THE CITY BELONGS TO EVERYONE

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Urbanism · Housing ·
Justice · Human Dignity ·

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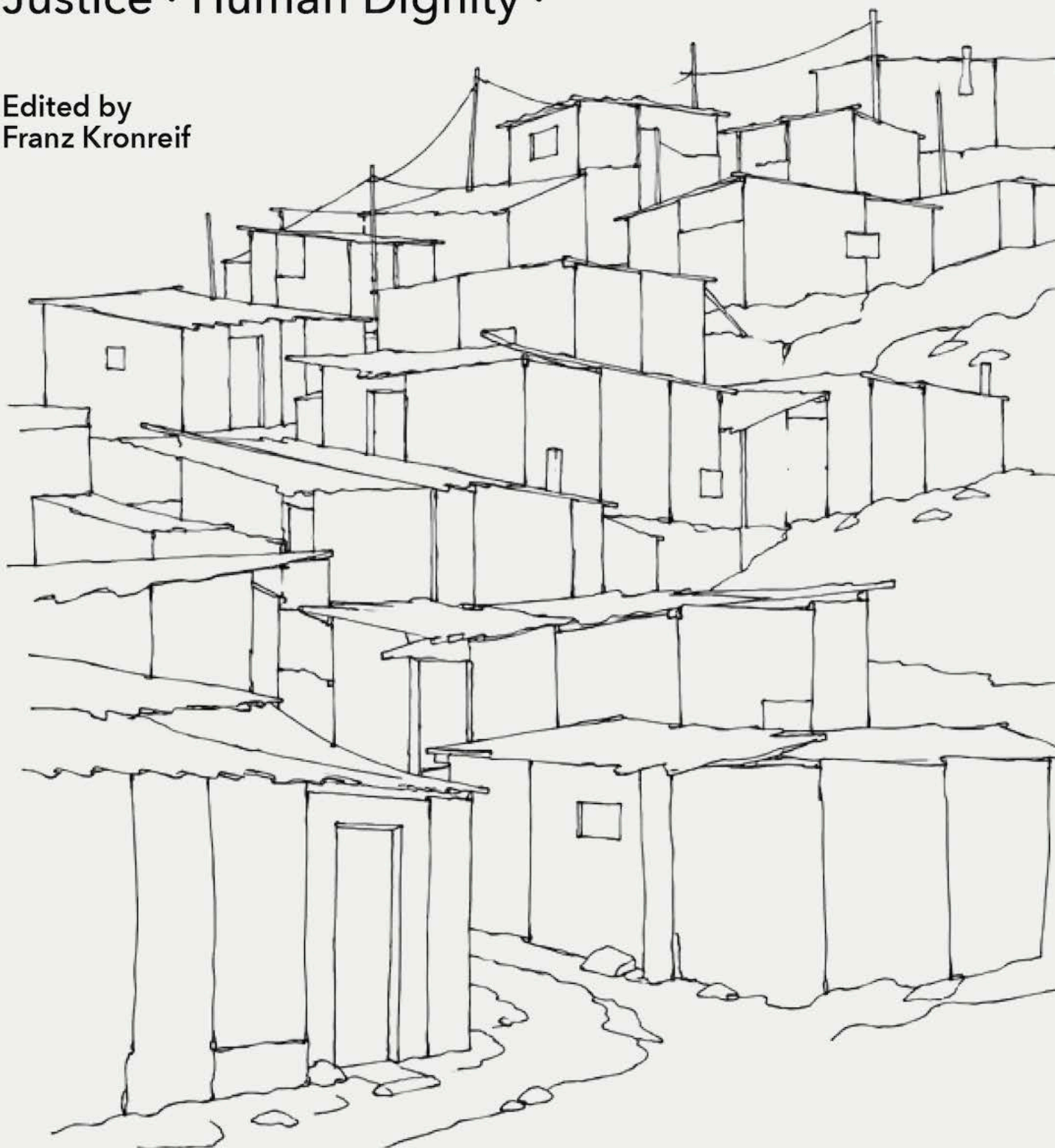

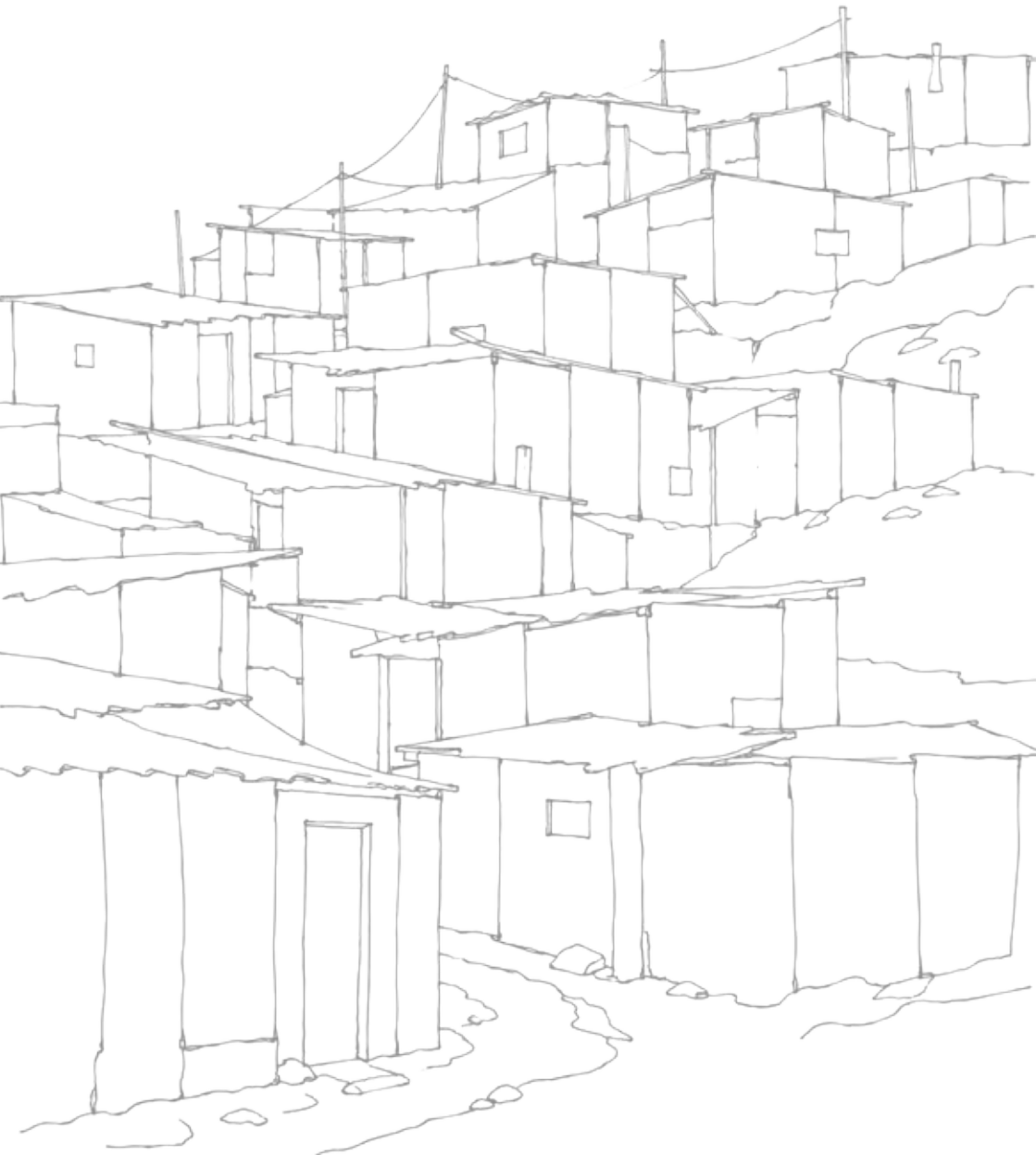

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DIALOP
TRANSVERSAL DIALOGUE PROJECT

The city belongs to everyone: urbanism, housing, justice, human dignity.

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Publisher: © Dialop - Transversal Dialogue Project

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2024

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Foreword

A society is unjust if there are people who have neither land nor a home nor decent work. Housing is therefore not a luxury, but a prerequisite for human dignity and social inclusion.

Across the globe, and particularly in cities, the injustice of society is especially evident. Luxury neighbourhoods stand side by side with slums and informal settlements; people are being pushed out of city centres, and the brunt of environmental pollution falls on the poor. Urban development is not guided by the common good but is often driven by speculation and profit. Yet housing is not a commodity, but a social good, and the city belongs to everyone – with everything that makes it what it is!

One could almost argue over the authorship of these lines. Do they derive from Marx? Or from Christianity? Surprisingly – or perhaps not – they draw on both sources: namely, Friedrich Engels's essay 'On the Housing Question' (1872/73) and Pope Francis's encyclical 'Laudato Sí' (2015), as well as his addresses to popular movements.

Indeed, this publication marks an important milestone in the 'transversal' Christian-Marxist dialogue that Pope Francis initiated in 2014.[1]

This dialogue is conducted using the method of qualified dissent and differentiated consensus, and gradually addresses socially relevant issues, such as, in the present case, the housing issue, for example the fact that housing is barely affordable for large sections of the population across almost every continent. This is – amongst other reasons – one of the reasons why there are people everywhere who are excluded from the housing market. Similarly, the displacement of poor and less affluent people from their traditional neighbourhoods is part of global processes. Renewal efforts often focus on technical and legal solutions but frequently overlook the relational aspect of neighbourhood life as it is actually lived.

The background to these remarks is the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat. This organisation was founded in the 1970s and promotes sustainable, inclusive and safe settlements worldwide.

1. www.acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:a4faf4fa-a3d4-4c6e-b622-d25022a8b901 (page 27) or https://www.dialop.eu

It supports governments in urban development, housing provision and infrastructure and advocates for the human right to adequate housing as well as the goals of sustainable urbanisation.

The issue at hand will be illustrated through case studies from South America (Argentina), Europe (Austria), Africa (Burundi), Gaza (the Middle East) and Asia (the Philippines). Clearly, such a global issue cannot be comprehensively addressed in a short publication. It can and should only present illustrative individual cases that demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the topic and how certain aspects are relevant across all continents.

Introduction: The right to adequate housing

Franz Kronreif

This book is based on the objectives of UN-Habitat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Founded in 1978, this organisation works on behalf of the UN to promote sustainable urban development.

Housing and urban planning vary fundamentally depending on the continent and region. However, there are issues, problems and potential solutions that apply worldwide. These include, for example, environmental problems, housing affordability, public services etc. The United Nations has addressed this issue and linked it to the 'Sustainable Development Goals'.

This text forms the backdrop to the following essays and may be useful for a reality check.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises every person's right to decent housing. A dedicated organisation was set up to achieve this aim: UN-Habitat - The United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

UN-Habitat views urbanisation as a global challenge that requires international cooperation. States, cities, academia, the business sector and civil society should exchange knowledge, funding and experience. The aim is to establish a shared global vision for the development of human settlements.

Virtually all of UN-Habitat's core objectives are, at least in part, not being met worldwide. Some shortcomings are evident globally – albeit in very different forms across Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Although UN-Habitat's objectives enjoy broad international support, there are certainly movements, organisations and even states or political levels that reject or strongly criticise individual objectives or underlying assumptions. However, this rarely takes the form of an overt 'anti-UN-Habitat' stance, but is usually expressed indirectly through ideology, concepts of property ownership, market models or national sovereignty.

Adequate housing for all

According to the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adequate housing is considered a fundamental human right. The aim is not merely a roof over one's head, but safe, affordable and decent housing with access to water, sanitation, energy, transport and social infrastructure. Informal settlements and slums should be improved rather than simply cleared away.

Particular consideration is given to poor sections of the population, migrants, women, older people and people with disabilities. The aspect of affordable and adequate housing is arguably the area where standards fall shortest worldwide. The problem manifests itself in various forms. In Europe and North America, it takes the form of a housing shortage, high rents, speculation, the displacement of the middle class, and so on. In Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia, it is characterised by massive informal settlements and the formation of slums. In the Middle East, this is compounded by war damage and the refugee crisis. Even affluent cities such as Vienna, London or San Francisco are struggling with affordability.[2]

2. www.unhabitat.org

Sustainable urban development and governance

Cities should grow in an environmentally sustainable manner and use resources efficiently. This includes energy-efficient construction methods, sustainable mobility, green spaces, and a reduction in land consumption and environmental impact. Urbanisation should not promote chaos, urban sprawl and environmental destruction, but rather quality of life and long-term stability. Sustainable urban development is regarded as the key to achieving many global sustainability goals.

UN-Habitat emphasises the importance of long-term and democratic urban planning. Cities should be developed transparently, in accordance with the rule of law and with public participation. Planning should not primarily follow investors' interests but should first and foremost serve the common good. This includes clear land policies, the creation of public spaces, a functioning administration and cooperation between the various levels – i.e. local, national and international.

Social inclusion, equality and the reduction of segregation

UN-Habitat aims to create cities that are open to all sections of the population. Discrimination on the grounds of income, gender, origin or social status is to be reduced. The objectives are social mix, equal opportunities and access to education, healthcare, employment and public spaces. Cities should become places of social participation rather than spaces of extreme segregation between rich and poor. In reality, spatial disparities between rich and poor are growing almost everywhere. Typical patterns include gated communities alongside slums, ethnic or social segregation, displacement through gentrification, and the exclusion of migrants or informal residents.

The specific form these patterns take varies from continent to continent. In the USA, they manifest as severe racial and income-based segregation, while in Europe, as marginalised areas inhabited by migrants. In Latin America, extreme polarisation exist within the same city and in Africa, spatial division shaped by colonial history.

Resilience to crises and climate change

Climate change is a global phenomenon. Cities need to become more resilient to natural disasters, climate change, conflicts and economic crises. This includes climate-adapted infrastructure, flood protection, heat protection, crisis-proof supply systems and sustainable reconstruction programmes. Population groups at particular risk should be better protected. Cities are regarded both as particularly vulnerable and as key locations for potential solutions.

Almost all cities face problems because they are inadequately prepared to deal with them: heat islands, flooding, water scarcity, unstable energy supplies and inadequate disaster preparedness. Coastal megacities, informal settlements and poor neighbourhoods are particularly at risk. Climate change exacerbates almost all other Habitat issues.

Sound and equitable land and urban development and governance

Long-term and democratic urban planning is of great importance. Cities should be developed in a transparent manner, in accordance with the rule of law and with public participation. Planning should be less driven by

investors' interests and more focused on serving the common good. This requires a clear land policy, public spaces, a functioning administration and cooperation between the relevant levels of government. Almost everywhere, the most fundamental problem facing fair land and urban development is that land is treated as an investment and a speculative asset. This has consequences: rising land prices, concentration of ownership, luxury development and the displacement of low-income groups.

Access to basic infrastructure and services

Everyone should have access to clean water, sanitation, electricity, waste collection, healthcare and public transport. These basic services are often lacking, particularly in rapidly growing cities in the Global South. Providing them is a prerequisite for health, economic development and social stability. Infrastructure policy is therefore at the heart of urban development.

Access to clean water, sanitation, electricity, waste collection and public transport is highly unequal globally. In Europe, the technical infrastructure is usually in place, but it is sometimes socially unaffordable. In many regions of Africa and South Asia, basic services

are structurally lacking. In Latin America, informal parallel structures often exist. Rapidly growing urban peripheries are particularly problematic.

Democratic participation and the 'right to the city'

The population should be actively involved in urban development. Cities should not belong solely to public authorities or investors, but to all residents. Above all, disadvantaged groups should be given a say. The much-discussed concept of the 'Right to the City' therefore emphasises democratic participation, the social use of urban spaces and shared responsibility for urban development.[3]

This Habitat ideal is realised only to a limited extent almost everywhere.

It is precisely this democratic participation that faces resistance from radical market-oriented urban developers or political movements that want as little regulation of the land and housing markets as possible. The concept of the 'Right to the City', which plays an

3. www.urbanagendaplatform.org

important role in the Habitat debate, is often viewed with particular scepticism; it is a concept that emphasises participation, the social use of the city and the limitation of purely market-driven urban development.
The root causes of this resistance lie in the dominance of large investors, technocratic planning, the lack of a say for the poor, authoritarian urban policy and, finally, widespread corruption and its networks.

Even democratic cities often prioritise property value appreciation, tourism and competition between locations over greater social participation.

Protection against eviction and displacement

In some megacities, slums are cleared to make way for prestigious large-scale projects. This clearly contradicts the Habitat Principles. The conflict is less ideological than it is driven by power interests, property speculation, authoritarian urban planning or patronage-based systems.

The displacement of people stems, directly or indirectly, from rising rents, large-scale projects, tourism, climate change and war. In Europe and North America, it is economic displacement. In Africa and Asia, it often takes the form of forced evictions. In the Middle East,

conflicts and destruction are additional factors. In island states and coastal regions, resettlement is often climate-induced.

Economic development and urban prosperity

Cities should create economic opportunities and promote innovation. Sustainable urbanisation should strengthen jobs, the local economy and social mobility. This is not just about growth, but about 'inclusive prosperity' – that is, economic development from which broad sections of the population benefit. Informal work and local communities should be more fully integrated and safeguarded.

Protection of public spaces and quality of life

Public spaces such as parks, squares, pavements and community facilities are considered crucial for social integration and democratic life. To achieve this, people-friendly cities with a high quality of life are needed, rather than planning that is exclusively car- or investor-oriented. Public spaces should promote safety, social interaction, culture and social participation, and be open to all sections of the population.

Lines of conflict

The most pronounced lines of conflict typically run between:

- Social housing rights **<=>** market logic,
- Global standards **<=>** national sovereignty,
- Democratic participation **<=>** technocratic or oligarchic urban development,
- Focus on the common good **<=>** property speculation.

UN-Habitat operates within the tension between left-wing, human rights-based and sustainability-oriented visions of the city. It is precisely this mix that draws criticism from both neoliberal and radical left-wing quarters.

To summarise the issue in the words of Pope Francis to the popular movements: it is not a question of giving poor neighbourhoods a fresh coat of paint, beautifying the outskirts or covering up society's wounds with make-up, but of healing them. This requires genuine and respectful integration.

Latin America

Plunder as an urban model: *The city of Buenos Aires*

María Eva Koutsovitis

For nearly two decades, the City of Buenos Aires administration has been consolidating a model of "plunder" characterized by the privatization of public land (520 hectares) and the awarding of service concessions without business risk. Deregulation and the Urban Code approved in 2018 fuelled speculative overdevelopment, resulting in thousands of vacant homes.

Under the current administration, the housing crisis has worsened due to mass evictions, budget cuts to urban development, and illegal real estate money laundering, further exacerbating social exclusion.

In the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, the urban

model that has been taking shape for almost two decades is structured around the logic of plunder, that is, the transfer of public resources and assets to private business sectors. The consequences of this plunder are housing, environmental, social and urban crises, as well as the increasing precariousness of daily life for the city's inhabitants. Since 2007, the City has been governed by the same political party, the PRO (Republican Proposal). Mauricio Macri was Mayor from December 2007 to December 2015; his successor, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, held that office from December 2015 to December 2023 and, from that date to the present, it is Jorge Macri who has held that role.

Firstly, the City of Buenos Aires is the wealthiest city in the country and ranks among the wealthiest in Latin America. The 2026 budget amounts to $19.9 trillion. This sum is equivalent to approximately $14 billion and a per capita budget of $4,700.

Secondly, not only does the city have the highest per capita budget—often allocated to resolving issues entirely unrelated to the common good—but the City of Buenos Aires also has the most expensive urban land in the country. The most expensive properties in the country are also located in the City of Buenos Aires. Access to these enables real estate ventures with extremely high profitability.

And, thirdly, another important aspect is the power to regulate and control economic activities and what is built within the territory. Regulatory power is one of the most powerful resources because it has the ability to ensure that the wealth generated by a city is distributed widely amongst its population or concentrated in a few sectors.

Mechanisms of plunder

Raffling off public land

When Mauricio Macri took office as Mayor at the end of 2007, he initiated a historic process of privatising public land, which was further expanded under the subsequent administrations of Rodríguez Larreta and Jorge Macri. The privatisation of a total of more than 520 hectares of public land was authorised, comprising concessions and sales, of which approximately 170 hectares were green spaces.

In the first phase, with Mauricio Macri as Head of Government, the sale of public land started with plots located in affluent neighbourhoods that belonged to the city.

The second phase began when Rodríguez Larreta took office as Head of Government and Mauricio Macri as

President of the nation (December 2015). This opened an opportunity regarding national land located within *the city, consisting mainly of disused railway sidings. The state sold the land to the city, and the city guaranteed the building rights to ensure lucrative deals for future buyers.*

Turnkey concessions

Rodríguez Larreta's administration structured a system of concessions in which the private sector makes no investment of its own capital and is, furthermore, guaranteed a monthly return. Zero business risk.

This logic is widespread in the public services sector. The city government invests in infrastructure and facilities, awards service concessions, and guarantees the concessionaires a monthly profit. The Buenos Aires city government's equation is: zero private investment plus zero business risk. The result is a profit for companies that is guaranteed by the state.

What makes no sense from a liberal capitalist perspective makes perfect sense from the logic of plunder.

Regulation of land use and building capacity

In 2018, the Urban Planning Code was approved, increasing building capacity across the city from 300% to 700%, depending on the area. The expansion of

over-construction was mainly directed at the low-rise residential sectors of the neighbourhoods of Núñez, Bajo Belgrano, Barrio Parque General Belgrano, Villa Devoto, Villa Del Parque, Chacarita, Villa Crespo, Villa Santa Rita, Villa Ortuzar, Colegiales, etc.

In 2021, the then head of government, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, submitted sixteen urban planning agreements to the Buenos Aires City Legislature. Of these, fifteen were approved in a marathon session. Urban planning agreements are exceptions to the city's planning regulations, specifically the Urban Planning Code. Most of these agreements authorised the construction of towers up to 85 metres high. This approach to authorising urban planning agreements has led the City of Buenos Aires to fragment its planning through the accumulation of exceptions. It has also guaranteed extraordinary profits for large property developers who buy cheap land with low building potential and then secure exceptions from the Legislature which, without laying a single brick, multiply the value of the land.

The pillars of the current administration

Although Jorge Macri's administration continues the model of governance initiated in 2007, it has distinctive features that can be summarised in two clear pillars: on

the one hand, social and territorial 'cleansing'; on the other, the continuation of major property deals.

The first pillar refers to the systematic institutional harassment and violence directed at low-income families, informal workers and families living in shantytowns, settlements and working-class neighbourhoods, where state violence is combined with a media spectacle. Raids in working-class neighbourhoods are a daily occurrence: the persecution of urban waste pickers and small traders to seize their goods and shut down their businesses, and militarisation, which includes entry checks into the neighbourhood and the harassment of migrants.

On this front, the figures speak for themselves: every 30 hours there is an illegal eviction in the City. These are evictions carried out outside the law. Jorge Macri takes pride in promoting an eviction count that is nearing eight hundred since the start of his administration. Instead of taking pride in generating housing solutions, as any modern statesman would, he celebrates the number of families left on the streets. From December 2023 to date, more than a thousand children have been illegally evicted from their homes. This figure, far from being an indicator of success in urban management, is a symptom of a critical housing crisis.

And of course, to carry out his marketing strategy, he has no qualms about systematically breaking the law. Every day, some neighbourhood in the city is transformed into a scene akin to a hostage-taking or an act of terrorism: foot soldiers, removal lorries, barriers and officials from the Auxiliary Guard. The aim: to evict families. And to circumvent the law, the government uses the technicality of 'imminent danger of collapse' so that the Auxiliary Guard can seal off the homes, evicting families swiftly and without constitutional safeguards. "Structural ruins" are always selective; the "ruins" only affect the families the government wishes to evict, and there are no detailed technical reports documenting the structural damage. These "express" evictions target families who, in some cases, hold title deeds, pay their rent on time, or have been occupying the property for several decades without any owner having brought a claim before the courts; therefore, in the eyes of the Argentine justice system, they are legitimate occupants. Then comes the Head of Government's media spectacle, in which, through official media channels, he produces videos simulating the return of the property to its "true" owners.

Against a backdrop of a structural housing crisis affecting more than half a million people in the city, the government has decided to allocate just 1% of the budget to housing policies. Actual investment in

policies to improve access to housing has fallen by 11.6%[4] this year compared with the previous year. The budget allocation for the development of working-class neighbourhoods, where 400,000 people live without access to drinking water or sewerage and in conditions of extreme overcrowding, has plummeted by 27.5%[5], reaching the lowest level of investment in the last 14 years. And the City Housing Institute (IVC), the body responsible for the city's housing policies, is facing a 15% budget cut. Funding for urban regeneration, construction and integration is being withdrawn, whilst logistical and operational resources for the security forces responsible for carrying out evictions are being increased.

Whilst access to housing is becoming increasingly restricted, the government is pushing ahead with a project to redevelop the city's administrative, financial and commercial centre. In Buenos Aires's city centre, the major banks and the real estate and financial group IRSA (Inversiones y Representaciones Sociedad Anónima) will receive tax subsidies totalling 200

4.www.centrocepa.com.ar/documentos/informes/700-el-presupuesto-2026-de-la-ciudad-de-buenos-aires-un-analisis-de-las-principales-apertura.

5. www.tiempoar.com.ar/ta_article/presupuesto-2026-jorge-macri-recort/

million dollars to convert their office buildings into housing. The "Downtown Transformation Scheme" constitutes an unequal and excessive transfer of public resources to the most concentrated private sector. Through this tax credit scheme, the Buenos Aires City Government (GCBA) ends up financing the business risk of major developers and financial corporations. The redevelopment of the city centre is directed almost entirely towards upper-middle and high-income sectors and properties for short-term tourist rentals.

To this we must add a shameful "property amnesty" designed to allow mega-construction firms and property developers, who built outside the law and city planning regulations, to regularise thousands of square metres of illegal construction by paying a fine. The scheme was presented by the Mayor of Buenos Aires and allows for the regularisation of up to 5,000 square metres that have breached the Building Code and 2,500 square metres that have breached the Urban Planning Code. We are talking about 'legalising' large illegal residential towers, built in breach of the city's planning regulations. Buildings that have exceeded the maximum permitted heights, have built more square metres than allowed, have encroached on open spaces within blocks, and have even affected areas protected for their heritage value. The first consequence of this 'legalisation' is the collapse of the infrastructure. In the city, the drinking

water networks, sewerage pipes, stormwater drainage system and electricity grid are operating at the limits of their capacity. By legalising tens of thousands of square metres that lack the technical feasibility for connection to services, the general public will have to bear the cost of building new infrastructure to support these tens of thousands of square metres. It also implies, in exchange for a fine, accepting, as a society, profound environmental degradation. Many of these developments have encroached on inner courtyards, destroyed absorbent green spaces, and altered ventilation and sunlight conditions in numerous areas of the city. This 'regularisation' outside any planning framework violates the principle of urban equity, as it artificially increases building capacity and drives up the value of urban land. This further deepens the process of displacement of the city's working-class and middle-class communities.

Consequences of the plundering

The consequences of this model of plundering our common goods are the current multidimensional state of emergency facing the city. This logic of gutting also extends to dimensions such as history, identity and memory, giving rise to a sense of 'otherness' that increasingly pervades those of us who inhabit the city.

The profound changes and transformations in the City of Buenos Aires—unconsulted, authoritarian and often unconstitutional—reduce us to mere urban spectators in our own city, rather than protagonists in shaping how we wish to live.

An urban model that merely reproduces and amplifies inequalities whilst consolidating precariousness in all its forms. Whilst on average 1 in 4 of the city's inhabitants are over 60, in the south of the city—more precisely in the century-old working-class neighbourhood of Villa 20—only 4 in 100 inhabitants manage to reach that age.

The city government's policy of encouraging speculative over-construction, initiated with the Urban Planning Code and the Building Code, was complemented by the approval of exemptions for the construction of lavish towers and the historic privatisation of public land, which reached a record high in the last decade, exceeding 520 hectares of privatised public land, an area equivalent to the neighbourhoods of San Telmo and La Boca. As we walk through the neighbourhoods of low-rise houses, we see how the large towers intrude, destroying the neighbourhood's morphology and identity, casting their shadows and overwhelming the urban services as a whole. These urban policies are imposed authoritatively without any real opportunities for public participation.

There are currently over 100,000 homes for sale and around 200,000 vacant properties – that is, homes that are neither occupied nor on the market for sale or rent. The highest proportions of vacant properties are found in the neighbourhoods of Puerto Madero, Recoleta and Palermo, which highlights their speculative nature. Construction is one of the main sources of pollution worldwide (accounting for 39% of CO2 emissions). Over the last 10 years, 10 million square metres have been built; however, the number of families in a housing crisis continues to rise year on year. Currently, over 42% of the city's population are tenants and must spend almost 50% of their income on rent.

Over the last 15 years, the city has privatised more than 170 hectares of public green spaces. Official data reveal that the average amount of green space per inhabitant in the City of Buenos Aires (6 m^2) is well below recommended international standards (between 10 and 15 m^2). This environmental indicator is not distributed evenly across the city, being particularly critical in working-class neighbourhoods, where it is 100 times lower than recommended levels.

This model of plundering is responsible for the current environmental, social and housing crisis which is driving the middle and working classes out of the city daily.

Europe

Special Case Vienna: *Dare to create a piece of socialism within a capitalistic state*

Wolfgang Förster & Claudia Krieglsteiner

Many cities envy Vienna's housing situation. Indeed, the Austrian capital's housing policies, which date back to the revolutionary mood of the post-Habsburg period of 1918 and the subsequent 'Red Vienna' era (1919–1934), have at least partly replaced private housing speculation with broad public intervention in the housing market. Can other cities learn from Vienna's experience? In this article, we will investigate the development of the 'Vienna model' and the lessons to be learned from it, and argue that, despite its undeniable advantages for the population, the Vienna model is not as perfect as it may seem to international observers. This is particularly

pertinent in a period of growing social disparities and under pressure from global economic challenges, which lead to phenomena such as economic crises, migration, and the resulting demographic challenges, as well as the influence of neoliberal pressure groups and international speculative capital on Austrian housing production. General housing and land policy frameworks have therefore undergone significant changes in recent years. While these frameworks are still characterised by a social democratic approach to housing as a basic human need, which rules out any privatisation of housing, we believe that public responsibility for providing affordable housing for all must be strengthened. From a Marxist perspective, we suggest a number of changes to the city's housing policies. In our view, this must include stronger means to counter capital-driven land and construction speculation in all its forms. The key to solving the housing crisis lies in public housing construction and management by municipalities and non-profit developers. Furthermore, public housing should be financed through private profits in the building sector rather than through general taxation. Tenants' rights must be further supported, paying special regard to vulnerable groups in society.

Vienna's century-old social housing policies prove that 'a piece of socialism' is indeed possible within a capitalistic

national state, or, to quote Robert Danneberg, the city's housing councillor during the 1920s, 'a socialist city can demonstrate the creative power of socialism within the capitalistic system', but it requires ongoing efforts to avoid losing sight of the transformative potential of such reforms.

100 years of public housing policies

The astonishing Vienna housing experience after 1918 can only be explained by Vienna´s late 19th century situation and the revolutionary situation that followed it: The Habsburg capital, grown enormously due to mass migration of workers from its crownlands – particularly from Bohemia - experienced extreme socio-spatial segregation with thousands of homeless people, of families living in shelters or on the streets, and even more living in overcrowded tenements lacking toilets and water. This resulted in frequent epidemics; tuberculosis was even internationally known as "Vienna Disease". The Social Democrats called repeatedly for housing reforms, for housing inspectors, and for a public housing program. The conservative- populist (and strongly antisemitic) Mayor Karl Lueger introduced a vast communalization program of public infrastructure – from which Vienna profits till today – but left housing provision completely to the private sector, i.e. to

private investors, and to land and housing speculation. The housing crisis led repeatedly to political turmoil and to the rise of the Social Democratic Party under its popular Chairman Victor Adler.

The housing crisis became even more critical at the end of WW I as construction of new houses had stopped for several years, and after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire tens of thousands fled to Vienna.

Further inspired by the Russian Revolution, a revolutionary movement started among the workers in 1917, involving strikes at ammunition factories, the election of workers' and soldiers' deputies (Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte), and large-scale demonstrations. In response, the young Emperor Karl introduced a programme of reforms, including the reopening of the Reichsrat (the Austrian parliament) and a Tenant Protection Act to prevent the eviction of soldiers' families. The Act was limited to the end of the war but remains valid in most respects to this day. The conservative Vienna City government also started construction of the first 'Gemeindebauten' (social housing built by the city).

Following the 1918 revolution, the first democratic elections resulted in an absolute majority for the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) in the Vienna City

Council, while at a national level, the SDAP formed a coalition with the conservative Christian Democrats. However, the revolutionary mood continued in the capital. In his work 'The Austrian Revolution', SDAP Chairman Otto Bauer wrote that, disregarding private property rights, the hungry and freezing masses occupied land and started to construct houses in cooperative settlements, where communal infrastructure such as kindergartens, club houses and inns were also built and managed democratically. Several of these workers' housing cooperatives have existed in the form of non-profit associations until today, and they continue to build social housing on a large scale.

Meanwhile, in huge demonstrations hundreds of thousands demanded a land reform, i.e. an immediate expropriation of all private land. The Social Democrats refused this with regard to their conservative partner in the national government while struggling on how to deal with the informal settler's movement. Should they accept this anarchic urban development, or should they stop it and thus "betray" their voters? Mayor Jakob Reumann finally decided on a compromise: the city accepted and legalized the land occupations wherever possible but, in order to prevent land speculation, insisted on the creation of cooperatives which would own and manage the settlements. This is actually an efficient model to deal with informal settlements as

they exist as favelas etc. in many parts of the world today.

At the same time, as the revolutionary workers had opened a door which would never close again, the SDAP started to work on a communal housing program ("Gemeindebauten") which could only start in 1922 when Vienna became a state of its own after the separation from the conservative state of Niederösterreich (Lower Austria).

Now, in 1923, Red Vienna had become a reality, and the world´s first metropolis governed by Social Democrats started its vast reform program, with significant changes in the fields of education, health, and, most importantly, housing.

The most important aspect of any housing reform was, of course, financing. Treasurer Hugo Breitner, a Jewish socialist who later fled to the US, developed a system of luxury taxes. The wealthy – many of whom were war profiteers – were to fund housing for the poor through taxes on large residences, horses, cars, champagne and household staff. This financing system set Vienna's social housing apart from that of all other major European cities, especially those governed by the Social Democrats in Germany, which relied on bank loans for financing. Housing Councillor Robert

Danneberg (also Jewish and later killed in the Holocaust) expressed the ideological background: 'A socialist city can demonstrate within the capitalist system the creative power inherent in socialism'.

After two fascist periods — the Austrian clerical-fascist regime from 1934 to 1938 and the German Nazi regime from 1938 to 1945 — the city, impoverished and in ruins, was divided into four allied sectors and was again governed by the Social Democrats. The social housing programme was resumed. At a 'Wiederaufbauseite' (Reconstruction Forum) shortly after the Liberation in 1945, it was stated that 'housing must not be left to private profits'. Construction of 'Gemeindewohnungen' began in the same year, but with a significant change: the pre-war luxury taxes were replaced by general budget financing. In other words: Workers were now financing social housing themselves. The quantities, however, are impressive: Today, the city owns more than 220,000 social housing units, and another 200,000 affordable rental apartments are owned and managed by non-profit housing associations. More than 60 per cent of the population lives in publicly subsidised housing, i.e. housing not "left to private profit".

During the 1970s, Vienna started a housing rehabilitation programme based on the idea of 'gentle urban renewal' ('sanfte Stadterneuerung'). Recognising

that ‘hard’ renewal strategies involving large-scale demolition and new construction, as seen in US cities or Berlin, often resulted in the destruction of local neighbourhoods and the eviction of tenants and consequently protests by residents, Vienna focused on a combination of rehabilitation and social measures. Sitting tenants were given the right to participate in the development of housing rehabilitation, considering their financial circumstances to avoid eviction. The first of several ‘Gebietsbetreuungen’ (area renewal offices) was established in the low-income district of Ottakring in 1974. In 2004, the City of Vienna was awarded the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour for the world’s best urban renewal programme. With tens of thousands of old tenement buildings refurbished, UN experts stressed that this success had been achieved without the usual gentrification. While this is certainly true, recent research shows that gentrification can also be observed in Vienna, albeit on a much slower scale thanks to comparatively strong tenant protection. This demonstrates that any improvement to a neighbourhood, even with the intention of supporting the less wealthy, attracts wealthier residents in a privately owned housing system. Only public housing estates escape the danger of gentrification when improved.

Unfortunately, in 2004 the then Housing Councillor and later Chancellor Werner Faymann stopped the

construction of 'Gemeindebauten'. This was not due to budgetary restrictions, but rather the new orientation of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), which adopted Tony Blair's neo-liberal 'third way'. It is only in recent years that "Gemeindebauten" have been built again, albeit on a much smaller scale.

For a municipal housing initiative

Despite Vienna's significant historical legacy in social housing, access to suitable and affordable homes is becoming an increasingly serious social issue for many people, even in a wealthy country like Austria.

This refers neither to the undignified mass camps in which refugees are often housed, nor to the exploitative and unacceptable accommodation that people rendered illegal by immigration and asylum laws are forced to rely on.

Over the past 20 years, the proportion of household income spent on housing has risen dramatically. On average, tenants now spend around 30 per cent of their net income on rent and operating costs. The difference between the private rental market and subsidised housing is only a few percentage points. However, for households in the lowest income bracket, housing costs

usually exceed 40 per cent, often reaching as much as 50 per cent of total household income.

This development also explains the steady rise in evictions, or the forced clearance of apartments. In Vienna, for example, the number of eviction lawsuits filed increased from 13,500 in 2023 to 15,200 in 2024. The number of evictions carried out increased from 5,481 to 6,369 over the same period.

Renovations and upgrades to entire neighbourhoods, often financed by general tax revenues, are causing private rents in these areas to rise disproportionately. This leads to gentrification and the displacement of long-term tenants, as well as low- and middle-income households.

Pressure from the private housing market also affects rents in the public sector, partly because public housing construction is increasingly financed through financial markets. Three major construction companies, with a combined annual turnover of around €30 billion, dominate housing construction in Vienna. This concentration gives them considerable influence over construction conditions and prices.

Another troubling development is that many newly built apartments remain vacant despite ongoing

construction activity, as they are primarily treated as financial investments.

In the long term, housing must be recognised as a basic human need, and the private profit motive must be removed from the provision of living space. Only in this way can social justice in housing be achieved and capital-driven land and construction speculation be countered in all its forms.

Vienna's history clearly shows that public housing construction and ownership by municipalities and housing cooperatives is the key to solving the housing crisis. This protects housing from direct exposure to capital market pressures. This strategy must be accompanied by a strict ban on the privatisation of publicly owned housing.

Therefore, a municipal housing offensive should aim to provide sufficient affordable housing by resuming large-scale municipal construction activity, thereby exerting downward pressure on the private market in tenants' interests.

General housing and land policy frameworks

People's living situations often change over the course of their lives. These changes can be voluntary, such as when families are started or children move out, or they can be involuntary, such as the physical limitations experienced as people age. However, sometimes changes occur due to illness or accident. New housing developments must be designed to meet these diverse needs, not only in subsidised housing projects, but in general housing too, for example for families, single parents, people living alone, the elderly, people with disabilities, and others.

In public housing in particular, a larger proportion of apartments should be made accessible by renovating existing buildings. This means ensuring accessibility within the apartments themselves, for example in bathrooms and toilets, and ensuring that hallways and doors are wide enough. The goal should be to enable people to live independently at every age and stage of life, according to their health and capabilities.

A quota of public apartments should be allocated directly by autonomous women's shelters and other facilities that protect victims of violence, so that victims do not have to meet criteria or go through allocation processes.

There is a growing awareness that land in European cities is a limited resource. Initially, however, this recognition fuelled land speculation, often operating at the margins of legality. Even local politicians have not always resisted the temptation to exploit their knowledge of upcoming zoning changes for personal gain.

Municipalities can either strengthen public finances or enable enormous private profits through zoning policy, which increases land value. Therefore, socially responsible zoning policies must prioritise public housing and ensure that profits from zoning gains are effectively taxed.

Introducing a land tax on unused building plots held for speculative purposes would be another step towards this goal. At the same time, land consumption must be reduced through spatial planning instruments that take social and ecological compatibility into account. Where possible, renovation and conversion should be prioritised over new construction.

In some cases, this may require property to be transferred into municipal ownership. Therefore, under certain conditions, real estate assets should be taken over by the city.

To better assess construction needs and support forward-looking zoning policies, the city should prepare an annual municipal housing market report.

Greening residential construction is imperative. The materials used for renovations and new builds must be examined and assessed according to their lifecycle and recyclability.

Heating and cooling systems must be geared towards generating alternative energy. This should include using facades and roofs for alternative energy production rather than solely satisfying the luxury needs of a select few with attic conversions. To this end, a binding master plan must be developed.

Construction industry employees are also experiencing the effects of climate change in the form of increasingly extreme working conditions. This requires new regulations to be introduced and properly monitored.

Tenant protection as the second pillar of social housing policies

Tenant protection in Austria was established during and after the revolutionary period that followed the First World War. Although these protections have

weakened in recent decades, they still provide a solid framework by comparison. These include, albeit not comprehensively, regulations on rent levels, restrictions on fixed-term contracts and protection against unjustified termination.

This framework forms the basis for a socially oriented housing policy.

Under certain conditions, low-income households are eligible for housing subsidies designed to prevent them from losing their homes. Although these subsidies are formally paid to tenants, they are effectively passed on to landlords. In practice, therefore, they constitute a transfer of public funds to property owners. To prevent this, rents must be capped across all housing categories, regardless of construction date. A genuine rent cap should gradually replace housing benefits.

Following the relaxation of tenant protection laws in the 1990s, most private rental contracts are now fixed-term. Although the minimum duration has recently increased from three to five years, this should only be seen as the first step towards completely abolishing fixed-term tenancy agreements. Tenants would, of course, retain the right to terminate contracts with appropriate notice. Public authorities must monitor compliance with statutory rent caps for all tenancy agreements. It

should not be the responsibility of individual tenants to determine whether their contracts or rents are unlawful. In future, violations of rent regulations should be subject to criminal sanctions comparable to those for other forms of fraud.

Similar to works councils in the labour market, legally mandated tenant advisory boards should be established. These bodies would strengthen the collective enforcement of tenants' rights and foster community cohesion within residential buildings.

A 'Vienna residential sticker', modelled on the inspection sticker required for vehicles, should be introduced as a prerequisite for renting out apartments. This would ensure that landlords' maintenance and renovation obligations are inspected every three years. Any defects identified by municipal authorities during these inspections would result in immediate binding renovation orders. Failure to comply would lead to substitute measures, rental bans and, ultimately, compulsory public administration. Repairs should be carried out promptly and at low cost to tenants by prioritising them within subsidised renovation programmes.

Property owners are increasingly allowing buildings with many long-term tenants and low-rent contracts to

deteriorate deliberately in order to displace residents and enable more profitable redevelopment. These so-called 'horror properties', as they are now known in Vienna, must be placed under municipal administration to guarantee residents' safety. The legal basis for such action already exists, but the City of Vienna has been very hesitant to apply these regulations so far.

How can public housing be financed?

Beyond a fundamental shift in public budget priorities towards meeting residents' needs in areas such as education, health, childcare, elder care, mobility, culture and housing, there are also concrete proposals for financing public housing.

The reintroduction of a Viennese housing tax on large fortunes and luxury goods, modelled on the historic 'Breitner housing tax' of Red Vienna, should form the core of the funding base.

Revenue from a land tax on unused building plots held for speculative purposes, as well as from taxes on zoning gains, should be earmarked exclusively for public housing construction.

Similarly, revenues from a land tax on unused building plots held for speculative purposes, as well as taxes

on zoning gains, should be earmarked exclusively for public housing construction.

A well-designed vacancy tax should be introduced to combat speculative property ownership and short-term rentals. The proceeds should also be dedicated to public housing.

To reduce dependence on private financial markets, a housing bank or federal housing fund should be established to support the construction and maintenance of public housing.

Summary

Even though we have criticised current developments, there is much to be learned from Red Vienna housing policies.

1. Housing is one of the basic human needs ('Daseinsvorsorge'), alongside health, energy, and education. The EU has categorised these as 'services of general economic interest (SGEI)' that are exempt from EU competition rules. Vienna has therefore accepted the provision of affordable, decent housing as a public task, rather than as part of profit-oriented private entrepreneurship. The political

focus has been on use value (Gebrauchswert) rather than exchange value (Tauschwert), thus excluding dwellings from capitalist speculative processes.

2. Consequently, affordable housing has been financed through taxes rather than free market instruments such as bank loans.

To implement public housing policies, the state supports limited-profit ("gemeinnützige") housing associations that keep dwellings in their property portfolio indefinitely. This prevents any steps towards the privatisation of housing units.

Africa

Ubuntu human eco-housing model: *Adequate living space for rural secondary towns in developing countries*

Sindayihebura Fidele

Access to adequate housing remains a fundamental human right as articulated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Despite global commitments, housing deficits persist in low-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In Burundi, rapid population growth, post-conflict recovery, and weak urban planning systems have contributed to inadequate housing conditions in both rural and emerging urban centres such as Bururi. This paper gives a new way of semi-urban housing in Africa through

culture and tradition, synthesising historical housing interventions, national policies, and UN-Habitat strategies to propose a Tradi-Modern Ecological Housing Model. Using spatial planning, socio-economic analysis, and environmental assessment, the study develops a prototype settlement of an Ubuntu-House Unity block of four housing units projected to 70 units for 500 residents on a 10,000 m² site. Findings indicate that compact, participatory, and ecologically grounded housing can operationalise the right to adequate housing while enhancing social cohesion and sustainability.

Context and background review

Housing is increasingly recognised as central to sustainable development and human dignity. Over one billion people globally lack adequate housing (UN-Habitat, 2020). The right to housing extends beyond shelter to include affordability, accessibility, and cultural adequacy. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) established housing as a fundamental right. General Comment No. 4 (1991) further defines adequacy criteria, including security, habitability, and access to services. Payne (2001) emphasises land tenure security, while Tipple (2000) highlights incremental housing as a key approach in low-income contexts.

Burundi is experiencing rapid population growth, with about 13 million inhabitants, and presents a paradox of low urbanisation at approximately 13% but high population density exceeding 470 persons/km² (World Bank, 2023). Historically, dispersed rural settlement ownership and limited planning capability have constrained infrastructure provision, thereby stifling human and societal development in Burundi, particularly in rural areas. Rural secondary cities such as Bururi are now critical for sustainably managing demographic growth, addressing the issues of dispersed single houses, rural exodus, and ecological impact.

The colonial history that led to subsequent civil wars following independence in 1962 resulted in the total destruction of the country, loss of human lives, and the destruction of houses and infrastructure. These events have left a lasting impact on development, governance, human migrations, and rural exodus. The current phase of post-conflict reconstruction since 2005 has established reconstruction programmes focused on rebuilding housing and infrastructure, particularly for dispersed populations living in rural Collins villages. This has negatively impacted development, as individuals lack access to clean water, electricity, roads, schools, hospitals, markets, and social cohesion, thereby harming the environment due to reliance on charcoal or firewood, with 95% of the population

using firewood. This reliance has sometimes resulted in deforestation due to pastoral or agricultural activities. A villagisation programme initiated by President Jean Baptiste Bagaza in 1980 was destabilised by the civil war but had shown positive impacts, with an experimental project of approximately 50 houses constructed in Bujumbura Capital that is still functional. In the post-conflict reconstruction phase, a social housing initiative policy was established in Burundi (PND, 2008).

Objectives

In 2008, Burundi established a National Housing Policy that introduced legal frameworks for land access and urban planning in response to rapid urban growth. This programme is aligned with the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda (2016), which promotes compact urban design, participatory planning, and pro-poor housing strategies. The goal of this work is to demonstrate a Rights-Based Ecological Housing Model for Rural Secondary Cities of Developing Countries, specifically in Burundi. The objective is to propose an integration of UN-Habitat frameworks into a "Tradi-Modern Ecological Housing Model" in Burundi. This paper specifically synthesises historical housing interventions, national policies, and Tradi-Modern Ecological Housing Model Proposal in Alignment with UN-Habitat Strategies.

Using spatial planning, socio-economic analysis, and environmental assessment, the study develops a prototype settlement of 70 housing units for 500 residents on a 10,000 m² site. Findings indicate that compact, participatory, and ecologically grounded housing can operationalize the right to adequate housing while enhancing social cohesion and sustainability.

Location

The model is proposed to be implemented in East Africa, Burundi, at Bururi Commune, a secondary rural-urban city with approximately 20,000 inhabitants, specifically at Kiganda Collin, located 10 km from Bururi Center. Kiganda has about 1,000 inhabitants, where rural-urban growth is largely informal, resulting in poor housing quality, rural exodus, and limited infrastructure.

The following map shows the location.

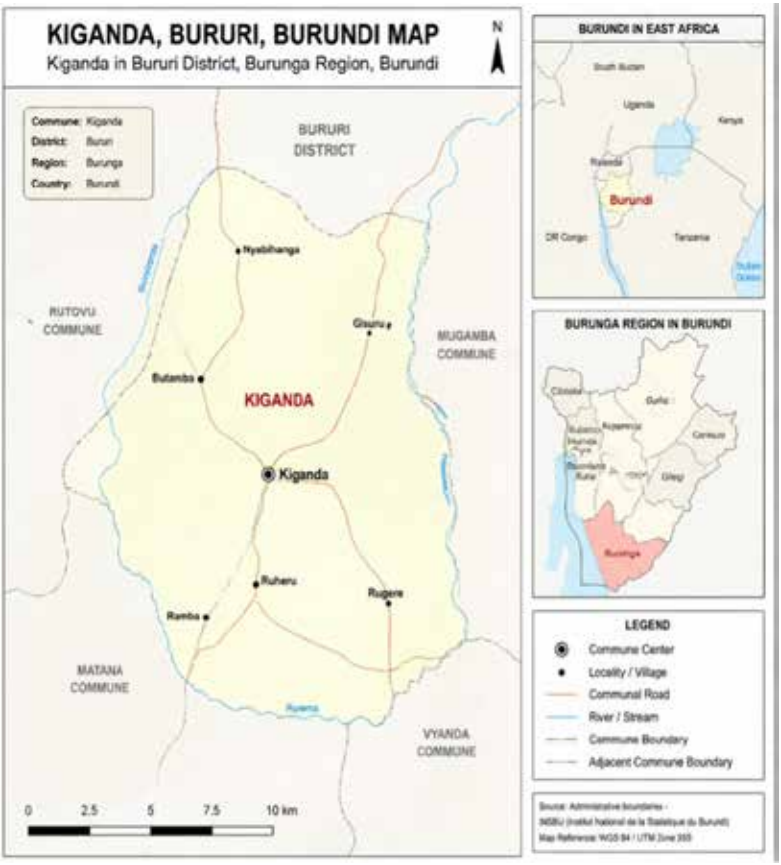

Figure 1. Kiganda, Bururi, Burundi Map Location.

Methodology

This study aims to analyze past housing initiatives and propose a rights-based ecological housing model adapted to Bururi, capable of creating a new dynamic of housing that enhances cohesion and harmony by gathering dispersed single houses from Collins into a single adequate village. A design-based approach has been used, combining the following methodology.

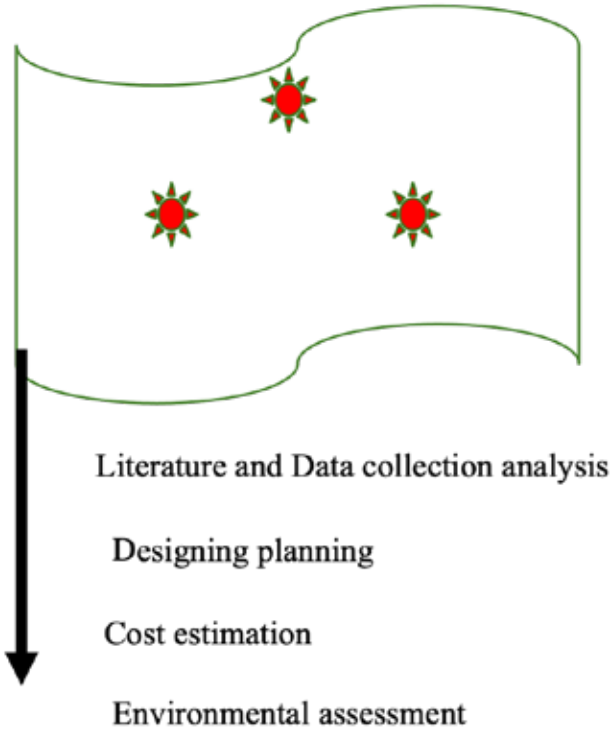

Diagram 1. Methodology Based Steps.

Data collection and analysis

The description of housing characteristics depends on family capacity and demographic growth. According to the UN, WPP (2022), Burundi has an average of 5 people per family.

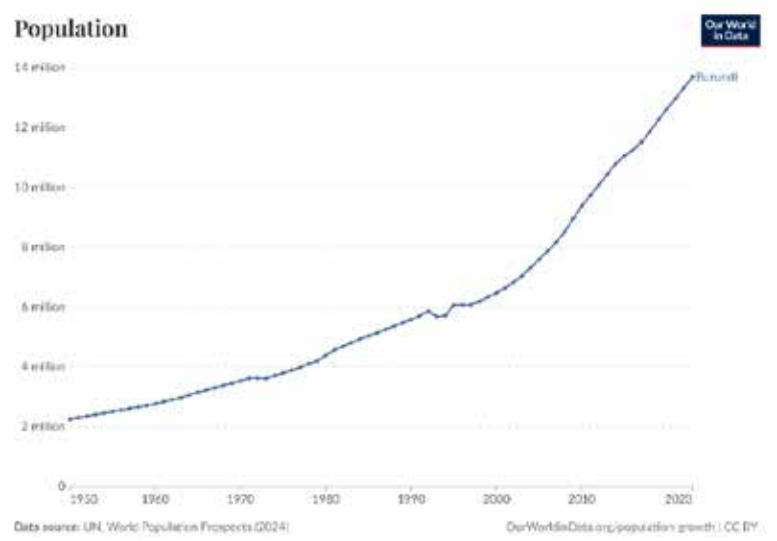

Diagram 2. Burundi Population Growth.

The following table data from UN World Population Prospects (2023) shows the population, growth rate, birth rate, and death rate.

Description	Value	year
Population	12,696.48	(2022 est.)
Growth Rate	3.63%	(2022 est.)
Birth Rate	35.17/1000	(2022 est.)

Table 1. Population growth rate.

Design planning typology

The following table describes design parameters of the site, housing unit requirements, and the projected population by model.

Type	Total square meters	Bedrooms
Ubuntu 1	45 m^2	2
Ubuntu 2	60 m^2	3

Table 2. Typology Designing and Required Area.

Results of proposed housing model

Cluster layout design and typology

Projected to a density of 500 persons per hectare, with a road width of 6 m, we have proposed a cluster layout of 20-house sections, including four parallel streets,

shared courtyards surrounded by circular designs of tradi-modern houses for social harmony, unity and togetherness, contributing as an eco-friendly housing. The Plan is presented in a Burundi Flag shape and Design Sketches of an Ubuntu Block Housing of 8 houses, each house has a diameter of about 8 meters, with a Green Ecological Burundi Map in the Middle. A Circular Traditional House for Cultural Rituals and Social Unity Cohesion, and a Green Playground Connecting One House to Another. This Emphasizes the Ubuntu Cultural Model. The Floor Plan Area of the House is 246.12 x 201.46 m².

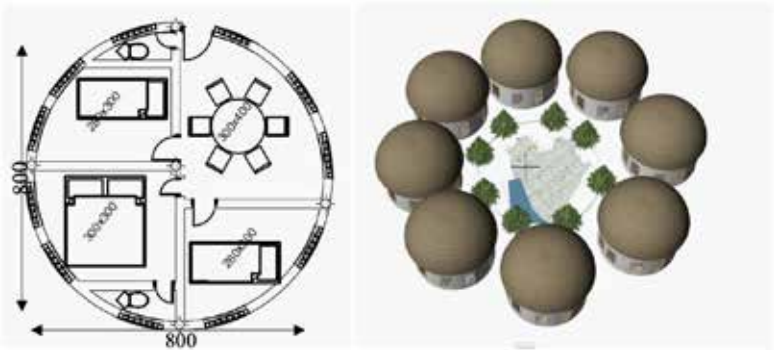

Figure 2. Cluster layout of Ubuntu design.

Housing description and typologies

Considering the average of 5 people per family, we have proposed two types of houses. The table here shows an Ubuntu-House Unity with a block of 4 housing units,

including total square meters and bedrooms for each house type. The following table describes the number of rooms per house.

Pieces	Number
Barza	1
Living-Dining	1
Hallway	1
Kitchen	1
Storage	1
Toilet	2
Bedrooms	3

Table.3 Housing Rooms Description.

Economic analysis

The houses are eco-friendly and cheaper, constructed from local materials such as earth blocks and local timber. All the houses will be covered with locally made bricks and roofed with tiles, with a local contribution of 50% of the total cost of the house (€45,000). Affordability is

supported through community labor and incremental construction.

The cost estimation per housing block (Ubuntu housing) of four (4) units together is approximately €200,000 (€45,000 x 4).

Environmental impact contribution

The model reduces environmental impact by around 90% through compact land use, reduced deforestation, passive ventilation and the use of environmentally friendly and renewable energy sources. This paper also proposes best practices to improve the livelihoods of the population:

Bio-organic and farming management:

- In the area of waste management, through the installation of the 'West House Treatment System': separation of bio-waste and plastic waste.

- Through the improvement of agricultural production: organic waste is converted into organic fertiliser for agriculture. In addition, each family will establish a grass pasture plantation at each of their former rural residences. As a sustainable rural approach, these grass pastures will be used to feed cows.

- Through pastoral farming: Cattle shed will be set up for each block of flats in the 'Ubuntu-Unity' housing estate. This will enable milking at home and ensure that children receive a breakfast with milk before going to school.

Use of renewable energy sources:

- A collective solar panel farm is being built in every Ubuntu-Unity housing estate. The aim is to promote independence and self-sufficiency, as only 11 per cent of Burundians have access to electricity.

- Biogas technology from biomass: Before the collected cow dung is used as organic fertiliser, an experiment will be carried out to produce biogas from it. This contributes to climate protection, as more than 99.8% of the population still rely on charcoal and firewood. This technology will generate efficient biogas for clean cooking. I have developed a technique based on organic biomass called 'Cow Manure Cleaning and Cooking', as described below.

Discussion

The model is consistent with the global frameworks of UN-Habitat and builds on Burundi's national strategies. The results confirm that participatory and incremental approaches to housing construction in low-income contexts are effective, environmentally friendly and more cost-effective when built using local materials with a 50% local contribution and 50% external funding, whilst creating jobs for around 300 people. Unity, social cohesion, harmony and shared development are indicators against which the success of this model can be assessed three years after the introduction of this way of life.

Conclusion

The proposed model demonstrates a scalable, human adequate housing and environmentally friendly approach to housing construction in rural-urban areas, which mitigates environmental impacts, contributes to decarbonisation and counteracts climate change as well as migration triggered by rural exodus. It integrates ecological design, public participation and policy coordination, thereby contributing to local sustainable rural-urban development in Burundi. Up to 66 per cent of building materials are sourced from local resources,

and external funding will create jobs for around 20 per cent of the projected population. As an additional and innovative added value, renewable energy sources such as photovoltaics and biogas are installed in the ‘Unity’ homes.

Middle East

Rebuilding Gaza after three years of war: *A policy framework for Palestinian-led reconstruction countries*

Osama Aim

The Gaza Strip enters mid-2026 in a state of physical collapse. Two years of war destroyed or damaged 371,888 housing units, set human development back seventy-seven years, and produced 68 million tons of rubble. About 1.9 million Palestinians remain displaced, often several times over. The Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment released by the UN, World Bank, and European Union in April 2026 puts the cost of

reconstruction at $71.4 billion over a decade if security holds.[6]

This paper argues that the technical task of reconstruction is enormous, but the political task is harder. Without Palestinian control of planning, Gaza will be rebuilt as someone else's project. Without resolving land tenure and the right of return, new construction may freeze old injustices in concrete. And without breaking the political deadlock between Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel, donors will not release funds at the scale needed.

Six recommendations follow, focused on housing rights, debris management, governance, labor absorption, and the link between reconstruction and a political settlement.

Background

Before October 2023, Gaza was already an unusual urban environment. About 2.2 million people lived in

6. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Humanitarian Situation Report I 27 March 2026," 27 March 2026, www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-report-27-march-2026 .

365 km2, a population density above 6,000 per km2, with a median age near nineteen. Seventy percent were refugees or descendants of refugees from 1948. Roughly 79 percent of housing was owner-occupied, a far higher rate than the regional average. Apartment buildings made up 78 percent of the stock, single-family homes most of the rest.

This pre-war picture matters because it shapes what reconstruction means. A Gazan family typically owned the home that was destroyed. The home was not just shelter. It carried inheritance, identity, and proof of presence on the land going back generations. Replacing it with a generic donor-built unit, on land whose ownership has been muddled by displacement, will feel less like recovery than dispossession by other means.

Infrastructure was strained even before the war. Electricity ran half the day at best. Groundwater was undrinkable due to over-extraction and saltwater intrusion. Sewage treatment plants discharged into the sea. The 2007 blockade had hollowed out the economy, and unemployment hovered near 46 percent. The system was fragile. The war then shattered it.

The current crisis

Housing and displacement

The Final Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment, conducted by the World Bank, the United Nations, and the European Union and released in April 2026, puts the figure at 371,888 housing units destroyed or damaged. More than 60 percent of the population has lost its home. About 1.9 million people are displaced, many of them several times.[7]

OCHA verified roughly 1,600 displacement sites across the Strip, housing at least 1.7 million people in tents and damaged structures.[8] Living conditions in these sites are not what reconstruction debates usually imagine. Skin diseases from fleas and ticks are common. Sewage and rainwater pool around tents. Storm-related deaths recur each winter, including twelve people killed by collapsing walls during a single storm in December 2025.[9]

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7. Ibid.

8. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Humanitarian Situation Report I 27 March 2026," 27 March 2026, www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-report-27-march-2026.

9. OCHA, "Humanitarian Situation Update #349 I Gaza Strip," December 2025, www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-349-gaza-strip.

Water, sanitation, and the engine-oil problem

The water and sewage system is functionally broken. Only 16 of73 sewage pumping stations were running as of April 2026. About 40,000 cubic meters of untreated sewage are released daily into the sea, residential areas, and groundwater. Six in ten families struggle to secure enough clean water.[10]

A more revealing problem sits behind this: restrictions on engine oil and generator spare parts. Without them, water trucks stop, hospital generators die, and the few working sewage pumps fail. OCHA reports that debris removal capacity has already dropped from 25,000 tons a day to about 5,000 tons because heavy machinery cannot be repaired[11]. Reconstruction debates focus on the $71 billion price tag, but a few months of withheld lubricant can collapse the existing system faster than money can rebuild it. The bottleneck is not financial. It is the daily flow of mundane spare parts across closed crossings.

Health, education, and food

Of 683 health service points, only 296 are operational

10. OCHA, "Humanitarian Situation Report I 1 May 2026," 2 May 2026, www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-report-1-may-2026.

11. Ibid., "Lack of Engine Oil and Spare Parts" section.

as of late April 2026, and just 23 of those are fully functional[12]. Half of all hospitals do not work. Nearly all schools are damaged or destroyed[13]. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification confirmed famine in Gaza city in August 2025. Conditions have improved since, but food insecurity is still acute, and the cost of livingsits at 282 percent pre-war levels.[14]

The economy has contracted by 84 percent.[15] Unemployment is no longer the relevant metric. There is no functioning labor market.

Future projections

How long will reconstruction take? No one knows, because the timeline depends on assumptions that are themselves contested. Three scenarios are useful for policy planning.

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12. Ibid., Annex 1 (Health Cluster)

13. United Nations in Palestine, "Final Gaza Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment."

14. OCHA, "Humanitarian Situation Report 11 May 2026" (Incoming Supplies section).

15. United Nations in Palestine, "Final Gaza Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment."

Low-end estimate (16 years). This assumes a stable ceasefire, full donor funding of $71.4 billion, unimpeded entry of materials, and clearance of 68 million tons of rubble within ten to fifteen years[16]. Under these conditions, every Gazan could have a permanent roof by roughly 2042.

Mid-range estimate (30 to 40 years). This is the more common projection. Donor commitments rarely arrive in full. Ceasefires erode. Material entry is restricted. UNDP, which manages rubble clearance, has cleared 120,000 tons since January 2025 and 50,000 tons in the first month after the October 2025 ceasefire. Even at the accelerated pace, the math points to seven years or more for debris alone[17].

High-end estimate (80 years). UNCTAD modeled a scenario where Gaza's GDP returns to 2022 levels only

16. Imran Riza, "Gaza's Day After: Reconstruction and Governance Challenges," Brookings Institution, 24 April 2025, Gaza's day after: Reconstruction and governance challenges | Brookings

17. United Nations, "Clearing Gaza's Rubble: A Prerequisite for Recovery," 21 November 2025, www.un.org/unispal/?p-=313984 ; see also Gilead Sher, "Gaza's Debris and the Road to Reconstruction," Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, 3 February 2026, https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/gazas-debris-and-road-reconstruction .

by 2092 if pre-war growth trends resume[18]. In housing terms, the youngest displaced children today could die before everyone is rehoused.

The midpoint of these scenarios is bleak. A thirty-year-old who lost her home in 2024 will likely live in temporary shelter into her fifties. A child born in a tent in 2025 may finish school and find work without ever knowing a fixed address.

Two further patterns shape the realistic outlook. First, partial reconstructions tend to harden into permanent geographies. The "temporary" Bureij and Jabalia camps built in the 1950s are still there. Whatever interim solutions are designed in 2026 will define how Gaza looks in 2050. Second, the longer reconstruction stalls, the harder it becomes politically. A displaced population kept in tents for a decade tends to radicalize or migrate. Neither outcome serves regional stability, and both make donor governments less willing to fund the next round.

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18. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), "Preliminary Assessment of the Economic Impact of the Destruction in Gaza," 31 January 2024, www.un.org/unispal/document/unctad-report-gaza-destruction-31Ian-2024/.

Policy environment

The political architecture is now defined by UN Security Council Resolution 2803 of November 2025, which endorsed the Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict, including the Board of Peace chaired by former U.S. President Donald Trump[19] The Board met for the first time in Washington in February 2026 and announced about $7 billion in pledges from nine countries plus a further $10 billion U.S. commitment, though without a published schedule of disbursement[20].

The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) began work in January 2026. It has fifteen Palestinian technocrats, none of them elected. It reports to the Board of Peace rather than to the Palestinian Authority[21].

The competing model is the Arab League plan, adopted in March 2025 and backed by Egypt, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the major European states

19. www.cfr.org/art1cles/who-w1ll-govern-gaza .

20. Ibid.

21. Daniel Kurtzer, "Gaza: From 'Master Plan' to Peace Plan?" Brookings Institution, 12 February 2026, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/gaza-from-master-plan-to-peace-plan/.

(the UK, France, Germany, and Italy).

It costs $53 billion, is staged over thirty months, and explicitly rejects population displacement[22]. Washington and Israel oppose it.

A reasonable read is that the international community has not yet decided who governs Gaza. The Board of Peace exists on paper, but most pledges remain verbal. The Arab plan carries more legitimacy among Palestinians but lacks U.S. and Israeli buy-in. Until this is resolved, large-scale reconstruction is unlikely to start.

Recommendations

1. Anchor reconstruction in housing, land, and property rights before clearance. Debris removal is urgent, but clearing rubble erases the boundaries of plots and the evidence of ownership. Donors should fund a parallel land-rights documentation effort using satellite imagery, pre-war cadastral records, and community testimony. The RONA itself names this

22. Khaled Elgindy, "Gaza War: How to Keep Rebuilding from Becoming an 80-Year Project," Foreign Policy, 17 December 2025, https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/12/17/war-gaza-rebuliding-palestinan-reconstruction-plan/ .

as a prerequisite for reconstruction[23]. 18 Without it, rebuilding will produce legal chaos and a second wave of dispossession.

2. Make Palestinian labor central to reconstruction contracts. If $71 billion flows in over a decade and most of it goes to foreign contractors, the unemployment crisis will outlast the war. Donor agreements should require a minimum share of Palestinian hiring, with training programs in masonry, civil engineering, and infrastructure operation. The model is post-2014 reconstruction in Gaza, where UNRWA's cash-for-work programs absorbed tens of thousands of workers, imperfectly but at meaningful scale.

3. Resolve the engine-oil and spare-parts bottleneck first. Before designing master plans, donors and Israel must agree on a streamlined entry mechanism for the materials needed to keep existing infrastructure alive. Without spare parts, hospitals, water systems, and rubble-removal equipment will collapse faster than rebuilding can catch up. This is a low-cost intervention with disproportionate impact.

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23. United Nations in Palestine, "Final Gaza Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment."

4. Build interim shelter that lasts five to ten years, not five to ten months. Realistic scenarios put permanent housing at least two decades away for many families. Donors should fund mid-life shelters that resist storms, accommodate winter cold and summer heat, and connect to working water and sewage lines. Tents are not a policy.

5. Insist on Palestinian-led planning, not Palestinian-staffed implementation. The NCAG was created without elections and reports to a body Palestinians that had no role in designing. Donors who want public legitimacy for their projects should condition funds on Palestinian Authority involvement and a credible timetable for local elections in Gaza. A reconstruction imposed on Gaza will be resisted or quietly abandoned by the people it claims to serve.

6. Hold the political path open. The RONA is explicit: reconstruction is inseparable from a credible pathway to Palestinian statehood across Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem[24]. Treating reconstruction as a purely technical exercise, separate from the two-state question, means spending $71 billion to maintain the status quo at higher cost. Funds tied

24. Ibid.

to a clear political horizon are more likely to survive the next round of fighting and to attract matching contributions from skeptical donors.

Conclusion

Gaza will be rebuilt. The question is by whom and on what terms. The figures in this paper, drawn from the UN, the World Bank, and the European Union, are conservative. The real loss includes neighborhoods that cannot be replaced and ownership records that cannot be reconstructed.

A reconstruction that respects Palestinian agency would take a generation. A reconstruction that does not can take a century or fail outright. The choice is being made now, mostly by people who do not live in Gaza.

Asia

Techo in the Archipelago: *Housing, informality, and collective resilience in Metro Manila*

Maria Cynthia Y. Funk

This paper reflects on the condition of techo (housing) in Metro Manila in light of the moral imperative of Tierra, Techo, Trabajo and the framework of UN-Habitat. It proposes that housing be understood not merely as a physical structure, but as a relational and lived condition shaped by community, livelihood, and environmental realities.

Drawing from engagement with communities in Barangay 739 and estuary settlements, the paper examines how informal housing emerges as a response to exclusion, while also revealing forms of resilience

and collective care. It introduces Kapwaspasyo, a Filipino-inspired framework of shared space, as a way of understanding housing as a condition of being with others. The paper argues that responding to the housing crisis requires not only building homes but strengthening the social and spatial relationships that sustain life.

Techo as a moral and urban question

Pope Francis's articulation of Tierra, Techo, Trabajo reminds us that housing is not simply a technical or economic concern, but a matter of human dignity. Shelter is inseparable from land and livelihood, and together these form the basis of a life lived with stability and belonging.

In many cities of the Global South, this reality is increasingly under strain. Rapid urbanization has outpaced formal housing systems, and millions are compelled to create homes in informal settlements located in spaces of risk and uncertainty. In Metro Manila, one of the densest urban regions in the world, this condition is particularly visible. Communities live along estuaries, riverbanks, and transport corridors - spaces often considered marginal yet deeply embedded in the life of the city.

Here, the question of techo is not simply about whether a roof exists, but about whether life can be sustained with dignity.

Living conditions and everyday resilience

The experience of informal settlements reveals an often-overlooked reality. While these spaces are marked by insecurity of tenure, infrastructure, and environment, they are also places of ingenuity, adaptation, and mutual support.

Housing is rarely delivered as a finished product. Instead, it is built incrementally over time, shaped by changing needs, income, and environmental conditions. Residents respond actively to flooding by elevating floors, using adaptable materials, and organizing collectively during crises.

Daily life extends beyond the walls of the home. Paths, thresholds, and shared spaces become sites of livelihood, care, and social exchange. What appears as congestion from the outside is, in lived experience, a dense network of relationships.

These communities demonstrate that vulnerability does not eliminate agency. Rather, it reveals the capacity of people to build, adapt, and sustain life together.

Limits of conventional housing approaches

Frameworks such as that of UN-Habitat define adequate housing through dimensions such as tenure, services, affordability, and location. These are essential measures. However, in practice, they often remain fragmented.

Formal housing may provide structure and legality but is frequently disconnected from livelihood and community. Informal settlements, on the other hand, offer proximity, social support, and adaptability, but lack stability and services.

This creates a paradox: many existing solutions address parts of the problem but fail to sustain life as a whole.
As a result, housing cannot be understood only as the provision of units. It must be approached as a set of relationships, between people, space, work, and environment.

Barangay 739: Housing as shared life

Barangay 739 in Manila illustrates this reality. In a densely populated area, housing is not defined solely by structures, but by the ways people live together. Spaces are shared and negotiated. Domestic activities extend into pathways, and neighbors remain constantly within reach—not as intrusion, but as support. In times of crisis, these networks become essential, enabling rapid response and collective care.

Despite insecurity and environmental risk, housing here is not absent. It is continuously being produced through cooperation, adaptation, and shared effort.

This challenges the idea that housing exists only where it is formally provided. It shows that shelter can also emerge through relationships.

The estuary pavilion: Building relationships

The Estuary Pavilion was developed as a modest architectural intervention within this context. Rather than serving as a finished object, it acts as a shared platform - a space for gathering, dialogue, and visibility. It does not resolve the complex challenges of tenure, infrastructure, or scale. Instead, it creates conditions

for encounter: between residents, institutions, and the environment.

In doing so, it suggests that architecture can contribute not only by constructing buildings, but by strengthening relationships.

Kapwaspasyo: A relational understanding of space

From these experiences the concept of Kapwaspasyo has emerged, drawn from the Filipino notion of kapwa, or shared identity.

Kapwaspasyo understands space not as isolated or bounded, but as something formed through relationships. It recognizes that a home is not only a structure, but a network of interactions—between people, between neighbors, and between community and environment.

In this view, housing becomes:

- shared rather than individual
- evolving rather than fixed
- sustained through participation rather than delivery

This perspective does not replace existing frameworks but deepens them by foregrounding the relational dimension of dwelling.

Toward housing as a common good

Addressing the housing crisis in Metro Manila - and in many cities like it - requires a shift in approach.
Instead of:

- relocating communities away from livelihood
- delivering standardized housing units

There is a need to:

- support in-city solutions
- strengthen incremental building processes
- recognize communities as partners
- design with, rather than for, people

Such approaches align with the principle of the common good—where housing is not only a private asset, but a shared condition that enables life within society.

Such approaches align with the principle of the common good—where housing is not merely a private asset, but a shared condition that enables life within society.

Kapwaspasyo invites a shift in how we understand responsibility in the built environment. It describes a shared space of being - one that is produced not by construction alone, but through presence, care, and ongoing negotiation. In Kapwaspasyo, a place becomes architectural not simply because it is completed, but because it is lived and inhabited together.

If space is relational, then design cannot be neutral. It shapes how people encounter one another, how care is practiced, and how communities endure. In contexts such as Metro Manila, where life unfolds under conditions of constraint, Kapwaspasyo recognizes that resilience is not only technical or legal, but relational. It is sustained through proximity, cooperation, and everyday acts of mutual support.

To design within this framework is therefore not only to provide shelter, but to cultivate the spatial conditions for encounter, dignity, and shared life.

Conclusion: From shelter to shared dwelling

Metro Manila reveals both the depth of the housing crisis and the strength of human resilience. Informal settlements are not only sites of deprivation, they are places where alternative ways of living, building, and

sharing space are already emerging.

To respond meaningfully to the call for techo, it is not enough to build more structures. It is necessary to nurture the relationships that make dwelling possible. The concept of Kapwaspasyo offers a way forward. It invites us to see housing not simply as a roof, but as a shared and evolving condition of life together.

In this sense, techo becomes not only something that is built, but something that is continuously lived and sustained in community.

Summary

The five case studies from Buenos Aires, Vienna, Bururi, Gaza, Metro Manila demonstrate that the housing crisis is a global phenomenon, although it takes fundamentally different forms depending on historical, political, economic, environmental and social contexts. Together they illustrate the continuing relevance of the UN-Habitat vision of adequate housing while showing that universal principles must always be adapted to local realities. Despite their diversity, all contributions understand housing not merely as the provision of buildings but as a foundation for human dignity, social inclusion, sustainable development and community life.

A central theme running through all five papers is that housing extends far beyond the physical dwelling. It is closely connected with land, livelihoods, public infrastructure, environmental quality, social cohesion and political participation. Housing is consistently presented as a common good with significant social functions rather than simply as a market commodity or financial asset. The contributions also share the view

that public authorities have an essential responsibility for shaping land use, regulating housing markets, protecting vulnerable populations and creating the institutional conditions under which adequate housing can be realised. In different ways, all authors argue that successful housing policies must integrate physical planning with social, economic, cultural and environmental objectives.

Five Case Studies

The case studies nevertheless reveal strikingly different manifestations of the housing challenge.

Buenos Aires illustrates the tensions between housing as a social necessity and housing as an object of speculative investment. According to the author, decades of land privatisation, planning decisions favouring private development and declining investment in social housing have contributed to rising inequality despite continued construction activity. Large numbers of vacant dwellings coexist with growing housing insecurity, while public land and urban planning increasingly serve private economic interests. The paper therefore advocates stronger public regulation of land use, protection of public assets and housing policies centred on social justice and the common good.

Vienna's housing model is regarded as a global benchmark: following the First World War, labour movements and social democratic reforms gave rise to a unique system of social housing, funded by luxury taxes. After 1945, the construction of social housing continued; today, over 60 per cent of Viennese people live in subsidised accommodation. However, current challenges such as gentrification, rising rents and property speculation show that the model is not perfect. To tackle the housing crisis, there is a need for more public housing construction, stricter rent controls, a speculation tax and protection against privatisation. Vienna's experience teaches us that housing must be recognised as a basic need and protected from market forces.

Burundi is facing a housing crisis: over a billion people worldwide do not have adequate housing. In Burundi, rapid population growth, colonial history, civil wars and rural exodus are exacerbating the crisis. The study proposes a "Tradi-Modern Ecological Housing Model" for rural secondary towns such as Bururi. The model combines traditional building methods with ecological solutions: compact settlements, local materials (e.g. mud bricks), solar energy, biogas from cow dung and waste management. Through participatory planning and community collaboration, affordable, sustainable

housing is created that promotes social cohesion and environmental sustainability. The project demonstrates how the right to housing can be realised – cost-effectively, in a climate-friendly manner and adaptable to local needs.

The contribution on Gaza addresses perhaps the most extreme housing crisis among the five cases. Here, housing destruction is inseparable from armed conflict, displacement and contested political authority. The paper demonstrates that reconstruction cannot be reduced to engineering or finance alone. Questions of land ownership, housing rights, governance, the right of return and political legitimacy are presented as essential preconditions for rebuilding. At the same time, immediate humanitarian concerns—including water, sanitation, debris removal, interim shelter and employment—must be addressed if reconstruction is to become both socially sustainable and politically legitimate. The study therefore frames reconstruction as a long-term process that depends as much on Palestinian agency and political settlement as on financial resources.

The article on Metro Manila focuses on the housing situation ("techo") in the greater Manila area and emphasises that housing is more than just a physical structure – it is a social and living fabric, shaped

by community, livelihoods and the environment. Using examples such as Barangay 739 and informal settlements, the author demonstrates how housing emerges, despite uncertainty, through collective adaptation and mutual support. The concept of Kapwaspasyo (inspired by 'kapwa' – shared identity) views housing as a relational, shared and evolving space. Resolving the housing crisis therefore requires not only the construction of houses, but also the strengthening of social and spatial relationships to enable people to live in dignity.

Different housing policies

Taken together, the five case studies suggest that there is no universal housing model applicable to all contexts. The priorities of post-war reconstruction in Gaza differ fundamentally from the challenges of informal settlements in Manila, ecological rural development in Burundi, speculative urban development in Buenos Aires or the maintenance of mature welfare-state institutions in Vienna. Nevertheless, the contributions converge on several common principles. Adequate housing requires secure access to land, effective public institutions, community participation, environmentally sustainable planning and policies that place human well-being above short-term financial returns. Housing should be

understood as part of an integrated urban and territorial system linking shelter with employment, infrastructure, education, health, mobility, environmental quality and social relationships.

The case studies also point towards future directions for housing policy. Public investment alone is insufficient without accountable governance and citizen participation, while market mechanisms alone cannot ensure equitable access to adequate housing. Climate resilience, renewable energy, circular resource management and ecological design are becoming increasingly important components of housing strategies, particularly in rapidly urbanising regions. Equally important are legal security, protection against displacement, recognition of community knowledge and stronger mechanisms for balancing private property rights with the public interest. Although the pathways differ, the contributions share a common conclusion: solving the global housing crisis requires more than constructing dwellings. It requires creating settlements and cities that foster dignity, security, social cohesion, environmental responsibility and shared responsibility, thereby enabling people not merely to inhabit space but to build sustainable and inclusive communities.

This book aims to provide some ideas on this topic.

Authors

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"THE CITY BELONGS TO EVERYONE" brings together diverse voices from across the globe, exploring how technology, culture, and human experience intersect within distinct local realities. From Manila to Gaza, Bururi, Vienna to Buenos Aires, and from island communities to global cities, the authors offer contrasting worldviews, disciplines, and lived experiences.

Their reflections reveal that technology is never neutral: it is shaped by history, geography, memory, and aspiration. Together, these essays form a rich archipelago of ideas, connections, and possibilities for our shared future.