



Does the Quality of Social Housing Matter?

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

Abstract

Social housing in Colombia has historically been defined as a housing solution aimed at low-income sectors of the population. It is also the type of housing with the highest demand in the country, reaching annual figures of 47% of total housing sales, according to the Technical Bulletin of the National Statistics Department (DANE) of 2023. According to Decree 949 of 2022, the maximum value of these homes is 135 current legal monthly minimum wages, i.e. 43.645 US dollars in 2025, except for urban agglomerations with more than one million inhabitants, where a price of up to 150 current legal monthly minimum wages, i.e. 48.500 US dollars, due to the higher land value in these urban centers. Despite of those prices, social housing tends to be seen as an housing alternative that is below market price and that aims to give access to housing to people who otherwise could not access this asset (de Soto, 2019).

The area of social housing in the country has shown a decrease over the years; it has gone from a minimum area of 80 square meters in 1980, to 60 square meters by 1993, and to 45 square meters by 2004 (Orozco, 2018). This does not directly speak of a decrease in quality, but of an increasingly limited size and a constant increase in density, as it is expected to build more and cheaper to meet a growing demand but bringing as an indirect consequence an increase in housing standardization (Orozco, 2018).

Although the regulations established by Colombian law, such as the maximum price and the minimum amount of habitable space for social housing, seek to guarantee access to decent housing for people with limited resources, in practice, they also pose a limit increasingly foreign to the welfare state of those who inhabit these homes (Pinto, 2005).

Thus, the concept of minimum housing in Colombia related to social housing has undergone a transformation. While in past decades it was conceived as a dignified housing solution, as demand was lower and the promoting entities were different, in recent years it has become a focus of marginalization and precariousness, with horizontal property complexes that are increasingly characterized by their narrow lots, small houses, and extremely peripheral location (Rodríguez Escallón, 2010). Part of the problem lies in the fact that social interest housing tends to be approached from public policies as a market good and not as a

fundamental right. Therefore, the definition of its true attributes and standards to guarantee dignified conditions for its inhabitants has been neglected.

In this sense, the research question that guides this article is What particularities does the qualitative deficit of social interest housing projects present between cities with particular social, cultural, and geographical dynamics?

Thus, the aim is to understand how the problem raised about the qualitative deficit in social housing (VIS for its Spanish acronym) is expressed in different cities of the country. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to analyze the differences in quality standards and habitability conditions evidenced in social housing projects between different cities in Colombia, considering the geographical, climatic, demographic, and cultural particularities of each urban context. In this sense, VIS housing complexes in Bogotá and other capital cities of Colombia, located in diverse thermal floors and city sizes, are taken as case studies. The above is in response to the fact that the constructive quality of social housing in the country can address the following aspects. First, there is the progressive reduction in the size of social housing dwelling units from a standard of 80m² in the 1980s to 42m² at present. Second, there is the existence of standardization and lack of adaptation of common spaces in social housing complexes to the social and cultural particularities of the territories. Finally, there is evidence of a practice in the planning of unsustainable designs, without greater adaptation to specific climatic conditions of the regions, prioritizing the reduction of construction costs over comfort and energy efficiency.

A mixed methodology with quantitative and qualitative techniques is used to analyze the qualitative deficit in social housing complexes. The quantitative component will characterize the quality of communal spaces and housing units of each sample, based on measurements and analysis variables, taking as a data source planimetries of the housing complexes. The selection of housing projects is made ensuring that each housing complex to be studied meets the following characteristics:

- Horizontal property
- Peripheral and central locations
- Diverse development companies
- Construction timeframe around 10 years
- Groupings with a number of homes greater than 500 apartments
- Groupings with at least two (2) housing typologies.

Additionally, an identification of the user profile for each case study is made using information from the National Population and Housing Census of the DANE from 2018. Furthermore, additionally, structured surveys will be applied to a representative sample of residents about their degree of satisfaction with the design, materiality, and comfort of the housing. The qualitative component will characterize the perception of housing quality from residents and other actors from the public sector and private entities linked to the design and production of social housing. This analysis will be done based on semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the information will be carried out with the help of statistical software and the reading of parameterized planimetries to identify similarities and differences between the case studies. This triangulation of mixed data seeks to comprehensively understand the problem of qualitative deficit in each case-study.

The results show that the qualitative deficit of social housing is confirmed due to the decrease in housing size, construction materials, and little consideration of the cultural,

demographic, and social dynamics of those who inhabit them. There is a standardization and lack of adaptation of the common spaces of social housing complexes to the social and cultural particularities of the territories, prioritizing the reduction of construction costs and access to low land rents, over other socioeconomic and cultural factors.

Specifically, the perception of the surveyed residents shows that most consider the presence of educational, sports, cultural, and welfare facilities near their homes to be poor or very poor; the same happens with public spaces. It is worth mentioning that this perception is also linked to situations of insecurity and crime present in these areas. These aspects, added to the deficit conditions in the sizes of housing units, generate little sense of belonging to the territories and a greater perception of socio-spatial segregation processes with respect to other places in the city, making neighborhood relations and community practices difficult. Additionally, most surveyed residents consider that their house is small in relation to the people who inhabit it and do not consider the climatic conditions of the place, something especially serious in cold climate cities like Bogotá, where homes present humidity problems, affecting the health of their inhabitants, or in hot climate cities like those in the Colombian Caribbean, where homes are not climatically adequate due to the lack of cross ventilation and the use of materials in roofs and walls with high thermal inertia, generating discomfort situations for their inhabitants.

These results will be valuable inputs to better inform local and national governments in terms of the adjustments that the public social housing policy must follow, specifically, in terms of minimum habitability, adaptation to ways of life, origin of residents, as well as general aspects of climate comfort and quality of materials.

Bibliographical references

Castro, N. E. (2021). Hábitat popular y procesos de transformación urbana. Retos y oportunidades en la vivienda popular y la vivienda de interés social. El caso de la localidad de usme, bogotá (Doctoral dissertation, Universidad Pablo de Olavide).

de Soto, J. D. M. F., & de Soto, A. M. C. F. (2019). La vivienda social en Colombia: un análisis desde la inclusión social (pp. 147-176). Universidad Santiago de Cali.

Orozco, J. C. (2018). La vivienda mínima: una revisión del desarrollo del concepto en Colombia. *Procesos Urbanos*, 5, 34-41.

Pinto, L. F. F. (2005). La habitabilidad de la vivienda de interés social en Colombia. Un enfoque en los procesos y las decisiones. *Revista Invi*, 20(55), 12-19.

Rodríguez Escallón, C (2010). Las preguntas por la calidad de la vivienda: ¿quién las hace?, ¿quién las responde? *Dearq*, (6), 6-19.