Rethinking the Informal City

Contents

Chapter 5

The Evolution of Informal Settlements in Chile: Improving Housing Conditions in Cities

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Chile's marked demographic explosion, its accelerated urbanisation and the consequent concentration of its population in a few cities has generated significant housing needs, mostly manifest as housing shortages, overcrowding, sharing, land invasions and informal settlements. These settlements are scattered throughout the country's main cities as well as in small towns and rural areas, and are all understood as settlements lacking any of the three basic services: running water, electricity and sewage. Important efforts have been made over the years to improve the conditions of those living in such settlements, and Greene (2004) identifies five main stages: emergency eradication, new solutions, no state support, upgrading and upgrading with new solutions.

This chapter presents a brief history of informal settlements in Santiago de Chile. Beginning with the initial formation of *callampas* and organised land invasions, or *campamentos*, the chapter goes on to look at political motivations relating to housing involved in the relocation of hundreds of families during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and the current democratic government's aim to eliminate poverty in Chile using housing as one of its main tools. This chapter also shows that the way the authorities have tried to correct, eliminate, control or promote informal settlements has varied over the years, from

absolute control to complete support, and from total neglect to a more consensual way of approaching them.

Nonetheless, it appears that even the more democratic interventions have led to unsatisfactory ways of inhabiting the city, because top-down 'formalisations' of informal settlements erase the richness of everyday urban living. In other words, to approach improvements in quality of life merely as a formalisation of housing tenure, or housing structure, is equivalent to overlooking the complexity of poverty and the need for the creation of citizenship.

The Formation of *Callampas* and *Campamentos*

Since colonial times, living conditions in urban areas dedicated to lower income groups have been extremely precarious and highly segregated (de Ramón 1990; Sepúlveda 1998). Initially, the indigenous population was not allowed to site their dwellings within the city limits. This situation repeated itself later when lower income groups living in cities or those migrating from rural areas were forced to remain on the periphery. As de Ramón (1990) mentions, there are two main stages in housing occupation for lower-income groups. The first, from the 1830s until the 1940s, involved mostly legal forms of occupation which included rented land in the periphery or room rental in inner-city buildings, both with high levels of overcrowding and precarious living conditions. During this time illegal occupations were highly controlled and tolerated only on land with unclear ownership or on areas of public property such as outside city limits or on riverbanks. The second stage, from the 1950s to the 1970s, was marked by the illegal occupation of empty plots in different areas of the city (de Ramón 1990). These settlements presented a gradual yet continuous growth, with families or migrants arriving steadily until the plots were fully occupied. This settlement process soon began to be known as *callampas*, or mushroom settlements.[1] According to Sepúlveda (1998), *callampas* differ from illegal land invasions, or *tomas*, in that the first are not conceived as permanent solutions – the occupants remain there temporarily while waiting for a better housing solution – whereas the latter are planned occupations aiming for permanence and eventual upgrading. Both types were generally backed by political parties and usually presented some form of violent confrontation with the police.

Government policies varied throughout these years. In the 1950s, 'self-help' housing began to be used as a type of intervention that is still applied today. It encourages families to build their housing using their

own labour with technical assistance provided by an external entity. Its origins are linked to an agreement between the governments of Chile and the U.S.A. (Hidalgo 1999; Haramoto et al. 1997; Greene 2004). In Santiago, this programme provided approximately 3,000 housing units, and it constituted a housing solution for families that lived in some of the most precarious settlements in the city (Hidalgo 1999). In the 1960s these programmes were included in the Eradication Programmes which involved moving urban dwellers either to finished units or, in the majority of cases, to urbanised plots where provisional housing was installed at the back of the plots for later self-building or formal construction by building companies (Hidalgo 1999; Greene 2004).

During the second half of the 1960s there was more influence from urban mobilisations. These were more than a political struggle to obtain land for housing, and became a type of social organisation that created social leaders and, later, became known as urban social movements. The Chilean experience during these struggles encouraged many authors to write about such movements, among them Manuel Castells (1983), who studied the impact of social movements in the development of contemporary cities.

Throughout this time, there was an increase in housing demand due to both the natural growth of the population and the rise of rural–urban migration. The state maintained its response from previous years, but the political context required faster solutions. One of these was Operación Sitio (Operation Site), focusing on self-built solutions. This programme was nick-named Operación Tiza (Operation Chalk), mocking the fact that, at the end, the plots were merely traced on the ground with chalk and the few initiated projects were very precarious. As a housing solution, Operación Sitio was similar to previous eradication and self-build programmes. Yet, these were considered to be new housing solutions and not provisional or emergency housing (Greene 2004). This alternative privileged access to land more than to finished housing units, whose construction would eventually be the beneficiary's responsibility. In Santiago, between 1964 and 1970, around 65,000 plots were provided through Operaciones Sitio (Hidalgo 1999) while over 110,000 were provided nationwide. This was fundamentally different to previous programmes: the quantitative leap represented the largest intervention ever carried out by the state up to that moment in Chilean history, and the start of progressive housing processes, in social as well as in physical terms, was then considered a real possibility (Greene 2004; Kusnetzoff 1987).

Social pressure continued and intensified at the beginning of the 1970s. At this point, Chilean cities evidenced almost three decades of

illegal land occupations, and there was great dissatisfaction with the efforts made by the state in order to reduce the housing deficit. The housing deficit was growing steadily, reaching 156,205 housing units in 1952, 420,000 in 1960, and 592,324 units by 1970 (Hidalgo 1999; Kusnetzoff 1987). Homeless committees created by those encroaching on, sharing or living in illegal settlements started to put pressure on and negotiate with authorities and political parties. They soon became an organised, national dwellers movement, coordinated centrally, directed by proletarian parties and linked to the new revolutionary organisations which were emerging in the country at the time. The settlements originating from these movements were called *campamentos* (encampments), indicating their fragile and paramilitary character (Hidalgo 1999). According to Kusnetzoff, 'no less than 300,000 people came to live in the new encampments and entered with great dynamism into the political struggle within the city of Santiago' (Kusnetzoff 1987: 161). They came from *conventillos* (inner city tenements), *callampas* and *allegados* (sharers living in conditions of overcrowding).

State-sponsored self-building programmes were eliminated during President Allende's period (1970–73) because they were seen to affect workers' resting time, to increase unemployment and were technically inefficient and uneconomical (Hidalgo 1999). It was also argued that they were discriminatory against the poor (Greene 2004). Thus the government proposed an Emergency Plan to begin building finished housing units and proclaimed housing as a right for all citizens (Kusnetzoff 1987). However, during this time the peripheral growth in large cities of informal settlements or *campamentos* not only continued but greatly increased. In 1970, the *campamentos* in Santiago hosted around 60,000 people, but by 1973 around 800,000 families belonged or participated in this type of territorial and functional organisation (de Ramón 1990). These spontaneous land invasions did not comply with legal norms and administrative policies, ignored urban planning regulations and rendered master plans obsolete. Furthermore, most of these invasions were carried out in different parts of the city, not only on the periphery. By 1973, the periphery of the city of Santiago had been extended with spontaneous settlements to accommodate 17 per cent of the capital's population in approximately 10 per cent of the city's area (de Ramón 1990). Though they did not have legal or formal backing, these *campamentos* were considered the most important urban operation of the century and, although envisioned as provisional, they ended up being permanent (Greene 2004).

The Eradication of Campamentos to Make Land Available

The process of land invasion and *campamentos* was violently stopped by the military government of Augusto Pinochet in 1973. During seventeen years of dictatorship, the military government maintained strict control over land invasions and limited the informal growth of the periphery. However, self-building at the back of existing plots started to make up for the insufficient housing supply, increasing *allegamientos* (sharing) as a way to solve the housing problems for new families without access to formal housing. Thus the physical expression of the housing deficit changed shape in comparison to the old *callampas*. Sharing became the main problem, one that became progressively invisible since the increasing population was hosted within existing plots or dwellings, thereby significantly multiplying population densities.

By 1975 a new housing policy led by market forces was being defined (Gilbert 2003). The state supported the creation of an open housing market leaving the responsibility for construction in the hands of the private sector, thus eliminating the concept of housing as a right, and making it instead a good to be accessed via the market. By 1978, the quantitative housing deficit was somewhere close to one million housings units (Held 2000) and in 1979 a new urban policy was issued declaring land a non-scarce resource (MINVU 1979; Kusnetzoff 1987). Parallel to this, a new housing policy was created, providing the housing subsidy system that still operates today.

A further development was the eradication and relocation of peripheral-area dwellers to those older *campamentos* which still existed within cities. In 1979, there were 294 *campamentos* in Santiago housing 44,789 families (223,957 persons); and between 1979 and 1986 around 28,500 families were forcibly eradicated (Hidalgo 1999; de la Puente, Torres and Muñoz 1990; Fadda, Jirón and Allen 2000). These violent relocations freed up land that mostly lay in the richer areas of the city where land values were higher. These actions were a form of 'social cleansing' of such areas with the aim of removing obstacles to real-estate market development (Kusnetzoff 1987; Sabatini 2000).

There have been many studies describing the consequences of the 1980s eradications both on the housing market (Sabatini 2000; Kusnetzoff 1987) and on the affected population (Morales and Rojas 1986; de la Puente, Torres and Muñoz 1990). The studies agree that most of the destination areas provided inadequate infrastructure or facilities to welcome the incoming population due to their peripheral
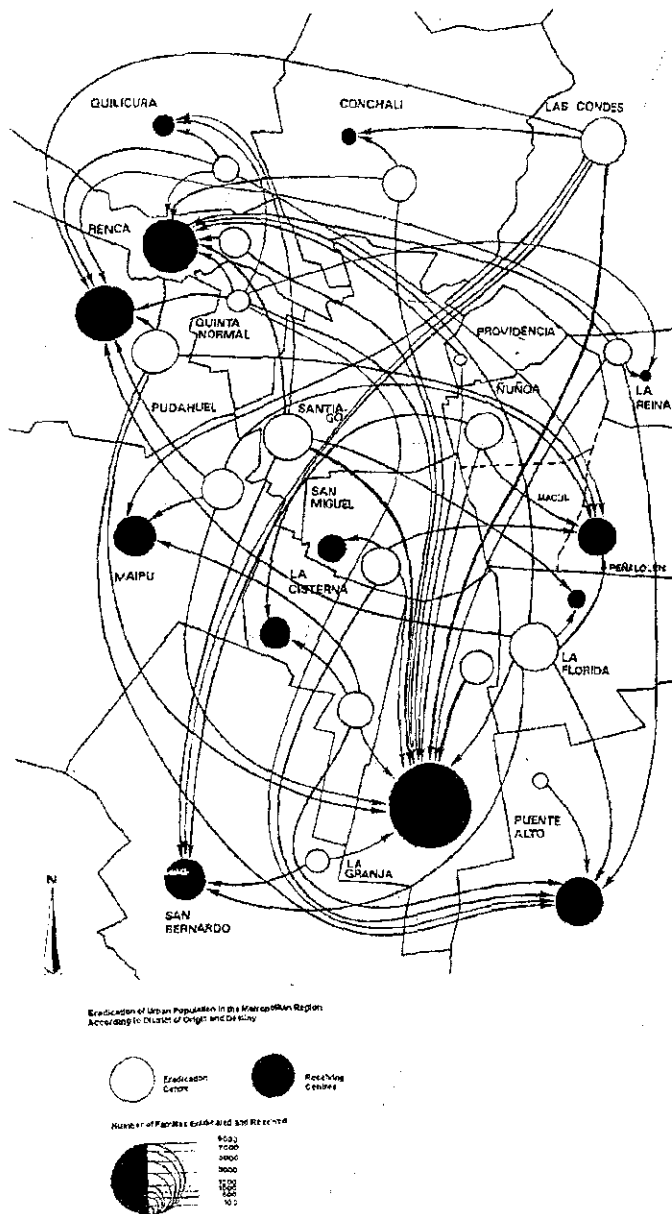
location and a lack of investment. The housing provided included minimum plots and dwellers lived under conditions of 'dispersion, uprooting and isolation, which aggravated the social deficiency and lack of work for the majority of those displaced' (Kusnetzoff 1987: 169).

In some areas the official programmes of displacement and resettlement in the impoverished periphery were chaotic, as in the district of La Pintana in the south of Santiago, where during the brief relocation brief period of 1982–84 the population grew by 90 per cent to 148,000 (Kusnetzoff 1987). In 1984 there were only 'two doctor's surgeries in the area, a third of the population had no sewage service, half of the children had no primary schools, there were seven telephones for the whole community and unemployment was estimated at 60%' (Kusnetzoff 1987: 169). The relocation worsened the living conditions for most of those displaced. These housing programmes had an immense negative impact inside the city as well, as the new location of the eradicated settlements, due to the low cost of land, contributed to and accentuated the excessive growth of the city, not only generating increased segregation but also environmental problems (Hidalgo 1999; Kusnetzoff 1987; Sabatini 2000).

This housing policy continued to be applied, particularly through the Basic Housing Programme, until the end of the military period and throughout Chile's economic crisis. Although fewer houses were built than promised, and payment arrears increased from low- and middle-income groups, the policy remained in place, with increasing demands for more housing and an increased housing deficit due to the 1985 earthquake.

Counting the Poor: The Urge to Eliminate Campamentos

At the beginning of democratic period in 1990, the estimated housing deficit was around 900,000 units. One of the biggest fears of the incoming government was that massive land invasions would occur. This led to the implementation of new housing plans that could quickly respond to dwellers' demands and would avoid urban demonstrations. The overall policy remained the same, but the main innovation was the Progressive Housing Programme, oriented specifically to those sharing homes and the homeless. Through this programme, along with other interventions, the Ministry of Housing managed to provide a housing supply greater than the rate of formation of new households and largely contained new land invasions. During the next ten years there was a significant reduction in the housing deficit (MINVU 2004a/b), but this

Figure 5.1 Eradication and Relocation Programmes in Santiago de Chile

was primarily in quantitative terms because the quality of the housing provided, though an improvement on previous living conditions, generally proved unsatisfactory in terms of dwelling size, materials, interior distribution, location and scale of the housing estates.

The Ministry of Housing entrusted the University of Chile to carry out the first cadastre of precarious informal settlements in 1996. At that time there were 972 informal settlements with more than twenty households in the country, housing approximately 500,000 people (MINVU-INVI 1997). This initial survey served as the basis for the first housing programme that included a holistic view of poverty and demonstrated that through the provision of housing units only, the cycle of poverty would not be overcome but required additional dimensions including basic infrastructure, employment, training and community participation, amongst other things. This new programme, Chile Barrio, resembled the successful programme being applied in the favelas of Brazil, and included upgrading in cases where land was adequate and available, and relocation to other areas of the city when necessary. Though housing and infrastructure were two of the main aspects of the programme, it also involved community and social development, employment and aid (for small industry) and the strengthening of public programmes aimed at alleviating poverty.

The Chile Barrio programme generated high expectations, particularly due to its innovative design. However, soon after the programme became operational, various criticisms arose. There was consensus, confirmed by a national evaluation of the programme, that its aims and objectives were appropriate to tackle the problems of the low-income population living in informal settlements, particularly in terms of an integral understanding of the problem of marginality through a multi-sectoral approach. However, once in operation, the programme seemed less than ideal, particularly in terms of its social components, including community development and employment generation within the target groups. Furthermore, the institutional framework was incapable of dealing with the programme adequately, as timing and project execution was not efficient and, in terms of management and coordination with the different sectors, the multi-sectoral approach did not flow smoothly. Finally, the programme did not contemplate any follow-up, monitoring or evaluation system thus making it difficult to analyse its success (DIPRES 2002). The differentiated timing required for the housing and social objectives proved difficult in that the former involved a concrete result while the latter took more time to develop. In all, the programme ended up being yet another housing programme and

not the integral proposal it had promised to be (SUR 2004). Though many of these criticisms were taken on board by the programme, it is uncertain whether they will be overcome as the formalisation of housing remains the most important product.

An additional issue arose after the original diagnosis. Because no monitoring or follow-up had been provided for, the diagnosis became static. A complementary cadastre was carried out in 2002, including micro settlements with less than twenty households, which accounted for a total of 1,282 *campamentos* nationwide (Ariztía and Tironi 2002). This meant that the dynamic and changing situation of informal settlements was not contemplated by Chile Barrio, nor was it meant to, because some government officials had expressed concern with including new settlements in the target population of the programme. They believed it would provide an incentive for the formation of more informal settlements seeking a fast route to solve their housing problem. However, in reality, some of the 'new' settlements had not been originally counted because they were smaller than twenty households and others, particularly those in rural areas, did not necessarily fall into the category of precarious settlements. Also, new informal settlements had been formed since 1997 by settlers trying to find ways of living in their district of origin through informal and formal means – that is, by land invasion as well as through formal application and negotiation with the Ministry of Housing.

The Chile Barrio programme ended in 2006 with the formalisation of the last settlements in the cadastre. However, although the housing target of the programme was reached, the other components, many of which take longer to implement and are harder to quantify, are yet to be attained. The programme offers many lessons and provides much room for improvement within itself and for other programmes following similar multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approaches to public policy. It has been suggested that the programme should evolve into one which will tackle the poverty and living conditions of the remaining precarious informal settlements, as well as inner-city vulnerable areas. It should also provide guidance to a new programme recently launched, Quiero mi Barrio ('I Love my Neighbourhood'),[2] aimed at improving the living conditions of those people living in housing estates built by the government over the past thirty years. However, the complexity of improving quality of life has to be learned prior to embarking on new or improved versions of the programme, particularly if it is to be emulated internationally as has been done with other Chilean housing programmes.

Improving Quality of Life? An Evaluation of a Resettlement Intervention

Various studies have analysed the impact of the Chile Barrio programme (CIS 2002; Contreras and Ugarte 2002; DIPRES 2002; FONDECYT 2000–2003; Saborido 2005; Siclari 2003). One of these studies, the 'Comparative Study of Quality of Life-Gender and Environment Triad' (FONDECYT 2000–2003),[3] included amongst its objectives that of assessing the quality of life of specific groups living in Santiago and, specifically, studied one of Chile Barrio's most notable interventions, the Oreste Plath Estate.[4]

The Oreste Plath Estate intervention aimed at formalising the housing, employment and community integration conditions of 326 families living in Parcela 30. This was an informal settlement where families had installed themselves, almost ten years prior to the intervention, next to a waste disposal site close to a riverbank. The houses were mainly of wood and light materials with only partial connection to water and sewage (44 per cent were without running water and almost 90 per cent without access to sewage), but all had illegal connections to the electricity supply (MINVU-INVI 1997). Furthermore, in terms of distance, the settlement had little access to health care, child care and educational services, and limited access to commerce, community and sporting centres. Moreover, its proximity to the waste site as well as its topographic conditions labelled it an area unsuitable for housing (MINVU-INVI 1997). The majority of the population was under twenty-four-years old with precarious employment and low education levels but they were highly organised with five housing committees. Most worked as independent rubbish collectors, recycling materials from the waste disposal site.

In 1998 the Parcela 30 settlement was eradicated and the residents transferred to the new housing complex of Oreste Plath close to the original settlement. The project was initially seen as a success and was even mentioned in the annual presidential speech of 1998 (Frei 1998). The overall project included 777 housing units distributed in three-storey building blocks ranging in size from 39 to 47 square metres. Within the project, 326 units belonged to the Chile Barrio programme and the other 451 households applied separately through the regular MINVU system (FONDECYT 2000–2003).

Due to the complex factors that determine quality of life (QoL), it is a difficult concept to apprehend, define and measure. The concept applied here does not limit itself to the 'private life level', but integrates
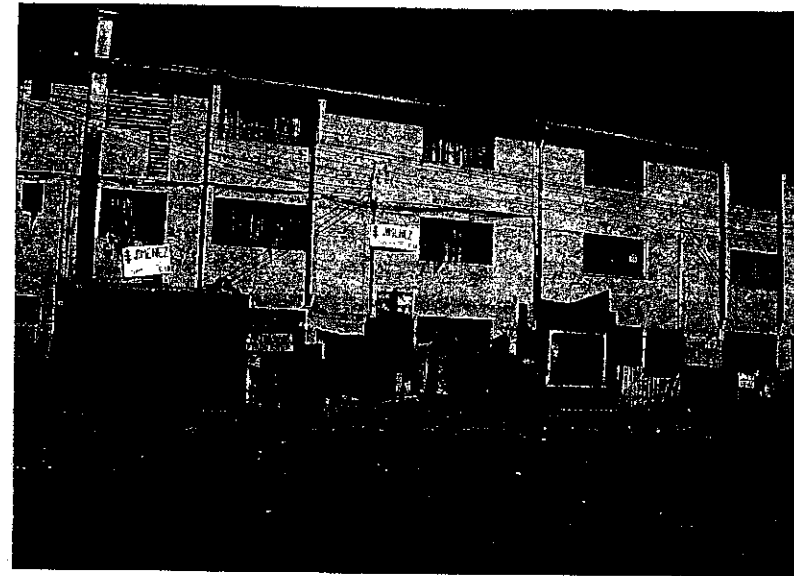

Figure 5.2 Oreste Plath: View of the Housing Blocks

all the elements, objective and subjective, of the conditions in which people live in an urban community, including their needs as well as their perceptions, expectations and levels of satisfaction (Jirón and Fadda 2003). This way of defining QoL is relevant when evaluating an intervention which attempts to provide an integral response to poverty. Housing is one of its components; since the housing process cannot be associated exclusively with the physical unit alone, it requires a vital analysis of the relation between the inhabitants and their habitat. This habitat includes the different scales at which people live (housing unit, surroundings, neighbourhood, city) and the various relations they form (family, neighbours, community, citizens). This makes the housing process more complex yet richer as it understands that improving housing conditions in material terms does not, automatically, imply an improvement of QoL, and, as will be seen, formalising informal settlements is a difficult goal to attain.

The following section presents the main highlights of an evaluation which started two years after the Parcela 30 settlement was relocated to the new formal housing complex in Oreste Plath. The evaluation consisted of analysing five major components of QoL, including human, socio-cultural, natural, physical and economic facts.

In physical terms, habitation of the new complex has led to the informal appropriation of common spaces, which is a widespread response in Chilean public housing interventions. Because the housing programme rarely responds effectively to the needs, household composition and everyday activities of families, it does not recognise the progressive dynamic of the housing process and the way urban dwellers appropriate space. Most ground floor apartments have been extended and there are appropriations and enclosures on the staircases which are used as bedrooms, kitchens, laundry rooms and drying areas,
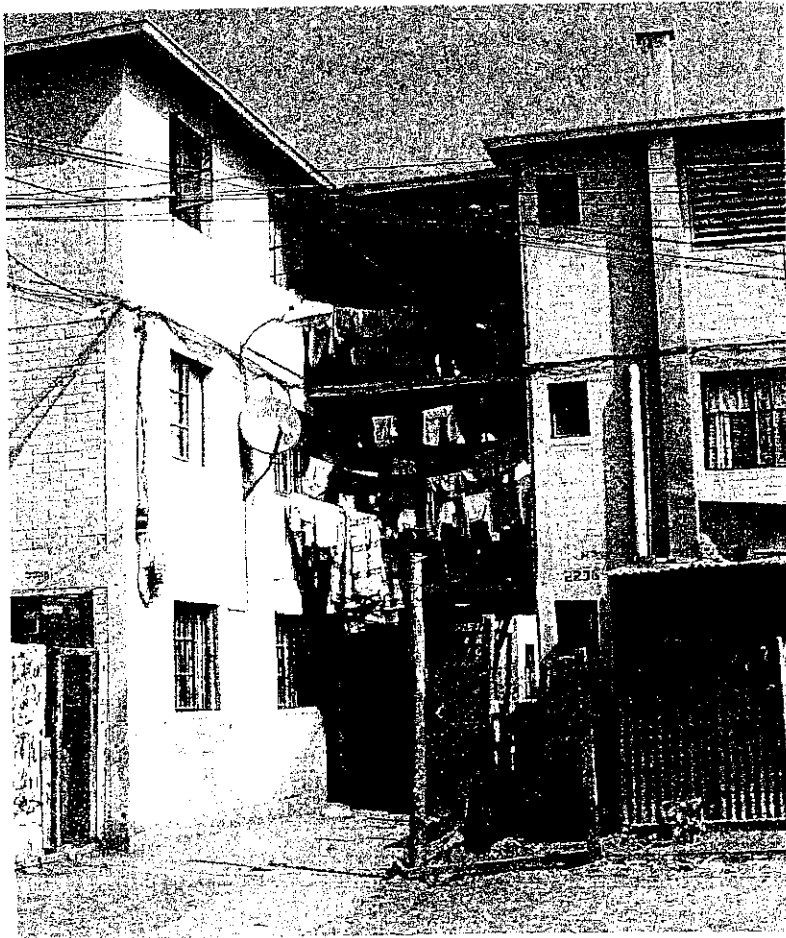

Figure 5.3 Oreste Plath: Appropriation of Staircase Space

storage space or as gardens. These inevitable extensions, which were not contemplated in the original design, are constructed without technical advice and constitute a danger in terms of possible collapse, blockage of circulation routes and, due to the reduction of visibility, an identified security issue.

The estate was provided with a community hall, a childcare centre and municipal schools nearby. The complex lacks public sports facilities and, though green areas exist around the complex, their peripheral location discourages the community from using them on a regular basis. Moreover, a lack of communal and local services can be observed, including health (medical assistance or hospitals) and security. The spatial configuration of the complex does not make it easy to live there, as its morphology does not contribute to social interaction. The architectural typology does not have any formal relation with the site, and residual spaces with little illumination become unsafe, along with the empty areas which are not looked after by the residents.
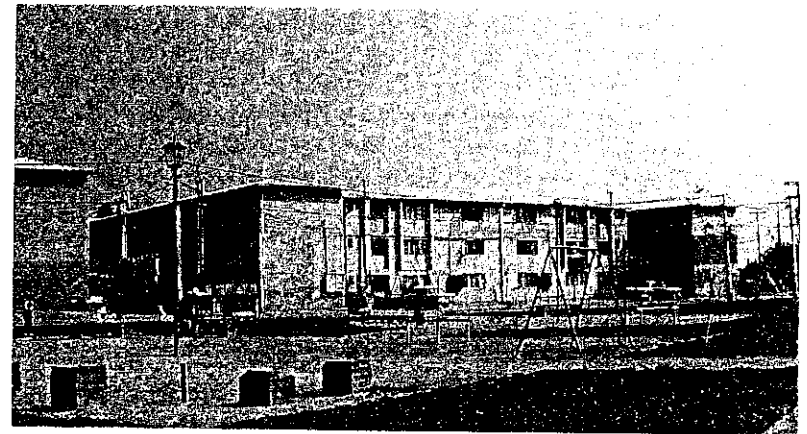
Figure 5.4 Oreste Plath: Unused Green Areas

The poverty of the inhabitants can be seen as a major issue in this community which, although more stable, still remains vulnerable. About 65 per cent of the population is below the poverty line and there are high levels of unemployment. Credit capacity is low due to the informality of employment and, because most dwellers have outstanding debts due to the precariousness of their income, the possibility of saving is also minimal. Compared to how they lived before, in economic terms they

feel worse off, particularly because of the increase in debt incurred by mortgages and basic services, which they did not have before. In terms of employment, their informal income from rubbish collection is no longer available, yet formal jobs have not been secured for the majority. Their economic situation requires many of them to seek help from the state, which promotes their dependency on welfare, with a high percentage receiving subsidies from the municipality in terms of food, water, electricity, healthcare and so on.

According to the residents, this vulnerability is complemented by the stigmatisation of the community due to crime, drug use, alcoholism and high rates of school dropout and teenage pregnancy in the neighbourhood. This situation affects citizen safety and raises concerns about the future of local children. The deteriorated environment strongly impacts on the perception of quality of life, even if people are not directly attacked (robbed, insulted or threatened). Women, for example, fear that their children will start taking drugs. Because of this, residents feel that they live in a 'dangerous neighbourhood'.[5] There is a sense of low social control of public spaces, all of which create opportunities for living in anonymity, gangs, fights, alcoholism, drug consumption and trafficking on the streets – a situation that was not found in the informal settlement where higher levels of solidarity and social cohesion existed.

The community also has had little involvement in any of the decision-making processes, from the original diagnosis prior to leaving the settlement through to the solutions provided. Hence, they feel low levels of empowerment and participation while, at the same time, they have high levels of expectation raised by the promise of future employment and educational training. Local inhabitants mention a negative change in the level of involvement as people are no longer committed to improving their habitat collectively as they did before. On the contrary, there seems to be an individualistic approach to community living, as if looking after each other were no longer necessary.

This situation generates speculation as to whether life in the previous settlement was better than in the current one. Most of those interviewed mentioned wanting to return to the informal settlement at Parcela 30. Although the assessment of housing satisfaction is, in most cases, positive, particularly in terms of ownership, it decreases as new issues arise over time: for example, people with whom they had no previous contact keep arriving from other settlements, an issue that generates tension and social dispersion. The inhabitants of Parcela 30 feel discriminated against by the non-Chile Barrio residents who have closed themselves off behind fences to avoid interaction with the new arrivals. Although the difficulties related

to moving from an informal to a more formal settlement are recognised by the programme, its implementation was not made easier by the fact that the transition to Oreste Plath did not include any prior mediation or social discussion between the two groups moving in. Although it was ensured that those coming from the *campamento* would live in proximity to each other as a way of maintaining social ties, the division has also made the poor section of the estate highly segregated, stigmatised and rejected by the other group. Moreover, new expenses also arise and, with them, more debts. All this has a direct impact on the inhabitants' desire to leave the newly built complex, complemented by a poor image that makes them ashamed of living there.

The problems presented raise questions regarding how the Chilean housing process has failed to incorporate lessons learned from previous experiences or from international projects. It seems that there has been no change since Turner's writings on housing (Turner and Fichter 1972; Turner 1976), where local control in the housing process is seen as an essential condition for its success, which is measured in terms of residential satisfaction. This control does not necessarily mean self-building, but involvement in how and what processes take place with whom. From the start of this programme little consultation took place. Hence, it is not surprising that involvement or participation was also minimal and this, in turn, created little possibility for control in the decision-making process. The long-term results of this are evident in the absence of a sense of ownership and attachment to place as well as in the levels of overall dissatisfaction.

Moreover it is also surprising that, almost forty years since the debate started, the Chilean government has implemented exactly the opposite of what was being suggested at the time: large investment in housing as opposed to large investment in infrastructure and basic services. It is precisely in this respect that many of the flaws were found in the Chile Barrio programme: the removal of inadequate housing and the relocation to major housing complexes while neglecting the infrastructure and services originally lacking.

Understanding QoL in terms of its multiple dimensions helps us to understand the problems of the programme and provide recommendations for the future, not only for Chile Barrio but also for other programmes that are currently being implemented. This means that informal settlements cannot be formalised by cleaning or clearing away material poverty, particularly when the informal settlements carry with them poverty issues that are not easy to overcome, including social stigmatisation, limited opportunities for social mobility, weak social

capital and intergenerational poverty. Furthermore, very seldom are the positive aspects of living in an informal settlement highlighted by formal housing interventions, including their previous strategies. Most traces of previous lives are erased, leaving the inhabitants without a history and the expectation that they will start their new lives from scratch. Achieving lasting change and real improvements in terms of quality of life involves time, and often time does not coincide with the framing of social policies. Lasting changes also require local control, and the way the Chilean system operates provides little room for this, from the administrative complexity down to a lack of trust in the ability of local residents to take control effectively.

Conclusion

The evolution of informal settlements in Chile is a complex issue that contains multiple dimensions. The country has striven to improve the living conditions of all its citizens, but the efforts that have been made do not respond adequately to the challenge (considering the degree of economic development of the country). Although interventions have lessened in terms of violent relocations, uprooting practices continue to create problems for informal settlements. Beneficiaries are often dissatisfied. Explaining that they feel like second-class citizens, many would like to return to where they used to live. It is understood that some of these original settlements cannot remain in their existing locations due to dangerous geographical conditions, but the relocation projects fail to recognise that the problem is not merely one of housing and that there are many positive aspects to the lives of dwellers in informal settlements.

The state response, though innovative and displaying an awareness of the complexity of poverty, does not translate adequately into practice. Chile Barrio did not offer an optimal solution since the programme's social components lagged behind due to implementation problems and institutional difficulties.

Despite the failures of the Chile Barrio programme, there have been some improvements in the way the state treats informal settlements and the poor. There have been a few land invasions over the past few years which, after careful negotiation with the authorities and the private sector, have resulted in participants securing the benefit of remaining close to sources of employment in areas where they have lived all their lives, as well as state support to stay. These cases have been few, very politicised and thoroughly documented.

There have also been evaluations and studies that suggest improvement in some areas, such as the promotion of participation (Siclari 2003), the reduction of the standardisation of solutions, and responses which act more on a case by case basis. Other advances include improvement in the social aspects of the programme which have proved to be the hardest to tackle and have largely remained unsolved; improved coordination among the different public institutions implementing social policies; the training of staff working in the programme, particularly in diagnosis, mediation and monitoring; enlargement of the scale of intervention from the neighbourhood to the city; and finally provision of an overall evaluation of the programme (Saborido 2005).

Chile Barrio's ideals of a territorialised, multi-sectoral, decentralised and participative approach seemed ideal for integral interventions aimed at improving urban quality of life; however, they clashed with the centralised and sectorial logic of Chilean public policy. This implies that in Chile the problem is far from resolved. Future trends are hard to anticipate, as the living conditions of those living informally, though precariously in physical terms, seem to provide higher levels of satisfaction than those whose living conditions have been formalised. There is a need to change the way housing is understood, moving from the attempt to formalise the informal in physical terms to the attempt to understand how people live on a daily basis and what improving the quality of life really means to inhabitants of informal settlements and urban dwellers in general. The social, cultural, environmental and legal aspects of daily living seem to be as important as the physical aspects. Therefore it is vital to increase our understanding of the everyday lives of urban dwellers.

Furthermore, if there is to be a shift away from paternalistic state interventions that have negative effects on the lives of informal dwellers, then there needs to be a shift in the way social policies are formulated, implemented, administered, monitored and evaluated, particularly if the aim is to improve dwellers' quality of life and not just their housing situation. Many blueprints regarding the aims and objectives of programmes and projects have little in common with their translation into practice. This seems to be a recurrent feature in Chilean housing programmes: the lessons from previous interventions do not seem to feed back into current projects. Although there are some major successes in the Chilean experience, more needs to be learned about how to give urban dwellers control over their housing.

Notes

1. In 1952 there were 75,000 people living in *callampas* (6.25 per cent) in Santiago; by 1966 there were 201,217 (8.05 per cent); in 1970 there were 346,380 (13.4 per cent); while by 1973, there were around 500,000 or 18 per cent of the city's population, living in this type of settlement (de Ramón 1990).
2. A national programme implemented by the Ministry of Housing to improve 200 neighbourhoods.
3. The 'Comparative Study of Quality of Life, Gender and Environment Triad' was a FONDECYT Research Project (No. 1000414). For further information, see: www.calidaddevida.uchile.cl
4. Named after a Chilean folklore researcher.
5. The estate is known as 'Choreste Plath', from the Chilean slang *choreado/a* which is commonly understood as 'angry' or 'enraged'. In that sense, *choreste* denotes the dangerous reputation of the area.

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