion and integration- A synthesis in the building? Institute of Labour Studies with the collaboration of the United Nations Development Program (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inst/papers/1997/dp90/ch3.htm>, 03.04.2004)
- Congreso de la Republica de Venezuela (1987):** Ley Orgánica de Ordenamiento Urbano. Gaceta Oficial No. 33.868 del 16 de diciembre
- Congreso de la Republica de Venezuela (1999):** Constitución de la Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela.
- De Boe, Ph and Th. Hauquet (1999):** Spatial Integration. Strand 1.4. Study Programme on European Spatial Planning –ESDP (<http://www.nordregio.se/spespn/Files/1.4.final>, 03.04.2004)
- Göschel, Albrecht (2001):** Integration and the city. In: Deutsche Zeitschrift für Kommunalwissenschaften, Vol. 40, No.1 (http://www.difu.de/index.shtml?publikationen/dfk/en/01_1/welcome.shtml, 03.04.2004)
- Gouverneur, David and Oscar Grauer (2001):** De los asentamientos informales a la ciudad: Los Barrios de Caracas. In: Quaderns d'arquitectura i urbanisme, # 228. Barcelona, Col.legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya, pp. 30-43
- Häußermann, Hartmut and Walter Siebel (2001):** Integration and segregation- Thoughts on an old debate. In: Deutsche Zeitschrift für Kommunalwissenschaften, Vol. 40, No.1 (http://www.difu.de/index.shtml?publikationen/dfk/en/01_1/welcome.shtml, 03.04.2004)
- Musters, Sako et al. (1999):** Urban social exclusion and modes of integration. Literature review. URBEX Series, No. 1. Fourth RTD Framework Programme. Targeted Socio-Economic Research (TSER) (http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/urbex/resrep/fd_1.htm, 03.04.2004)
- Negron, Marcos (2004):** Caracas de Latinoamérica. In: Caracas Cenital, Colección Fundación para la Cultura Urbana, Editorial Arte, Caracas.
- UN-Habitat (2003):** The Global Report on Human Settlements: Facing the Slum Challenge. Published in association with The United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Virtuoso S.J, José; César Martín y Mary Gloria Olivo (1997): Consorcio Catuche. Seminario Internacional MejorHab, Caracas

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



