



Urban Margins: Examining Socio-Spatial Segregation and Peripheral Development in Usme, Bogotá

S50 Social Housing and Socio-Spatial Segregation: New Challenges in Urban Planning

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Introduction

Latin American cities, particularly Bogotá and Medellín, face acute challenges associated with rapid urban growth, socio-spatial segregation, and peripheral urbanization. These processes have been driven by a combination of economic pressures, land-use policies, and socio-political dynamics that marginalize low-income populations. Among the critical issues is the role of social housing, which, rather than mitigating inequities, has often exacerbated segregation by relegating vulnerable populations to urban fringes with limited infrastructure and services. This extended abstract delves into these dynamics, focusing on Bogotá's locality of Usme as a case study to highlight the interrelations between social housing, socio-spatial segregation, and peripheral development.

Context and Background

The phenomenon of socio-spatial segregation is deeply rooted in the historical patterns of urbanization in Latin America. Bogotá exemplifies the unequal distribution of urban resources, where wealthier populations concentrate in central, well-served areas, while the urban poor are displaced to the city's periphery. The locality of Usme, situated on the southern border of Bogotá, is emblematic of this trend. Originally in a rural area, Usme has undergone a significant transformation due to urban expansion, becoming a site of informal settlements and large-scale social housing projects. These developments highlight the complex interplay between economic imperatives, ecological considerations, and social equity.

The research stems from a need to address the persistent challenges of socio-spatial segregation in cities of the Global South, where the production of social housing is often dictated by market dynamics. High urban land values in central areas force governments and developers to allocate social housing to cheaper peripheral zones. This practice perpetuates spatial inequalities, limiting residents' access to essential services, employment opportunities, and social networks. In Bogotá, these dynamics are exacerbated by a lack of integrated urban planning, which has historically favored market-led solutions over equitable and sustainable development.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyze the relationship between the production of social housing and socio-spatial segregation in Bogotá's periphery.
2. Identify the socio-economic, spatial, and ecological dynamics that characterize peripheral urbanization in Usme.
3. Propose effective criteria for intervening in marginalized urban areas to foster equity and sustainability.
4. Contribute to the academic and policy discourse on urban inequality and housing in the Global South.

Methodology

The research employs a multidimensional and multiscale methodology to capture the complexities of socio-spatial segregation and peripheral urbanization:

- **Macro-Level Analysis:** At the metropolitan scale, the study examines the policies and economic forces shaping social housing production in Bogotá. It investigates the spatial distribution of housing projects, focusing on the factors driving their location in peripheral areas.
- **Meso-Level Analysis:** At the locality level, the research focuses on Usme's transformation from a rural territory to an urbanized periphery. It examines the spatial organization, infrastructure provision, and socio-economic characteristics of the area, highlighting disparities between formal and informal settlements.
- **Micro-Level Analysis:** At the neighborhood scale, the study explores the lived experiences of residents in social housing and informal settlements. Semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations reveal how residents navigate the challenges of peripheral living, including limited access to services and employment.

The methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches, combining spatial analysis with social research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Key Findings

1. Social Housing and Segregation

The study confirms that social housing projects in Bogotá are predominantly located on the city's periphery, driven by the high cost of urban land in central areas. These projects often lack adequate infrastructure, public services, and connectivity to employment hubs. This spatial isolation reinforces socio-spatial segregation, as residents face significant barriers to social and economic integration. In Usme, social housing developments are characterized by small housing units, inadequate public spaces, and poor access to transportation, limiting residents' quality of life.

The social housing market is deeply intertwined with economic and regulatory frameworks. Developers, motivated by profit, prioritize low-cost land, which is typically found in

peripheral areas. While this approach addresses housing deficits quantitatively, it neglects qualitative aspects such as accessibility, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion. Moreover, the limited involvement of local communities in the planning and development process often results in housing solutions that fail to meet their needs. The lack of affordability for low-income families further exacerbates the situation, as many are forced to seek informal housing alternatives.

2. Peripheral Challenges

Usme's peripheral location poses unique challenges, particularly in balancing urban growth with ecological preservation. The area's proximity to Bogotá's ecological structure, including water resources and natural reserves, has led to conflicts between urbanization and environmental conservation. Informal settlements often encroach on ecologically sensitive areas, exacerbating environmental degradation and increasing residents' vulnerability to natural hazards. Moreover, the lack of integrated planning has resulted in fragmented urban development, with stark contrasts between formal housing projects and informal settlements.

Despite significant investments in social housing, peripheral areas like Usme remain underserved in terms of infrastructure and public services. Basic amenities such as healthcare, education, and transportation are often inadequate or inaccessible, limiting residents' ability to improve their socio-economic conditions. This disconnect between housing provision and urban integration underscores the need for a more holistic approach to urban planning that prioritizes the well-being of peripheral communities.

3. Community Resilience and Creativity

Despite systemic marginalization, residents of peripheral areas like Usme demonstrate remarkable resilience and creativity. Informal housing is often self-constructed, allowing residents to adapt their homes to their specific needs over time. Community networks play a crucial role in providing social support and fostering a sense of belonging. The study highlights the importance of recognizing these grassroots efforts as a foundation for more inclusive urban interventions.

Social housing projects, while often limited in scope, have also sparked innovative adaptations by residents. For instance, many households in Usme have modified their housing units to create additional space, accommodate extended family members, or establish small businesses. These adaptations reflect the dynamic and resourceful nature of peripheral communities, which find ways to navigate the constraints imposed by formal housing policies.

Policy and Design Implications

New Challenges in Urban Planning

Urban planning in the Global South faces evolving challenges that require innovative approaches to ensure sustainability and equity. The increasing pace of urbanization, coupled with the effects of climate change and economic disparities, has amplified the urgency for adaptive and inclusive planning strategies. Peripheral areas like Usme highlight these challenges, where fragmented urban development and ecological conflicts necessitate a shift in traditional urban planning paradigms.

One major challenge is addressing the growing spatial inequalities within cities. Urban planning must move beyond land-use efficiency to incorporate principles of social justice and ecological balance. This requires integrating peripheral regions into metropolitan frameworks through multimodal transportation systems, equitable service distribution, and the preservation of natural resources. Furthermore, urban planners must contend with the dual pressures of densification and ecological preservation, ensuring that peripheral housing developments do not encroach on environmentally sensitive areas.

The impact of technological advancements on urban planning also represents a significant challenge. Smart city technologies offer opportunities to improve service delivery and infrastructure efficiency, but their implementation must be inclusive to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities. Peripheral communities, often excluded from technological innovations, require targeted interventions to ensure they benefit from advancements in urban planning and management.

Public Policy Recommendations

The findings underscore the need for a paradigm shift in urban planning and housing policy. Governments and policymakers must prioritize the integration of peripheral areas into the broader urban fabric, ensuring equitable access to services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. Key recommendations include:

1. **Land Use Regulation:** Implement policies to control land speculation and promote the development of affordable housing in central and well-connected areas.
2. **Integrated Urban Planning:** Develop comprehensive plans that balance urban growth with ecological preservation, ensuring that peripheral developments are sustainable and resilient.
3. **Participatory Governance:** Involve residents in the planning and decision-making processes to ensure that housing projects reflect their needs and aspirations.
4. **Climate-Resilient Infrastructure:** Invest in infrastructure that mitigates climate risks, such as flood-resistant drainage systems and green spaces that enhance urban resilience.

Urban Design Strategies

Urban design interventions must address the unique challenges of peripheral areas while leveraging their inherent strengths. Strategies include:

1. **Flexible Housing Design:** Promote adaptable housing solutions that allow residents to modify and expand their homes over time, accommodating changing family needs.
2. **Community Infrastructure:** Invest in public spaces, community facilities, and local economic hubs to foster social cohesion and economic development.
3. **Transportation Connectivity:** Improve public transportation networks to connect peripheral areas with employment centers and other urban amenities.
4. **Green Urban Design:** Incorporate green roofs, urban forests, and renewable energy systems into housing projects to promote sustainability and reduce environmental impacts.

Additionally, public-private partnerships can play a critical role in bridging the gap between housing demand and supply. By incentivizing developers to prioritize quality and sustainability, governments can ensure that social housing projects contribute to long-term urban equity.

The study contributes to the academic discourse on urban inequality and housing in the Global South by providing a detailed analysis of socio-spatial segregation in Bogotá. It highlights the interplay between market dynamics, policy frameworks, and community practices, offering a nuanced understanding of peripheral urbanization. The research's multiscale approach serves as a model for studying similar contexts in other cities, emphasizing the importance of integrating spatial, social, and ecological perspectives.

Conclusion

The dynamics of socio-spatial segregation, social housing, and peripheral urbanization in Bogotá illustrate the broader challenges facing cities in the Global South. While social housing aims to address housing deficits, its location on urban fringes often perpetuates inequality and exclusion. The case of Usme underscores the need for holistic approaches to urban planning and housing policy that prioritize equity, sustainability, and inclusivity. By recognizing the resilience and creativity of peripheral communities, policymakers and urban designers can develop interventions that empower residents and foster more just and sustainable urban environments. This research provides a foundation for such efforts, offering insights and methodologies that can inform practice and policy in Bogotá and beyond.

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