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Resettling, re-enabling: the challenge of reconstructing a human habitat

Anne-Catherine Chardon

During the last few decades Latin America has been one of the most affected and most studied regions as regards urban vulnerability to natural phenomena. Studies have been produced to better analyse, understand and intervene in not only the physical threats but also the vulnerability that generates fragility and instability in urban settlements. The aim has been to mitigate risks and build resilient human habitats. Indeed, the vulnerable city is primarily a habitat, when this is considered in its broader meaning, and needs to be dealt with using holistic and cross-cutting approaches. This is required in order to deal with the problem as a whole and to intervene in all its shortcomings and weaknesses, taking advantage of the strengths that characterise a community and its environment.

In the Colombian Andes region, urban areas are subject to high seismicity, mudslides and mass movements. The latter are the more frequent and significant, leading to the greatest amount of accumulated losses. These are in good part borne by the inhabitants of such settlements themselves. In today's context where things may get worse, as an effect of climate change, one of the measures to reduce risk in a preventive way or to respond to the situation of affected households is population resettlement. This is enacted in different ways. Many attempts are unsuccessful. In the present chapter, following some conceptual reflections, various cases of resettlement in Manizales, Colombia, developed since the mid-1980s, will be discussed.

Vulnerable habitats: a needed reflection

When analysing mitigation policies for natural hazards in Latin American urban areas, significant orientation and intervention failings can be found. Policies have been directed almost exclusively towards the physical-natural or physical-spatial fields, leaving aside fundamental factors relating to social, cultural, economic and financial vulnerability.

Vulnerability, a complex concept

In a resettlement context, it is important to consider the vulnerable object as a habitat. Habitat is proposed as an ‘articulating’ concept used to address the proposed theme of resettlement. Indeed, when we talk about the vulnerability of a community and resettlement as a possible solution, what is really at stake is the multidimensional habitat built by this community. Therefore, the resettlement process cannot be limited only to the group of persons involved. It needs to contemplate the resettlement of the habitat in its totality.

Inhabit, habitat, habits

Logically, the habitat should allow for the notion of ‘inhabitation’, the complex expression of being and remaining on the land. This is the central topic covered in the present chapter.

The act of inhabiting goes far beyond using and occupying a space, since the dynamic process of inhabiting derives from the confluence of different worlds: the natural, social, economic, cultural, emotional and physical-spatial. In ‘dwelling’, the human being materialises the building of place, territory and a life system, in order not only to relate to and own something but also to belong to, develop roots and grow. Inhabiting is multidimensional, because the settler establishes connections with all the elements of their environment, by using and transforming them. Buchot (2012) also indicates that to inhabit means to be mobile: that is to say, to be able to move physically and mentally in time, space and towards others. Such an understanding means that to inhabit is, in fact, a process marked by an evolution and individual or community transformations in different directions.

This singularity in the ways of living, coexisting and relating to the environment leads to the concept of human habitat, that is to say, the object or space that is inhabited. Different to the use of the term in the environmental field, the concept of human habitat has increasingly evolved considering the leading role of the settlers themselves. This allows us to speak of human territory and territoriality, which refers to the dynamic acts of appropriation, transformation, 'culturisation' and 'anthropomorphisation' of space. This signifies a territory, a space with actors, owners, defenders and mourners with a sense of belonging and where they are recognised because they participate in its construction and development.

These reflections and definitions are fundamental since in the process of resettlement, actions of territorialisation, the expression of culture and identity, must be allowed in order to prevent traumas. This must also be applied to the habitat which is left behind, the original habitat.

For the reasons argued above, habitat does not exist on its own, but rather, is built around the life space of human beings, around their possessions, and is characterised by an exclusively anthropomorphic dimension (González-Escobar 2002). Of course, when we introduce the concept of belonging, one approximates the notion of housing. This tends to be seen as a container for material goods and intangibles, without completely implying that habitat is limited to the living space of a house. However, the house is a principal component of habitat. It is important here to recognise that it is not limited to the space between the walls (the house), but also includes the space from the walls outward, the proximate environment, generally of public use, and necessary for acceptable daily life (Hurtado Isaza and Chardon 2012).

In praxis, it can be asserted that the institutional vision of habitat cannot be limited to the house, the form. It is important to be able to inhabit, that is, to choose to live in the place and out of the place, beyond its structure. Policies should allow for the design of productive housing models and habitats should provide acceptable living conditions, achieving, among other things, economic sustainability.

Elsewhere (Chardon 2010, 30) I have considered the urban habitat to be 'a bio-physical-eco-space-system. A system whose components are the urban space itself, its inhabitants (characterised by a context, social, economic and cultural processes, routes and means of communication), the natural, physical-spatial environment, the political and institutional context and the relationships that link these elements'. Also, habitat is the expression of the dynamics, nexus and networks human beings establish with their environment (Ramírez Hernández 2014). This means

occupying a meaningful territory where, beyond the notion of being in a physical sense, one can 'be'. This recognises that habitat is loaded with a strong dose of subjectivity, the product of affection, perception, dreams, yearnings and symbols. It is an intimate social way of representing territory, of appropriating it. This multidimensional view of habitat allows us to understand that at the moment resettlement processes are promoted, the focus of the action needs to be comprehensive.

Resettlement: a challenge

In practice, as we will demonstrate with case study analysis, the concept of resettlement, seen first as a mitigation of hazard exposure, is often developed and implemented with little consideration of aspects that go beyond such mitigation. This has implications that require careful analysis. As Lavell explains in Chapter 1, the term resettlement is often confused in common institutional languages with concepts such as relocation, which, if considered closely, refers to a different situation, even if both terms are motivated by changes in the life of the inhabitants, especially in spatial terms (see Lavell's chapter in this book for arguments that support the critical notions developed here and below).

In order to consider human resettlement, it is important to reflect on the meaning of the verb 'to settle'. This refers to the act of establishment at a site, but with a particular connotation of security, decisiveness, permanence and durability over time. This permanence means settling is not sudden but rather the result of a process, spatial or physical, as well as social, cultural, political and economic. Settling derives from identity. It corresponds to the establishment of a place, of a community and finally of a habitat with a sense of roots. The term 'locate', and its derived term, relocation, is not associated with durability and a sense of belonging. Rather, it supposes the act of putting in a place, but not in an intentional or definitive way. As to the concept of resettlement, there are approaches guided by the 'simple' search for security of life and property (Duque-Botero 2006). This is a view many local authorities hold.

Resettlement programs should signify habitat recreation. This cannot, of course, be achieved without some unpleasant experiences. If it is not carried out with a multisector approach, there is a risk that one type of marginality is transformed into another type at the new site, due to poor management by the authorities.

A conceptualisation of resettlement inspired by my earlier article (Chardon 2010) is proposed for the analysis in this chapter. This concept

suggests that resettlement is the construction of a new territory or real habitat, framed within a policy for city reorganisation. This is seen to be the only valid option since it demonstrates a systemic view of the situation. Effectively, the resettlement process is primarily human and, through changes and transformations in multiple aspects, the process should lead to optimal individual and collective habitat conditions, sustained over time. Its purpose is at least to restore and at best to achieve a general improvement in the daily lives, the environment and the quality of life of the targeted population. Initially, one has to think about the physical context, looking for safe spatial conditions. But implementation also has to be carried out in structural and non-structural areas, internal or external to the community, i.e. in social, cultural, economic, financial and physical-spatial aspects. Here, community participation in sustainable development is fundamental.

Resettling populations signifies building for them and with them (through community participation and reflection, planning, design and execution) a new living space in order that they feel they have a *life territory* – that is to say, a comfortable, friendly space, where this is recognised and felt, where the inhabitant has appropriated place, is rooted in it and has become a recognised, legitimate actor.

Resettlement projects have to respond in a holistic and definitive way to complex individual and collective situations, and therefore have to go far beyond the simple search for a safe roof. The processes involve a high social, economic, cultural and political cost as well as important physical-territorial impacts both in the home habitat and in the destination area. Due to this it is important to operate in such a way that the result is the observance of a continuous development of the resettled community.

Resettlement: reality may be far from the theory

In Colombia, resettlement is a risk mitigation option used in situations where it is deemed impossible to provide in situ vulnerability reduction due to the high hazard-proneness of place. Because of this the settler can opt for a social housing program providing housing in safe sectors or choose to buy a used home. The Colombian state does not currently have specific regulations to formulate and implement resettlement plans. Such plans are considered to be similar to simple projects for housing of social or priority interest ('VIS' and 'VIP', in Spanish).

Through a comparative analysis of three resettlement processes developed in Manizales in the last 20 years, we will observe the distance between theory and imposed practice.

Resettlement praxis in Manizales: from one habitat to another

Manizales is an intermediate-sized Andean city (380,000 inhabitants). It is located in an area of very rugged topography, with lowly compacted volcanic soils and high levels of seismicity. The area is characterised by a bimodal equatorial mountain climate (between 2,500 and 3,000 mm of rain per year, of torrential characteristics and with strong erosive power). This situation partially explains the frequent occurrence of erosive processes in the city and constant mass movements of large destructive power. In this context, the municipality proposes solutions for the mitigation of vulnerability through resettlement processes. These consist in the acquisition of new or 'used' housing by the vulnerable community members, in a supposedly safe place when seen from the physical-natural angle. The primary objective is to effectively protect the population's life and goods. The projects are mostly designed as VIP projects (maximum value of 70 monthly minimum wages, equalling US\$17,300 as of March 2017) or less frequently as VIS (maximum value of 135 monthly minimum wages). According to income levels, the beneficiaries can receive a subsidy from the state of up to 22 monthly minimum wages and 14 monthly minimum wages from the municipality. The remaining amount is financed through the banking system.

Before commenting on different modalities of resettlement, it is important to briefly present the initial living conditions of the settlers in order to apprehend the situation.

The habitat of origin

In Manizales, the population subject to resettlement processes lived previously on very steep slopes near the city centre (see Figure 2.1). The families, generally numerous (more than six members), with low and irregular incomes, lived in precarious dwellings, seen in terms of materials and construction systems, and suffered very low hygiene and health conditions. The built area often did not meet optimum needs. However, the space people occupied was much larger than that later given to them as a supposed solution to their vulnerability. The residents occupied the site as owners, as de facto owners or by paying a moderate rent. The physical and



Figure 2.1 San José district, on the northern hillside of the city. Self-built bamboo housing forms organic neighbourhoods where a united urban community with a partly rural way of life has developed. © A.C. Chardon.

spatial environment was characterised by an organic morphology where, despite the evident overcrowding, there were green areas, generally cultivated, and people walked to and from their homes. There was access to all required urban services and piracy of public services was very common. Extended nuclear families lived in the same neighbourhood or the same house, thus increasing family interrelationships. Neighbourhood relations encouraged solidarity in the human environment.

The prior living conditions of settlers help us understand why becoming a homeowner in a safe place is a very attractive proposal, without settlers really worrying about the multidimensional conditions of the process. Three resettlement projects are discussed below. The programs were developed in different modalities and at various times. By considering three cases, we may analyse benefits and reprehensible aspects, from an integrated vision of habitat.

Destination habitats

The three projects respond to local and national conditions and policies: Yarumales (1995), Altos de Santa Ana (2005) and Bosques de Bengala (2013).

Yarumales (see Figure 2.2) was holistically designed and could be described as a visionary, integrated model to follow. In 1993 and over a two-year period, the local government's Popular Housing Fund along with El Minuto de Dios, a local organisation, carried out a resettlement project for 36 families that previously lived in very different vulnerable parts of the city. The project consisted not only in relocating the settlers but also in constructing a sustainable socio-economic-cultural community, aspects that were developed in workshops organised with the mandatory participation of all family members. Also, it was important to build *community* with future neighbours, given that each actor was seen as someone committed to and responsible for the project. Among other activities, training in the fields of dressmaking, shoemaking and baking were offered, so that families could earn the necessary income for their support and to pay for the new house. A building was equipped in the neighbourhood with the necessary machinery for the development of these trades so that the newly qualified people could work there. Families had to be able to sustain themselves and their new life project in the short, medium and long terms. In addition, households, as a way of



Figure 2.2 Yarumales, an integrated resettlement programme built according to the modality of the individual house, in a consolidated neighbourhood with all services and equipment. © A.C. Chardon.

participating in the project and reducing costs of acquiring housing, had to contribute 700 hours of work on the site.

In effect, the project was not subsidised. Families had to fully finance the acquisition of their new homes, including the initial deposit and a credit in the bank. This was essential. Full participation, especially financial, was deemed essential if the project was to work. This generates a sense of belonging and respect for the project, and allows it to be appreciated in all its dimensions. In resettlement programs (as with housing programs), paternalism and clientelism distort the objectives of programs. That is to say, it is an opportunity for participatory development and not a gift or a bargaining block between different interest groups.

As regards the physical-natural and physical-spatial dimensions, the project also sought to improve the quality of life of the settlers and it considered them worthy of a dignified and pleasant life. The lot was located near a main road in an already consolidated traditional sector of the city that had access to all needed urban services and equipment. From the urbanistic point of view, the public areas were composed of front yards, walkways, a small playground, a sports court and parking, all of which are currently in excellent condition. This is proof of the sense of belonging in the community.

Finally, the architectural design of the project was undertaken by a group of students and professors from the School of Architecture and Urbanism at the National University of Colombia in Manizales. Design provided for areas of around 55 m² distributed on two levels and with a back yard. In 1995, the families moved to Yarumales and after more than 20 years, we can observe that only 30 per cent of the buildings have undergone remodelling or enlargement, which shows that the dwellers have felt at ease with the initial project.

Overall, the project was conceived of in integrated terms. Vulnerability was not only seen to be due to physical factors but also to the negative social, cultural and economic context at a family and community level. Intervention using a correct vision of habitat was needed in order to favour development among the families. The project has been sustainable ever since, in all its dimensions. To date, in Manizales, the Yarumales project is unique (in part, possibly because of the limited number of resettled households). During the twenty-first century, processes have unfortunately been promoted that have a very limited and erroneous vision and approach to the concept of human habitat.

The Santa Ana resettlement project (finished in 2005) was developed by the municipality for the benefit of families affected by the night of 18 March 2003, when in three hours 144 mm of rain fell, causing 82

large landslides in several unstable sectors of the city. Deciding on and executing the project took a little more than two years. This is a short period when compared to the range of tasks that had to be undertaken, including financing, finding and purchasing adequate land (given the low income levels of the recipient population), tendering and building. No social dimension was considered and the project was run like any social housing project, with the right to a 50 per cent financial subsidy from the state and municipality. This obliged the families to obtain a loan to pay the other 50 per cent of building costs. Although it is important that the recipient population assume some financial responsibility for their homes, the lack of employment and income-generating training options led to immense difficulties as regards paying for bank loans and public utility services. This led on many occasions to owners selling or renting their homes against the rules of the game, and returning to less costly areas, which are often unstable, insecure and dangerous in general. Homes have also been sold off by the bank to recover unpaid loans. Such results completely eliminate the objectives of a resettlement program.

The Santa Ana housing development is located on peripheral forest lands and consists of 11 blocks that group 392 houses, each with an area of 29m², on 35m² lots. Families moved to live there in October 2005. Urban development is oriented in the direction of the slope, with roads and laddered buildings and difficult access to public spaces, which also lack services (see Figure 2.3).

Architecturally, each house of 29 m² is distributed between a social space, a bedroom, a patio and a bathroom, which a family group, always numerous, 'enjoys'. Critical overcrowding does not allow the separation of social, private and intimate areas. Curtains are used to separate spaces. Social or service space is private, and decks or terraces become a place where children play, clothes are dried, vegetables are grown or domestic animals are kept, thus revealing the rural customs of the settlers. The lack of space, as in many similar situations, forces the occupation of public spaces. This is the case of the use given to front yards.

In this type of settlement, it is very common to observe that the living space is also a source of income. Lack of training and of formal employment opportunities means that people create their own employment opportunities that allow, among other things, them to cover the financial responsibilities entailed in purchasing the house (payment of loans, public services, transport etc.).

As Torres-Tovar and Robles-Joya (2014) underline, in the processes of resettlement, the economic aspects are rarely considered. They are assumed to be already solved. This is how, in the same 29m², in addition



Figure 2.3 The basic deliverable unit in Altos de Santa Ana. The terrace allows for a doubling of the available area. © A.C. Chardon.

to the confusion and overlap of domestic uses, small-scale commercial activities such as a shop, a stall or a hairdresser are developed. Limited habitability is not restricted to the built area as such, but also applies as regards light (a single span), acoustics (a thin wall is shared with the neighbouring house), ventilation and humidity (the deck-terrace generates water filtration). Because they were not taken into account during the design process, families had to expand or transform their home to take economic advantage of it, demonstrating that the desire is to have a home as opposed to a house. And soon after occupation, second and third storeys, windows, balconies and personalised colours appear, and the patio gets covered. These modifications are not always undertaken using adequate building standards, thus endangering the structure and its habitants.

The peripheral location of the project requires public transport in order to be able to connect to the rest of the city, mainly the centre. This situation generates an additional expense for families who used to live previously in very central areas. Moreover, the absence of social actors, the high unemployment rate among young people and the reduced living spaces and service provision lead to conditions that foment delinquency. Since the keys to houses were handed over in 2005, local authorities have

had no further contact with settlers and no official process of follow-up has occurred.

The Bosques de Bengala urban development project is one of the housing schemes totalling one hundred thousand houses to be built as part of the free-of-charge home policy the Colombian government launched in 2012, mainly for families displaced by armed conflict and by disasters. In Manizales, a total of 1,420 housing units will be built, all using the multifamily mode. This program is an unfortunate example of where by receiving a new house a family has its immediate physical needs satisfied but little consciousness exists as to the fact that the what, the where and the how of things are highly significant social variables.

By the end of 2013, 240 families had 'benefited' from the project. It consists of six blocks of five storeys with eight fully subsidised apartments each. Additionally, the housing complex is provided with a court, green areas, playgrounds and parking (see Figure 2.4). Families came from rural areas, fleeing armed conflict. They were employed mostly in agricultural pursuits. A move to the city created a complete change in work environments, with no support given in this context of forced urban adaptation and acculturation.

While the new living conditions allow some degree of stability and access to basic services which the inhabitants did not have as displaced or affected persons, the smallness of apartments (scarcely 42 m², with three rooms but no opportunity for enlargement as in the case of Santa Ana), the non-resolution of their economic situation and the new rules of coexistence considerably affect their daily lives. The hallways become an extension of the apartments, to dry clothes and store bicycles. People also linger on the outside railings as if it was their balcony because inside, not everything fits. In the same way, the apartment becomes an economic unit and the windows of the apartment that border with the outside corridor are turned into windows to serve the customers of the businesses that many families set up. Some of these use hazardous equipment such as industrial bakery ovens! Thus, as in Santa Ana, shops, bakeries, manicure salons and hairdressing salons are opened, with their own advertisements on the facades. In the parking lot, *arepas* (a typical Colombian food) are also made and sold at certain times of the day.

Even though the houses were given away by the state (a policy that also generated employment in the construction sector), families find it difficult to pay public services, or costs of the administration of the complex, and other essential daily obligations. Due to this, housing has to become productive, even if it was not designed for this, and the situation



Figure 2.4 Bosques de Bengala, 40 apartments per block. Appropriation of the exterior corridors. © A.C. Chardon.

often leads to conflicts. What seems to be inexpensive as a solution turns out to be expensive. Owners can neither rent nor sell for 10 years according to the rules. But the lack of economic solvency has led to many selling their apartment or renting them out. Severe economic difficulties are recurrent in these projects, as they almost inevitably generate an increase in household expenses.

The first stage of the San Sebastián de Betania project (close to Bosques de Bengala and where the construction of almost all the free housing of the city is carried out) was in part subsidised. More than 80 per cent of households have not been able to keep up with their debts or pay for public services. This has led to a crisis that has required much negotiation, a search for sponsors to pay off the debts, the suspension of services (with illegal connection then being made to neighbours' services), and even auction of goods (Toro 2014; Arango-Arango 2015). Resettlement, when legally constituted, has a cost and generates new expenses, which not all families can assume. It requires the development of educational policies, training opportunities and the creation of employment to enable income generation at the household level. But such policies are not put into action.

Numerous problems of coexistence exist in the housing projects, even leading to homicide. These are caused by the lack of respect and tolerance of some residents towards their neighbours. They are also possibly, in part, the responsibility of the architectural and urban design (Sánchez 2014). The narrowness of place leads to forced existence under high-density conditions. Guayacundo-Chaves (2015) points out that the problem is recurrent in this modality of multifamily units. It is obvious that a process of resettlement, as well as urban renewal, cannot be successful and contribute to the quality of life of the settlers, without taking into account socio-economic and cultural conditions and their implications for the development and management of projects at the financial, socio-cultural, architectural and urbanistic level. A project must be, to some degree, personalised with regard to the community to be resettled and, of course, designed to offer an integrated, comfortable life context, i.e. as a habitat.

Conclusion

In light of the examples analysed above, evidence exists that resettlement praxis is still far from the theory that the author considers valid. This situation is largely due to an incomplete institutional vision of the conditions required for the acceptable development of a vulnerable population. This view seems to assume that quality of life is merely having a safe roof over one's head and few qualitative factors are taken into account. The 'house' as an object also appears in the foreground of the families' imaginary. But they later become aware that other social, economic, cultural and urban requirements must be satisfied. In effect, it is important to mention

the large-scale, very detailed survey I developed (Chardon 2010) among families resettled in Manizales, which showed how families accept the housing programs because they allow them to abandon a risk zone and become low-cost owners. At first, they consider that their new situation offers new opportunities. But then their vision usually changes, and they feel nostalgic about their original habitat. This occurs when they realise that at both the housing level and with regard to the quality of life in general, the project does not satisfy their needs and expectations. Over time, they become resigned to their situation and accommodate to it. So, in most respects, people exist more in line with the habits and needs that existed before the transfer. This scenario generally leads to them adapting to their new place of 'life' and gradually trying to build a sustainable, manageable habitat.

The Yarumales project demonstrated that comprehensive and transdisciplinary management – including participation (financial as well), training and integration into the labour market and the dynamics of the city – propitiates a process of successful resettlement. This has allowed people to 're-inhabit', while facing all aspects of vulnerability, articulating the interests of the various actors and allowing a real dialectic between the different levels of intervention (housing unit, neighbourhood, city), thus achieving the construction of a habitable city, from the perspective of the city and the polis.

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