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Technologies for Sustainable Development, A Way to Reduce Poverty?

Workshop Human Settlement
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New Vernacular Architecture as Appropriate Strategy for Housing the Poor

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How do we develop an "Appropriate Technology" [in housing]?
Focus on inhabitant-dwelling / user-building interaction.
Make use of autonomy.
Observe and respect the autonomy-heteronomy boundary.
Demand-oriented approach, unlike supply-driven.
Build on existing structures, networks

How could research take into account the social and beneficiaries needs?
Reverse the direction of participation: beneficiary is no longer the outsider.
Researchers participate in the lives of beneficiaries.
Tap into beneficiaries' own networks.
Development is a generating, unfolding process unlike fabrication.
Distinguish *vernacular* from *commodity*.

How do we assure participation of stakeholders?
Reverse the direction of participation: stakeholder is no longer the outsider.
Start with the beneficiary.
Take a demand-driven approach, solution is secondary.
Tap into the beneficiaries' own initiative.
Continue on existing structures, systems, and networks.

How can research be adapted to contexts?
Observe and respect the autonomy-heteronomy boundary.
Who has authority to change?
Prioritize effectiveness over efficiency.
Know formality from informality.

When your tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.
(Anonymous)

When your tool is industrial production, even housing looks industrially producible.
Inhabitant-excluding development.

Site-and-Services: User-driven development.

Introduction and Purpose
Improving living conditions of the poor often involves a drastic change in lifestyle, in order to fit daily life into industrially produced dwellings. Slum rehabilitation programs replacing informal settlements with standardized mass housing, have often resulted in a socio-cultural mismatch of inhabitants and the built environment. Participation strategies meant to counter this problem, show little effect unless the user is in charge. What is the problem with development and participation?

Design and Methods
This session will discuss 'housing the poor' as a case to illustrate how industrialization and systemization are at odds with participation. We will consider two ways of producing housing: industrial mass housing, and informal settlement. The focus is on the connectedness of the user, the inhabitant, with his dwelling.

Results
It will lead to the observation that participation aims at meeting the diversity that is natural to human beings, whereas systemization requires and produces the opposite: humanly inadequate uniformity. Moreover, the term *user-participation* implicitly states the user is an outsider participating in the developer's projects, which after all are dominated by the interests of the construction industry. The gap between the user's informal economy and the developer's capitalized economy makes many housing-the-poor projects eventually non-appropriate.

A billion people live in informal settlement and appear to be able to create reasonable shelter. Their way of dealing with housing shortage deserves recognition as it shows that housing improvement by users themselves is often more effective than top-down imposed replacement. Low-intervention approaches, such as *site-and-services*, have shown the value of user-driven development.

Conclusions
Systemization being the main development tool in the West may be the hammer that makes everything look like a nail. Participation is thought of as affording systemization, whereas the user has no direct interest in being systemized. On the contrary, from humanitarian interest, technology and systemization should be no more than servant to people, meaning that experts offer their services as participation in the lives of dwellers, unlike the concept that dwellers are allowed to participate in the processes governed by outsiders.

An Appropriate Technology - approach in housing the poor would benefit from a focus on user-building interaction as it taps directly into people's most powerful resource: creativity. Western systemization is not the only route to improvement. Strategies based on vernacular are at least as effective, appropriate, and humanly sustainable.