



Social Movement and Habitat Production in Buenos Aires. When Policies are Effective

Lic. Mariano Scheinson; Arch. Cecilia Cabrera

Urban and Regional Planning Specialists, Instituto Superior de Urbanismo (Higher Institute of Urbanism) – School of Architecture and Urbanism - University of Buenos Aires – Buenos Aires, Argentina

marianoscheinson@yahoo.com.ar; ceciliac1@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This paper intends to highlight some emerging matters that are crucial to popular housing development experiences carried out by social organisations within the context of political movements in Buenos Aires in recent years.

In this sense, the main purpose here is to analyse the role of the political dimension –taken broadly not only as the participation in the public scenario, but also in its relationship with power structures– in generating efficiency conditions for the development of said processes. It should be understood that this kind of undertakings, for being framed within a politically organised social movement (as opposed to NGO's), exhibit a significant dialogue capacity with the State, which, on the one hand, allows mediations that operate as control guarantees, but, on the other, generates power and public presence inequalities among the group active members.

Another purpose of this paper is analysing the capabilities of this kind of social movement for overcoming micro and sector role scales (“social economy”), and their potential for generating scale economies to participate in urban development.

0. INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-eighties, popular habitat production in Argentina was mainly related to self-construction processes (both spontaneous and planned), and, to a lower degree, to the

application of focused social policies, usually financed by International Organisations and the State.

During that period, especially in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, housing conditions of the most vulnerable social sectors not only did not improve but deteriorated within a context of generalised impoverishment.

Since the 2002 crisis, changes in the processes of popular habitat production began to show, framed within a deep wear of public institutions, delegitimization of political parties, and rise and consolidation of new social players.

While in the past the main actors of this process were NGO's, cooperatives, local government agencies and financial international organisations, a new configuration of player begins to emerge with the crisis. This new scenario brings about the emergence of new public policies, where social and political movements that had already achieved a significant public presence, such as *piqueteros* (picket) and human rights organisations, start to play a leading role.

From this perspective, the experiences of popular urban habitat production of the "Movimiento Territorial de Liberación" (MTL) picket movement and the "Madres de Plaza de Mayo" Association will be considered as examples of this new modality.

It is important to analyse the implications of the evolution of these social movements –with a strong political tradition of public sphere demands– toward a peculiar intervention modality in urban habitat production.

Thus, the political dimension of their actions becomes the key to analysing the conditions of efficiency in promoting urban habitat for the most underprivileged sectors.

Below there is a summary description of actual experiences in popular housing complex production carried out by both organizations. Then, common elements related to the purposes of the present paper will be analysed. Finally, they will be considered as signs of transformation of popular habitat production processes derived from the incorporation of those movements through their political action.

When analysing the evolution of the aforementioned process, A. Hirschman's "exit" and "voice" concepts, related to social actors' behaviour, will be taken as reference. Those concepts prove useful to understand the context where these new popular habitat production modalities develop.

1. STATE, SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND HOUSING PROBLEMS WITHIN THE CRISIS CONTEXT¹

In Argentina, during the last thirty years, the combined effects of applying bureaucratic-state terrorism (1976-82) and the subsequent uninterrupted adoption of recurrent adjustment economic policies (neoliberal) brought about, among other significant consequences, a deep

¹ M. Scheinsohn et al., 2006, Constructing from within a Social Movement: Self-management of Large Building Enterprises– (coauthored with Beatriz Rajland, Luis Einstein and Ernesto Pastrana) En M. Balbo (comp.) *Promoting social inclusion in urban areas: policies and practice* - Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia. N-Aerus Conference 2005, SIDA/ HDM-University of Lund, Venezia.

and constant delegitimization process of the State and the political apparatus as a whole, together with the break and disintegration of social bonds.

The gradual dismantling of the pseudo-Keynesian policies, and the blocking of the 'integrating' social pact associated to them, generated an increase in demands for spaces of political and identity mediation and socialization beyond formal channels.

In this scenario, new political expressions, related to the (predominant) social sectors that were most severely affected by these blended policies and crises, have arisen and eventually, through the years, tended to expand and consolidate

A significant feature of these new modalities of social demand that began to appear at the beginning of the eighties and generalized and consolidated between mid and late nineties, is represented by the 'territorialized' mode in which protests were stated.

This type of territorialized conflicts only began to generalise and become the predominant way of social demands during the nineties, as a result of the accelerated process of economic reform –deregulation, privatisations of public services, and State reform– and its subsequent generalized structural unemployment.

In the mentioned context, the 'piquete' started to take on a wide social visibility within the repertoire of collective actions, being the main social demand and protest instrument of the 'marginalized, pariahs and impoverished' of the new accumulation model. This action basically consists of the interruption of vehicular transit (or traffic in general) on the main roads and communication arteries (streets, avenues, highways, bridges); it tends to mobilise a significant amount of people around 'strategic' sites.

Through the forthcoming years, the 'piquete' has thus been constituted as the way through which the social construction of a pattern of political intervention and socialization of the sectors that have been marginalized from the traditional State-mediation spaces is put into effect.

Facing a State with all its institutions in a crisis condition, and a delegitimized traditional political praxis, some of these organizations tended to reinforce and consolidate their self-managing capacities, hoisted as their action principle. When, starting along 2003, the government began to put into practice a number of cooptation mechanisms, other social activists, in their turn, inserted, through their leaders, in exercising governmental public roles, as a way of articulating the political mediations representing the 'urban poor' and as managers recognized in the welfare distribution programs in exchange to their abandoning of the street-struggle for getting official promotion policies, as the creation of labour positions.

Somehow, these organizations, making out a movement that began being a marginal, informal and delegitimized player, have been taking on legitimacy and political importance alongside the very process in which the State has lost its legitimating capacity.²

The welfare programs that have emerged over this period to face the deepening of the social crisis turned out to be an efficient means through which the State is trying, on the one hand, to restore its legitimating capacity, and, on the other, to restrain the social movement that

² This situation still goes on, although these picket organizations have suffered a significant wear out process of fragmentation, with the subsequent loss of social legitimacy, due to the restoring of the traditional political organizations and the legitimating capacities of the State

had already brimmed over and was seriously threatening the survival of the whole political structure (political parties, unions, etc.).

As a response to this policy, the 'piquete' organizations tended to differentiate among themselves regarding their tactics and strategies to confront the State.

As already mentioned above, some of them became immersed in the public State sphere as both beneficiaries and privileged mediators of the social policies. In turn, other organizations turned into using State welfare resources, as well as the public acknowledgement generated by this State policy, in order to produce self-managing processes that may sustain their political independence from the State.

Within those organizations that adopt the latter political strategy, this situation enables the emergence of a profuse diversity of productive micro-enterprises and a phenomenology of organizations and transactions usually called 'social economy', including barter clubs, low-scale craftwork production for informal markets, etc

Within the mentioned scenario, the Movimiento Territorial de Liberación (MTL) emerged in Buenos Aires City through the struggle and resistance facing the eviction of buildings occupied by low-income sectors between 2000 and 2001, issues on which the State practically did not have explicit policies, or had some that turned out to be insignificant in terms of the scale of the problem. Meanwhile, the MTL has tended to evolve as a 'piquete' organization according to the previously indicated patterns.

It has taken on its movement condition and eventually adopted a double action tactic: producing labour possibilities, by means of promoting and organizing productive enterprises, and requiring the assignment of even minimum aid programs from State institutions.

This characteristic duplicity –that is common to a sector of the picket organizations– offers, on the one hand, a permanent dialogue with the State instances but, on the other, allows it to obtain certain degrees of independence from the traditional political institutions (governments, political parties, unions, etc).

2. THE MTL AND THE MONTEAGUDO PROJECT³

In context of the evolution of this experience, the MTL decided to involve in housing production as an entity, for which end it established a construction cooperative. At the beginning, the Cooperative was considered by the MTL as a merely bureaucratic requirement, because the organization axis was the movement's political-administrative structure itself.

It is important to point out that while the Monteagudo housing project is operationally "self-managed" by the social movement, it does not represent a self-construction process; it rather propounds a large scale construction work from the perspective of enterprise logistics, though under an autonomous social and political administration.

³ Sources for this chapter are taken from a work co-authored by Ernesto Pastrana, Beatriz Rajland and Luís Ainstein. Un particular conjunto de vivienda popular en Buenos Aires. Análisis socio-urbano del "Proyecto Monteagudo" (A special popular housing complex in Buenos Aires. "Monteagudo Project" Socio-urban Analysis) Paper presented at the XXVI Latin American Sociology Association Congress (ALAS) held in August 2007 in Guadalajara, Mexico.

This situation did not evolve smoothly, as Carlos “Chile” Huerta (a member of MTL Executive Board) explained: “[...] we were ready to begin when some people from the Institute turned up with the proposal of a construction company to carry out the work. We told them we were going to construct it on our own by undertaking it as a business company. They answered we were totally insane. [...], that it would be impossible. They told us that we would not be able to cover everything in the construction of 326 dwellings and ten retail stores overlooking the street. [...] That was the moment of greatest struggle and many pressures. And this is exactly what we are now doing. This is our responsibility and we are showing them that it is possible. And this way we know that in the purchase office nothing goes ‘under the counter’ [...]”.

To this end, the movement leaders had both the will and the express intention to create an employment relationship with the members participating in the works, based on the grounds that, in most cases, movement grass roots had no formal labour experience, and this could become a good training experience toward incorporating them into the “work culture”, so as to finally allow them to become “working class”. That is, it would be an adequate means to reduce their “disaffiliation” levels (Castell, 1994). For this reason, the cooperative, formally, and the MTL, specifically, became the employer of the construction workers (all of them movement members) who worked at the site. Nowadays, its head count is 700 workers.

Specifically, this being another peculiar characteristic of this project, its large-scale covers a land surface area of 18,000 m² –almost 2 hectares–, and the construction, 326 apartments in 2 and 3-level-buildings, inside a zone with compact and consolidated land use conditions.

The Monteagudo Complex design programme also includes a multiple use room; a complex of 10 business premises for commercial/services micro-enterprises, with the intention to create more jobs; a space for a child day care centre; a space for a public square – transferred to the City of Buenos Aires Municipal Government for its administration–, and several open spaces destined to the community residents’ use.

Besides, this complex has been structured as two mutually linked condominiums, corresponding to each of the two city blocks of the Project layout.

A significant matter, which sets out a first differentiation from certain usual characteristics of other popular housing projects, is its location inside the central city.

This enterprise is not located in a typical area of a residential development of this kind. On the contrary, its setting is that of a traditional working class (clase media trabajadora) residential neighbourhood (‘barrio’) -Parque Patricios- already consolidated since mid-twentieth century.

At the beginning, it was a neighbourhood with a strong industrial activity, which started to decrease as from the seventies, leaving an important number of derelict or idle factories, warehouses and industrial buildings. However, its setting was always that of a lower middle/working class residential neighbourhood, with a low density population. For this reason, in recent decades, there was an important housing demand, derived from both the lack of residential units’ renewal and the low offer of multifamily dwellings, adequate for the new generations who wanted to live in the area.

Within the urban structure of the city, this is a district close to the main downtown area, with a very good coverage of public transportation, urban services and equipment, located in the southern sector (this area of the city have a lesser levels of development and quality of life than the northern one).

In addition, within the neighbourhood's scale, the enterprise develops four blocks away from a large park and its main commercial and transportation sectors. Its immediate surroundings are mainly made out by a number of factories and warehouses fallen into disuse, or with some degree of obsolescence. This was one of the reasons that enabled the availability of an extensive (lot) piece of land within a consolidated residential zone.⁴

This setting is not accidental, and relates to the explicit intention of the MTL leaders regarding this project. As Carlos 'Chile', one of the higher-standing heads of this organization, points out: "[...] what we wish for is that this complex (of dwellings) of Monteagudo Street be not transformed into a deposit of the poor. On the contrary, our aim is to incorporate it to the neighbourhood, to put a lot of social life into it. The idea is that the people may be able not only to have access to housing, but also to help change it throughout a process that, of course, [...] is interrelated with the country's realities".

For this reason they searched for an area in a neighbourhood or sector that was not a typical social-interest housing one, but, on the contrary, had a setting that from the beginning of the project would stimulate the socially heterogeneous integration of the housing project's future residents with the population of a traditional neighbourhood of the city.

In this sense, the project's design has taken this matter into account, and hence, the development plan has decided to incorporate the opening up of a street (José C. Paz) that divides the complex into two halves and preserves the continuity of the existing urban square –which is an essential condition for its integration, at least physically, with the rest of the neighbourhood–.

One of the ideas supporting the project is that it should not be shut out from the neighbourhood. On the contrary, it should contain and recreate public and community spaces as a way of integration into the surroundings, so as to avoid in this way the enclave logics that usually takes place in popular housing complexes.

Housing unit allocation to families was and is one of the most problematic aspects in this project development. In the first place, it is interesting to point out that workers' participation in the construction did not imply the allocation of a unit, as this is not a self-construction process, and workers are in an employment relationship with a salary paid by the cooperative. In short, two somewhat independent processes were established: construction and allocation.

As pointed out by some of the professionals participating in the support technical team, two basic indicators were taken into account for selecting the families to whom the units would be allocated. On the one hand, the level and degree of participation and commitment to the movement, and, on the other, each family's capacity and ability for living together. Besides, the allocation process had to be done through an assembly of all of its members (3,500 families).

Furthermore, considering the requirements linked to the financing terms offered by Buenos Aires City Government Housing Institute, it was decided that the units should be allocated as individual property to each family.

⁴ This piece of land was formerly occupied by an abandoned paintings factory related to an important multinational corporation (Bunge & Born), which became discontinued some 20 years ago.

In short, the actual allocation process had to take multiple criteria into account: degree of political militancy, family structure, capacity to live together, degree of necessity, and capability to pay the corresponding mandatory instalments to the Housing Institute during 30 years, the amount of which should not exceed 20% of the family income.

It is deemed that the beneficiaries' average income must range between \$1,200 and \$2,000 (pesos) per family group.⁵

Thus, it could be said that the allocation process implies a mix of complex logics, because, on the one hand, it implies the responsibility for the debt of each household unit as a condition for property allocation to each family, but, on the other, the MTL takes on the political and social responsibility of generating sustainable feasibility conditions for the project in the long term by selecting beneficiaries according to political and social criteria.

Somehow, the social movement establishes itself as a "political" mediator⁶ between the families and the State, and thus determines a "regulatory" and social control framework to the family incorporation process into the whole.

In practice, as pointed out by some members already dwelling in some of the units, they still have to sign the sales agreement, and therefore *"we are all behaving well and we live together in peace, because if any problem arises, they still can 'throw us out'"*.

The housing complex construction process and its impact on the neighbourhood may be one of the most interesting aspects when analysing the Monteagudo Project.

This project is located in a traditional Buenos Aires neighbourhood with a strong identity and "a long history" –as pointed out by one of "newcomer" MTL members–, but with marked signs of obsolescence and degradation in its physical stock and a very low density dwelling level (some nearby neighbours said that sometimes only two or three families lived on a block).

A series of interviews to neighbours and shopkeepers located at close distance of the project site showed that people who have been living in the area for several years have deeply changed their perception of this undertaking from its beginnings up to now.

The moment they learnt that a housing complex for a 'piquete' group would be built in the old facilities of former Bunge & Born paintings factory, most of the neighbours reacted with a strong rejection.

In this sense, at the start, the situation reflected, in a somewhat typical way, the classical conflict between *established* and *marginalized*⁷ people regarding the residential settlement of

⁵ These amounts are significant considering that the National Statistics and Census Institute (Argentina) established, for the second semester 2006, that a typical household (2 adults and 2 or 3 children) is considered poor if family income is \$978 or below (Poverty Line).

⁶ Concept understood, in a broad sense, as mediation through power structures and dialogue capabilities with the State.

⁷ Following Norberto Elías' figurative model of *established* and *marginalized* people, where he states that "mere residential permanence in that place, with all it implies, may generate a degree of group cohesion, collective identification and common rules, adequate to generate in some people the gratifying euphoria linked to the sense of belonging to a superior group and the concomitant despise for other groups". "Thus, *marginalized* exclusion and stigmatization become powerful weapons if used by *established* people to maintain their identity and reaffirm their superiority so as to firmly keep others in their place", N. Elías, *Ensayo teórico sobre las relaciones entre establecidos y marginados*, Norma, 1998.

a new social group considered alien to the neighbourhood, which was also emblematically representative from a social standpoint of the marginal stigma of Buenos Aires urban pariahs: the 'movimiento piquetero'.

In this case, it is remarkable that once the works started progressing, and the complex consolidated, some of the neighbours' perception began to change. As pointed out by a lady living across from the undertaking, she now thinks that *"it is a good contribution to the neighbourhood, it lifted it, it has made it livelier, but it all depends on the people that come to live here"*. *"The complex is nice –nearby houses are older–, no new constructions had been made in the neighbourhood for a long time"*.

Somehow, the fact that the project design had foreseen opening a street, which integrates the block consistently with the surroundings, and the construction of community facilities open to the neighbourhood at large (such as the square on the intersection of Monteagudo and José C. Paz Streets, the child day care centre and the medical assistance centre) allowed the neighbours to consider these elements as a positive impact on the neighbourhood's dynamics.

In addition, some of them valued the fact that sidewalks had been repaired and that an old industrial buildings area, greatly related to Parque Patricios' identity, had been recovered and refunctionalised.

To some extent, the project's dynamics regarding its construction and insertion permitted to revert, at least partially, the neighbours' stigmatized perception of the social group carrying out the works.

The general perception is that the MTL, as a relevant political player, allows increased relative power levels toward the project implementation, a fact that is rather negatively considered by some neighbours, especially regarding this group's increased dialogue capabilities with the State, and adversely affects old established neighbours. In contrast, it is also positively appreciated, as this project fostered the implementation of works that had been demanded by neighbours for many years. *"They opened the street that we had asked for many times, and this integrates the neighbourhood"*. *"They could do what others couldn't, for example, open this street that we had been requesting for years..."* *"They repaired the front sidewalks and the public space in general"*. *"We now have a small public park here"*.

In short, once the initial distrust was partially overcome, at least by some of the neighbours, the MTL is sensed as an organised political mediator not only between the new residents and the State, but also for the people already living in the surroundings. In this sense, the permanent surveillance carried out by group members around the housing complex is worth being mentioned as a sign of organisation and "contention" of "new neighbours", which is positively valued by old established residents.

It is also interesting to note that the expectations about the neighbourhood's future dynamics expressed by neighbours are highly optimistic. Some of them pointed out that the neighbourhood *"would improve"*. *"In the future, it might turn out into another 'Palermo'"*⁸, *because 'Palermo' used to be like this too, just houses and warehouses..."*

⁸ Palermo is a traditional Buenos Aires neighbourhood that some decades ago showed certain levels of degradation and that, in the last twenty or thirty years, has gone through a renewal process (or almost gentrification process) promoted by the settlement of specialised and sophisticated service activities linked to

Finally, it should not be forgotten that this undertaking is inserted in a politically organised social movement with a strong dialogue capacity with the State, a fact that allows mediations operating as control guarantees, but, on the other, generates power and public presence inequalities with respect to old established neighbours.

3. MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO AND THE PROJECTS OF “VILLA 15” AND “LOS PILETONES” NEIGHBOURHOOD

Regarding the subject matter of this paper, another habitat construction project that should be described is the one being carried out by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Association in the slum “Villa 15” and in Los Piletones neighbourhood.

Both undertakings are located in the surroundings of Villa Soldati, in the Buenos Aires south-western sector, one of the city areas concentrating the highest poverty levels.

These initiatives are operatively managed by Fundación Madres Plaza de Mayo jointly with neighbourhood housing cooperatives, which hand in hand with the Corporación del Sur and the Ministry of Human Rights of the Buenos Aires City Government represent an example of articulation between popular organisations and the State.

Among these projects main features, it should be pointed out that, the same as the Monteagudo Project, they are not self-construction processes. All of the workers are “hired” by the cooperatives and receive a salary, technical training, and all the necessary materials to carry out their task.

The construction is done with a dry building technique, using light and prefabricated panels, all of which allows work to be carried out by both men and women.

In the case of the Villa 15 Project, neighbourhood families and social organisations participating in the undertaking decided that the first 36 units would be allocated to people who became homeless by a fire, in December 2006. The remaining 36 units will be for families registered on the waiting list of the City of Buenos Aires Housing Institute.

Furthermore, a Pilot Plan for training on housing construction is under way, as from the incorporation of the aforementioned construction technique.

In March 2007, an agreement was signed between Fundación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, jointly with cooperatives, and the Urban Territorial Policy Coordination of the City Government, for the development of a factory to manufacture the panels necessary for housing construction. It will also receive advisory services of a group of architects and engineers who will work with the cooperatives. It is estimated that the plant production capacity will allow building at least 5,000 units a year.

The factory is now operative in an old Barracas neighbourhood refunctionalised warehouse, representative of the early twentieth century industrial architecture (1921). It is jointly managed by Buenos Aires City Government and Fundación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Twelve people per shift work there, and produce 4,500 m² panels a day. It is now providing the panels for Los Piletones Neighbourhood construction project.

design and communications, consolidating in a significantly important consumption node, renamed by many as the “Buenos Aires SOHO”.

These works have begun in February and will probably be finished by November 2007. It is mainly made up of 36 three-level buildings with 12 units per level. The buildings will have internal open spaces, and low density condominiums; they will be located on Ave. Castañares, across from Parque Indoamericano. Construction costs will almost halve the costs of traditional techniques.

Construction of community facilities, such as a school, a child day care centre, and shops, as well as parks, lighting and street opening developments, have also been foreseen. Besides, the City Government will open a District Office (local authorities Management and Participation Centre – ‘Comuna’) in the neighbourhood.

Los Piletones project enabled the creation of 400 jobs, 90% of which were for unemployed people living in the neighbourhood and belonging to some of the organizations linked to this undertaking. These people receive a salary and are legally employed.

As to these projects location, in contrast with Monteagudo, they are based in a city area where poverty rates are more generalised and homogeneous, within a more vulnerable environmental setting. Furthermore, part of the neighbourhood was made up some decades ago by irregular and informal settlements, precisely those intended to be urbanised and formalised.

It is interesting to point out that, in the last two or three years, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo⁹ have started to divert their action from their traditional protest pattern.

To this effect, one of the documents describing the housing projects under way declares that these projects are considered “a strategy to put an end to [social] exclusion regarding the right to decent housing and urban space.”

In this paper, we will not analyse in detail the roots of the specific dynamics of organisational change. But it is certainly important to note that this political player –with a strong political incidence at national and international levels– is turning into an urban player, which, together with the State, is beginning to participate in popular habitat production based as from a wider understanding of human rights.

It is also important to emphasize that the MPM's express intention is to gradually develop a series of pilot experiences in order to replicate them, for the purpose of generating –jointly with the State– a specific public policy for urban social housing. So much so that Espacio Madres housing cooperatives have proposed the City Government creating a popular housing ministry, which would become the public agency responsible for developing this policy.

From this perspective, it could be said that these projects, together with Monteagudo, represent the most significant popular housing production, in terms of both scale and quantity, within Buenos Aires City in the last 15 years.

4. SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND POLITICS: AN EFFICIENT MIX FOR POPULAR HABITAT PRODUCTION.

⁹ A highly relevant social and political organisation –internationally renowned- with a long history in dealing with human rights problems, devoted during the last three decades to claims for justice and clarification of the genocide that took place during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983).

The previously described experiences have some common features which evidence the emergence of new matters in popular habitat production social practices in Buenos Aires City.

These undertakings share the common feature of being developed by social organisations framed within political movements with a strong demand tradition in the public sphere. In recent years, through changes in their ways of action and their orientations, they are establishing a new intervention modality in popular urban habitat production.

The common factor indicating their peculiarity might probably be the strong political imprint given to their social action in housing conditions production. This might derive from the fact that they are social organisations constituted gradually and consolidated under the sign of public sphere demands and protests, always having the State as privileged interlocutor and “opponent”.¹⁰ This situation has allowed them to build up a tradition of political participation in the public opinion, which, through years, has granted them –in both cases– a significant social legitimacy as a political non-partisan player.

It is then possible to state that, in Hirschmann’s words, these (picket and human rights) organisations have socially built a symbolically significant *voice*¹¹ for the reference group regarding the problems they struggle for.

It is precisely as from this strong *voice*-type strategy that they have progressively turned into social players participating in popular habitat production. For this reason, the political dimension of these actions becomes the key for understanding certain efficiency conditions in the materialization of these housing projects.

It is possible to consider that popular habitat production processes carried out by social organisations, cooperatives or NGOs which are not members of a wider political movement or any federation grouping them tend to build up their actions around *exit*-type strategies. This is the case to the extent that, as pointed out by Hirschmann¹², they react to a deceitful experience, such as the economic and social impossibility of obtaining their housing (whether through the market or as beneficiaries of government public policies), and, therefore, they look for a different source of supply, usually self-construction or international financing.

It is somehow possible to assert that, in the nineties, most of popular housing production experiences –self-managed by social organisations– correspond to this type of action in Buenos Aires.

Consequently, the projects described in the present paper have been implemented under a different modality and through a different strategy.

¹⁰ Both picket and human rights organisations –especially the Madres de Plaza de Mayo organisation- carried out, from their very beginning, a strong public action, mainly intended to make socially visible problems and demands that the State, and more precisely the *establishment* in office, systematically tried to overshadow, hide and silence.

¹¹ Continuing the activity, but adopting a critical attitude in an attempt to obtain improvements from within (Revilla Blanco, 1994). “Disappointed consumers have another option: raising their *voice* and thus participating in various actions, from strictly private complaint to public action for the benefit of everybody’s interest”. Hirschman, A. 1982. *Shifting Involvements. Private Interest and Public Action*, Princeton, page 74.

¹² Hirschman A., 1982. op. cit. page 74.

These undertakings, by being framed within social movements with a strong political organised (such as the 'Movimiento Piquetero', in the first case, and the Human Rights Movement, in the second one), represent strategies with a stronger emphasis on *voice*, which provides them significant dialogue capabilities both with the State and with public opinion.

This type of situation enables them to build up mediations between movement members participating in these projects and the State, which, in turn, guarantee control and social order inward and outward the organisations, thus giving credibility to the continuity and completion of undertakings.

Thus, a social organisation with a strong tradition, presence, and public voice grants its actions a relative guarantee of continuity insofar as it is a socially legitimate political player (beyond any judgment values held by different social sectors). This situation becomes relevant when considering that habitat (housing) production implies long terms as well as the existence of some kind of financial guarantees.¹³

Likewise, the implementation of these projects –by efficiently using the *voice*– has the advantage of generating a stronger loyalty among movement members (not without any conflicts) because it mainly enables building up improvement expectations related to staying in the organisation. As stated by one of MTL's active members, who participated in the Monteagudo Project and is now living in one of its units: *"Before, I used to live in a slum, I was a slum dweller, I am not ashamed of that, but after five years participating in the MTL, just see how much I have improved. Now I have a good house for my children, in a good area, and they can go to the neighbourhood school"*.

Similarly, it is not by chance that the aforementioned projects go beyond the small scale, and that they differ from the self-construction modality since, by having prospects for an efficient use of *voice* in the public (social and state) sphere, the emphasis on *exit*-type strategies tends to decrease.

Consequently, these social movements –from their political leadership– try to reorient themselves taking on expectations of insertion in the formal socio-economic sphere, which is clearly evidenced by the "social" enterprise¹⁴ creation process, public works implementation, social policies management, etc.

This issue would demand a more detailed analysis of the features of social movement dynamics in the present Argentine juncture –which exceeds the material possibilities of this paper–. However, it could be stated that the action level and type of these social organisations, considering the analysed examples, show a marked difference as compared to the features of popular habitat production processes a decade ago.

¹³ Somehow, MTL's political guarantee regarding Buenos Aires City Government has operated as the financial guarantee for the money lent to the movement by the Banco Ciudad (under the Buenos Aires City Government administration); this financing represented the initial capital for carrying out Monteagudo Project. .

¹⁴ Fundación Madres de Plaza de Mayo developed the panel factory, for housing construction, in the Barracas neighbourhood. The MTL created a building enterprise that is now participating in public works tenders and developing a mining undertaking in the province of Catamarca.

In short, these social players fully assume their political capacity (in a broad sense¹⁵), through an efficient use of their *voice*, and thus build up an empowerment linked to their social legitimacy, to their members' loyalty and to dialogue capabilities with the State.

In a similar way, by incorporating the political dimension to the development of undertakings, these tend to create an alternative to technocratic modalities, whether in design, setting or allocation of housing units to families. This situation gives the projects a higher level of social and symbolic sustainability.

It is still early to foresee what the evolution of these popular housing production modalities will be, and to what extent they will be generalised. Nevertheless, they are signs of an emerging process in Buenos Aires; and this process highlights the political possibility¹⁶ of habitat production for the most underprivileged social sectors.

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¹⁵ Not only as participation in the public field, but also in connection to power structures.

¹⁶ Understood as collective construction, beyond the "clientele policy" (practice of obtaining votes with promises of government positions, etc) applied by traditional political parties and some social organisations.

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