

Social Justice Pulse Review

Poverty and Cost of Living

Grassroot Innovations Tackling Housing Precarity

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Project Summary

This project showcases best practice from community organisations engaged in tackling issues of urban precarity. Short films focusing on practices were produced, drawing on experiences in low-income settlements in Latin America. It is aimed at community organisations, practitioners, and policymakers, with the aim of fostering more democratic and inclusive approaches of urban planning and housing policies.



The Challenge

Inadequate housing affects the lives of 1 in each 4 people on the planet. An expanding definition recognises the importance of the wider habitat beyond shelter, encompassing physical and psychological needs. Housing and infrastructure provision have improved in recent decades; but they often show inadequacies in terms of their implementation and maintenance. In addition, community participation is often sidelined. Despite this, grassroots initiatives have sought to provide their own ways to address urgent needs by focussing on social mobilisation and innovation.

Successful community-led initiatives generate interest, but this interest often exerts its own pressures on limited organisational time and resources. This project addresses that challenge, through the development of a platform showcasing grassroots best practice, facilitating networks and enabling peer to peer exchanges. Three key initiatives in Latin American low-income settlements were selected to highlight alternative approaches to more inclusive and high-quality planning, housing, and infrastructure delivery.

Findings

The short films document and explain the key outcomes, and aim to disseminate best practice.

1. Community-led initiatives can result in better quality in the delivery of housing and infrastructure. In Santiago de Chile, an award-winning social housing project was co-designed between a housing movement and architects. In Rosario, Argentina, community oversight of sanitation services helped to both improve the functioning of systems and connections to multiple households beyond those identified in official records.
2. More empowerment in housing and planning processes strengthens civil society and democratic functioning. The communities examined reported feeling empowered by their involvement in policy design and delivery leading to the formation of new civil associations, capacity building programmes and direct involvement in innovative political platforms.
3. Community-led initiatives often require negotiations at different levels of government. To achieve guarantees of land tenure, housing and infrastructural delivery, communities must network with governments and agencies at various administrative levels (local, regional and national).



Recommendations

- Hybrid policy approaches that recognise the contribution of community-led initiatives can offer more effective and innovative responses.
- Co-design inclusive approaches drawing on communities' wealth of intelligence about the territories in which they live to better inform the definition of priorities and strengthen sense of belonging.
- Participatory processes, when adopted, usually stop at the level of policy design and specification. Co-implementation of such policies are less common but can make a significant difference in terms of ensuring inclusivity and efficiency.