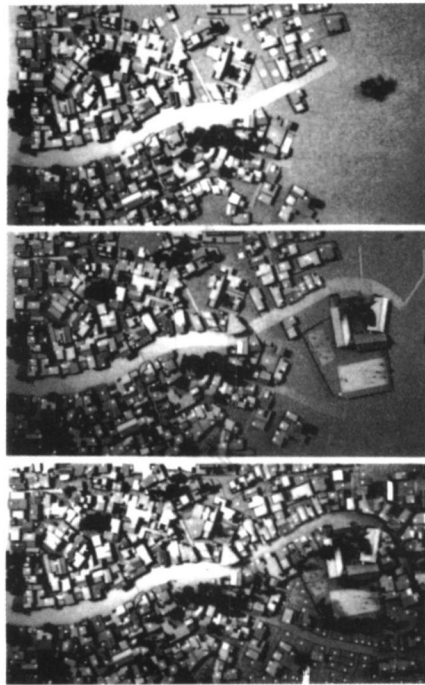


## THE CONTEXT

There is a general feeling among most who are familiar with housing, that the essentially complex issues of housing have neither been properly understood nor attempted, particularly in the practitioners world. This obviously is a bold suggestion and is sure to make most housing experts feel uncomfortable. At this point when we are attempting to articulate the future direction of housing however, it is essential that we take this position so that we could re-examine the past, and suggest more meaningful and appropriate approaches which could be attempted at least in the future.

## THE ISSUE OF HOUSING

The issues of housing as we know them today are numerous. But almost everyone reasonably familiar with housing issues will agree that they are primarily twofold. On the one hand, there is a need to housing the poor, who cannot house themselves. On the other, there is a shortfall of supply to demand which is ever increasing despite all the investments and innovations. Housing, has begun to be viewed as a problem only as a result of these two sets of objectives



*Unless we understand how settlements naturally grow and evolve ...*

put in place in the industry of building which discriminates against the house-building activity. In fact, housing until the so-called civilized world came into being has been a private individual problem and a manageable community problem, which those communities had resolved quite easily and quite appropriately.

## HOUSING AS A PROBLEM

Housing has come to be a problem, and a complex one at that only with the emergence of the governments and other external agencies coming to take responsibility for the management and provision of welfare of the societies

already in some kind of accommodation require more in terms of the quantity and the quality of the dwelling already occupied to satisfy ever-increasing desires. On the one hand, more space is needed and more conveniences are needed. On the other, architecture of the houses, their locations, arrangements, styles or sizes and the decoration reflect the individuals and their standing and social relations in the society. Houses acquire market values, and acquisition and exchange of dwellings depend on the purchasing power of families. Houses are built by some and occupied by others. They are to be built to certain standards specified by agencies

# Architects, Architecture and Housing

## Is Supports the Way Forward?

DR. RANJITH DAYARATNE

not having being achieved in the contemporary world for understandable reasons. Partly, the society which we have allowed to evolve is to blame, with all its income disparities, resource disparities and social inequalities. Partly, it is the systems that we have

and individuals. It is no great secret that the problem of housing begins with each new family formed demanding new accommodation separate from their parental homes specially in the contemporary world. It gets worsened when the families

alien to those societies inhabiting them. There are some who know how to build and to build them better, and others who know nothing of construction. In fact, we have come very far away from the self-contained self-sufficient society with ever-increasing populations where everything from a needle to a house are in short supply both in quantity and quality. This certainly is not an individual problem anymore. The governments have got involved, the builders, the contractors, the property developers, the sales managers have all got involved. In the midst of course are also the Architects and those millions of "homeless" people who have not

been able to come to terms with this complex issue we seem to be talking about and their simple needs for dwellings to live in.

#### ARCHITECTS AND HOUSING

**History however tells us that neither Architecture (with a capital A) nor Architects had much to do with the vast building activities of housing until the last two or three decades anywhere in the world. Even when they have now got involved, they seem to manage only a very small dent in the context of overall supply that is needed and that is produced. Here again we have had only marginal success in producing the right number of houses of the right kind in the right place and at the right cost.**

Shall we say something somewhere has gone wrong.

#### HOUSING PROBLEM : WHICH ONE?

The major problems of housing are twofold; one is the gap between the supply and the demand which leaves a large part of the population without a house to live. *Ad hoc* arrangements for accommodations crop up and are in abundance. We call them slums, shanties or substandard houses. The rich, the able and the well-to-do have no problem here. Houses, or forms of accommodation can be found, as long as one is willing to pay and is able to pay. The real issue is in housing the poor, the disabled, and those who cannot build for themselves. Unlike the rich, the poor are compelled to resort to illegal means, since poverty is immediately associated with inability; Squatting, unlawful land invasions, and illegal occupation of houses result in. This is when housing becomes a problem "that really needs to be solved."

If one looks at the problem of housing the poor carefully however, it becomes clear that the real problem there is not that of housing, but poverty. It is no secret that scarcity does not necessarily affect the rich and the well-to-do. It affects the poor, because poverty diminishes the ability to pay, and the ability to obtain many a thing that the rich can obtain without even paying. Poverty diminishes the opportunities available to housing oneself, in two ways. Firstly, as a result of the inability to pay, and secondly as a result of the inability to have access to develop the ability to pay. This vicious circle keeps the poor as the poor and the problem of housing remains largely for the poor, who are unable to afford.

As such, housing for the poor, cannot be addressed as a housing problem

alone. Housing is a problem for the poor not because they are not making any effort. It is just the opposite. The scarce resources and their market values make it impossible for the poor to acquire them; the land, the building materials, the labour, and all other services are determined in the marketplace by the market forces appropriate for the haves. The poor are naturally marginalised.

**The answer to this question lies fundamentally elsewhere. It is the poverty that makes it impossible for poor to buy land and force them to squat on vacant land. It is impossible for them to buy the right building materials. It is poverty that makes them build slums. It is impossible for them to hire architects to design their dwellings.** It is poverty that makes them build slums. The answer is not in this approach called "housing for the poor"; which suggest that they have different spatial qualities or architectural standards. Their housing dreams are the same and their housing needs are the same. It is perhaps in their ability to realise those dreams, that the differences may lie.

The solution to this has to be twofold. One is not in housing but in poverty alleviation. Enabling people to acquire the means by which they can build what they want. But this is no easy task, and it will have to be a long-term strategy. The other is to enable them to build incrementally; that is that the houses for the poor do not have to end up being the 350 sq. ft. house forever. As in the real world, the houses should grow and grow with the people. As they develop their capacities, and as the family changes, the houses should acquire modifications and grow with time.

**In the short term, an approach to housing for the poor as an incremental housing practice has to be there; as an immediate quick remedial action to provide accommodation for the people who cannot build for themselves. The way to build however is not in typical low-cost housing but in choice-based low-capital housing practices that allow incremental development and evolution.**

When we have accepted that housing the poor requires primarily poverty alleviation rather than anything else, the central issues of housing begins to surface. If housing is made, accessible from an economic point of view, then we may ask what kind of houses must be made available in what way, to whom, in what kind of settings and surroundings.

#### HOUSING, HOMES AND DWELLINGS

Housing is a term loosely employed to mean a board spectrum of activities, and is mostly mistakenly identified with house design, or housing projects. But housing goes beyond the mere provision of house units. At the most rudimentary level, **Housing** is the process enabling the act of **dwelling**; establishing one's existence as appropriate for his living on earth, in the form of making **homes**. House designs, and the settlements are intricately intertwined in the process, and architects have a great deal to offer in the process. But this is possible only if the architects understand the broader perspectives of "HOUSING, DWELLINGS, AND HOMES, what they mean, how they come about and how they can be intervened.

Let us look at these concepts closely enough so that their meanings become clear and their significance become obvious.

The home is an organism in direct relationship to man. It is his external environment, and his affirmation in space. Making homes is entirely a private, personal affair. Dwelling is the process by which homes are made, and enabling dwelling is to make the home-making possible. This is the ultimate aim of housing; the process of enabling dwelling and home-making. Dwelling is also the place, the tangible spatial enwrapper; the context for home. Home is a dream, and an emotive bond built between the person and the world around him. Homes are imbued with memories, personal emotions, histories and sense of belonging. They provide the center of the world for individuals, identity for individuals and families and inculcate the desire and the strength to live. This is the ultimate aim of housing. **HOUSING MUST ENABLE HOME-MAKING.**

Homelessness is thus twofold. On the one hand, there is the lack of a place to live. The quantity problem; the accommodation; lack of the space, the house units and the land plots; On the other, there is the lack of opportunity in the place one lives to make the home. The houses are mere enclosures of human bodies. We have both kinds of homelessness and the latter cannot be left to be achieved only after the former has been totally achieved. Most of our present-day house building approaches address the quantity; the housing unit at the expense of the quality; the home.

#### HOUSING AND THE STATE

**However, home cannot have any relationship to the state, which recognises people not as individuals**

but as numbers, a fraction of some greater number. Evidence shows that every time that the state has taken upon itself these relationships, the results have been disastrous.

House building must ideally be a private problem. Until recently, or in the traditional community, providing places to the needy was accomplished by the family itself or within the community who had the responsibility for as well as the control of its members. Traditional extended family system well looked after the problem of accommodating the new families. But this is no more possible: The society has changed its structure and the responsibility and control have now been vested with the state. The professional is there to assist the state, as well as the individual and articulate processes and practices that will enable these controls and responsibilities.

So where shall we begin. If we are to devise ways for the future, that will enable the state to intervene with the professionals, the property developer and the marketing man in a macro scale to build dwellings whereby people can be enabled to make homes.

This no doubt is our housing problem of the future.

#### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DOMAINS

This problem is embedded in two main tenets of the contemporary world. One, there is the need to involve the state, the professional, the property developer, and the marketing man, at a mass scale. the other is that the individuals need to be provided with the opportunity for establishing their identity and sense of belonging by means of the individual choice, change, and control of his own personal space, the home that is to be made.

Let us look at what houses are, how they are naturally made and how they evolve. Let us look at how we can learn from them and devise ways of articulating practices in the context in which we operate. It is only if we look at these we may begin to see the solution for these issues and the forward for the future.

A house at the most rudimentary level can

be seen as a concretisation of a spatial entity identified with and belonging exclusively to the smallest social unit, the family. Its contents and configurations therefore are private and express the personal individual and group needs of that family. Its configurations and symbolism are a manifestation of the forms and forces of the family life and politics up to a transitional point at which its nature changes both in content and control. The boundary of the house (the home base including the plot) demarcates the end of the private individual or family domain and the beginning of the public and community domain. The private control and responsibility ends here and the public responsibility and control begins.

#### BUILDING HOUSES: BUILDING TWO WORLDS

As same as every person has a private existence as well as a public existence houses have the same. House building also has to have a private component as well as a public component. Since every house builds both the private domain and the public domain, every house also builds a private world for family and the public world in which that exists. Acting in either of these two domains involve responsibility and control of different nature. The issue of housing require appropriate engagement of these two domains, and appropriate sharing of responsibilities and control, for any possible solution. In parallel, the state, the community or

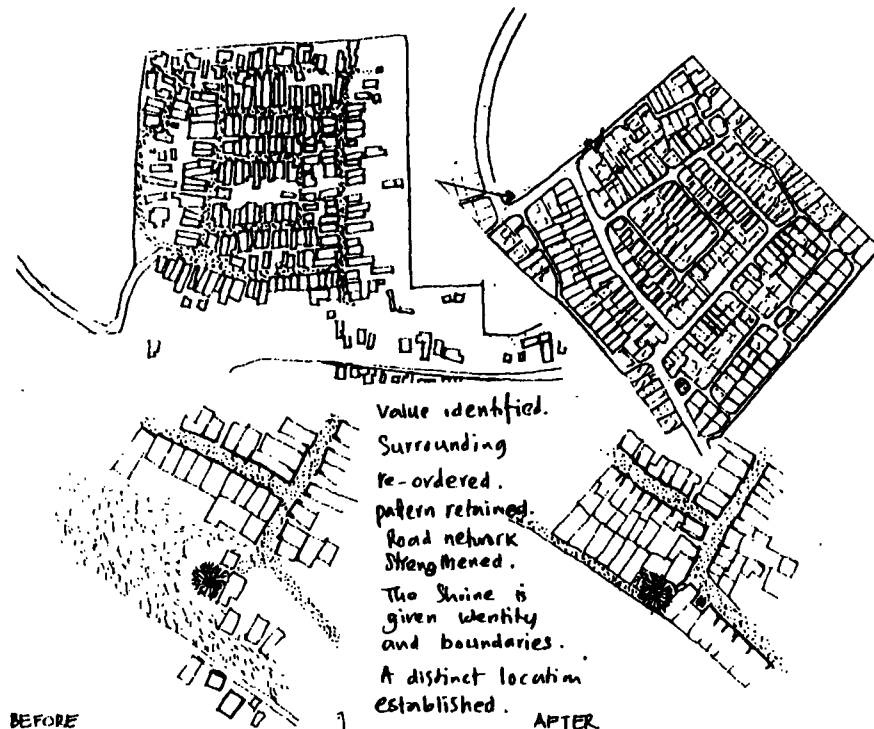
the architects must have the control and responsibility for the public realm. It is not his business to interfere with the private realm, unless he has been personally consulted. The dweller must have control of the private realm, and he cannot be expected to take either the responsibility or the control of the public realm. Architecture and planning must recognise this division, houses, (home bases) or the plot divisions for housing must be articulated strictly within these parameters if our objectives are to be achieved.

#### RESPONSIBILITY AND CONTROL

Housing is not the responsibility of either the state or the professional alone. It is the responsibility of the individual, the society, the state and the professionals. These responsibilities are tied with the controls and a balance of the two are needed. It involves the shared responsibility, of the state, and the community at large. The professional has to offer the links, the mechanisms and methods to work, and to enable the sharing and participation of all partners.

**So how do we devise ways of building houses which will enable and retain these shared responsibilities. In other words, houses that enable the dweller to have control of the private domain and the community to have control of the public domain. The public domain to be articulated by the architect/state and others involved in the housing business.**

*and recognise their patterns and enable them to grow in new settlements.*



How do we do this in situations where the dwellers are not even known before the houses are built, and that dwellers have to change from time to time as their families grow and move.

### SUPPORTS AN ALTERNATIVE

In sharp contrast to the provider paradigm which aims at delivering the completed, type plan houses is the support paradigm, which stems from a fundamental shift of the perception of the housing issues, a shift in the responsibility and control shared, and a shift in the process put in place, a shift in the end products. Supports have been articulated in many different ways and it is proposed that Supports provide the alternative way forward.

Let us look at the main tenets of the support paradigm.

displacing entire populations means building incrementally, precisely as people in informal developments do. It means cultivating an environment in which housing, small businesses, and communities will grow, consolidate and change and where production and building can provide opportunities for employment, for accumulating wealth, and for improving health. For supporters, housing becomes an integral part of urban development.

Supporters argue that the public through architectural intervention must take control of and give configuration and content of the public domain. It must also leave room, as much as possible, and within the framework put in place by the public realm, for the individual and family to articulate the private domain. In simple terms, we must design the externals of the

intervention, and at the same time, the dweller control and enable the home making. Habraken divides the dwellings on the basis of the control and responsibility and enables the design of housing projects, estates and individual units, taking control of the public domain and leaving room for the private domain to take shape as it requires. In other words as it happens naturally in the real world. We may borrow the salient features of this practice and evolve as he calls the support-infill systems which will allow mass production, architects and property developers intervention, but also enable the dweller input, choice and potential for home making.

### SUPPORT STRUCTURES

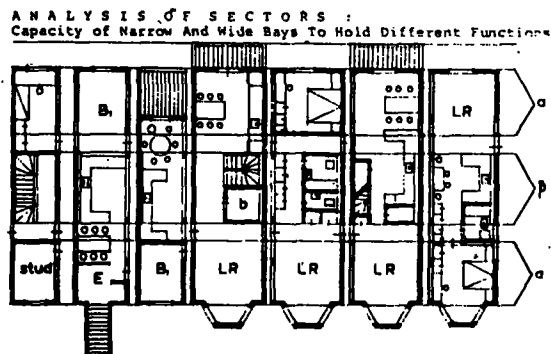
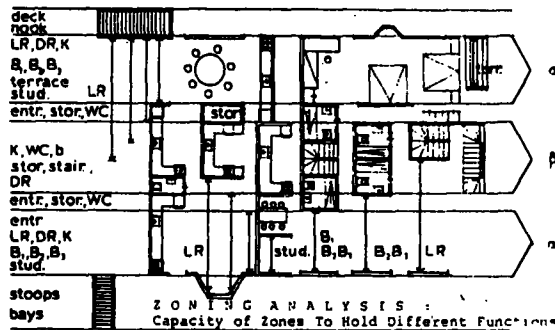
Support structures represent that part of a building which provide the framework for the eventual articulation of potential dwellings. Support structures provide the structural, service, and architectural ensemble of the public component. The public space, common utilities, the overall composition of the settlement are generators of the support structure. The architect involves and designs the support structure while leaving the framework generated for the infill to come in. His intervention in the infill is only by invitation of the dweller as a client would commission an architect. The support structure is generated also by the potential infills, and the potential homes. The support structure is flexible and allows varying types of dwellings to be built, modified from time to time and evolve with the people, with the time and with the needs of the settlement as it grows.

Support structure is not merely a building structure. Its configuration, and arrangement is a compromise between needs of the public realm and the potentials of a private domain. It has potential to change and adapt but retains an overall control and composition appropriate for a healthy dwelling environment. It needs to be designed to suit the place, the people and the potential dwellings.

Such supports offer enormous potentials and opportunities. In the contemporary world where land is scarce, the systems are complex and sophisticated, specialists are involved, this seems to be one way forward in striking a workable balance between the demand of the market-place and the needs of individual families.

It is time that we look at the supports as a potential way forward for the future.

Note: An earlier version of this paper was presented at the SLIA Annual Sessions and Public Affairs Forum in 1995.



### and develop opportunities for individual dwellings to grow in structural settings ...

The supporters hold that building lost of houses of a certain type does not provide them with much choice. Neither do they need such nor do they like it and appreciate. In fact, to the contrary, house builders know that each family wishes to have a house of their own personal individual liking: a UNIQUE one. In the mass production process we will say no. The costs are inhibitive, and uncontrollable, the architects will have endless work. Marketing will have risks.

In contrast to the instant delivery of houses, supporters argue that scaling up the supply of houses without risking bankruptcy and without

dwellings, their inter-relationships and leave the internals and the arrangements to the dwellers as available within the given contexts.

### SUPPORT STRUCTURES : THE WAY FORWARD

Transformed into architectural reality, Archt. John Habraken articulates the ideas professed by the supporters appropriate to the contemporary context, where the dwellers, the architects, the property developers and the state will have meaningful roles to play. His proposal of supports and infill systems work with the industrial production processes, the professional