

# Building within the built environment

Towards a sustainable improvement urban policy in Venezuela

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## Abstract

The concern for recovering the informal urban periphery in Venezuela had led the National Housing Council (CONAVI), and the Institution for Community Development (FUNDACOMUN), to design a national improvement urban policy for the "barrios" (neighborhoods). This policy is based upon a conservative view of the built environment and a philosophy that privileges the sense of belonging of the inhabitants, maintaining as far as possible, its place of residence. CONAVI is implementing this policy through a national competition of ideas, that focuses on the improvement of "barrios" that already have a community organization<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this paper is to present three case studies, that have won these competitions, Petare in Caracas, Palo Negro in Maracaibo and Bella Vista in Cagua, in which additional to the institutional view, the urban design group included as proposal statements the reinforcement of the formal and social organizational patterns within the barrios and the conservation of the built environment (artificial capital) that integrate changes proposed within the concept building within the built, without modifying in a substantial way the morphological and environmental conditions (natural capital) that support the urban dwellers memory.

## INTRODUCTION

CONAVI has classified peripheral neighborhoods as Urban Design Units (UDU, Unidad de Diseño Urbano), which generally include more than one neighborhood or Barrio. A group of Urban Design Units is part of what has been called Physical Planning Unit (UPF, Unidad de Planificación Física). Petare that is part of a UPF of four UDU, has 16 barrios, Palo Negro has 5 barrios and Bella Vista, which does not belong to any UPF, because its relative isolation, is a single Barrio.

Of the cases listed, Petare has been completed and approved, but the other two cases still have to be submitted to community discussions. The three cases respond to the concept of BUILDING WITHIN THE BUILT, and to the urban politics of neighborhoods sustainable improvement. The cases have in common their location in the urban periphery with variations in the organization that depend on the geographical conditions of the place and dimensions and complexity of the cities where they are located. In general the urban design proposals are directed towards integrating the illegal settlement with the planned city, and balancing the quality of life conditions with the surrounding environment. Integration between neighborhood and city is supported by the criteria of preserving the existing spatial and

social system of relations in the illegal settlement, although these relations are scarcely defined. This kind of urban intervention based upon respect for site resources, promotes community social and physical cohesion<sup>2</sup>. This paper is divided in four parts, one describes the existing conditions of the three settlements emphasizing differences and similarities, the second one describes the basis for site analysis, the third presents the criteria and proposals of social and spatial organization and, the fourth establishes the conclusions.

## **1. EXISTING SETTLEMENT CONDITIONS**

The informal occupation of the urban periphery in Venezuela generates different physical and spatial situations that respond to the characteristics of the city where the development is inserted. Differences in urban scenes, density and availability of land for urban development, are key aspects when approaching the definition of design proposals.

### **1.1. Case Bella Vista, Cagua**

This neighborhood is located in the outskirts of a medium size city that combines regular and irregular topographic conditions. Bella Vista, is an extension of existing peripheral developments, without direct links with its urban center due to geographical conditions that define a clear physical limit, and connected to its surroundings through a major avenue. The urban fabric, continues in some areas the existing grid pattern of the formal settlement, but in general the occupation follows the topography of the hillside.

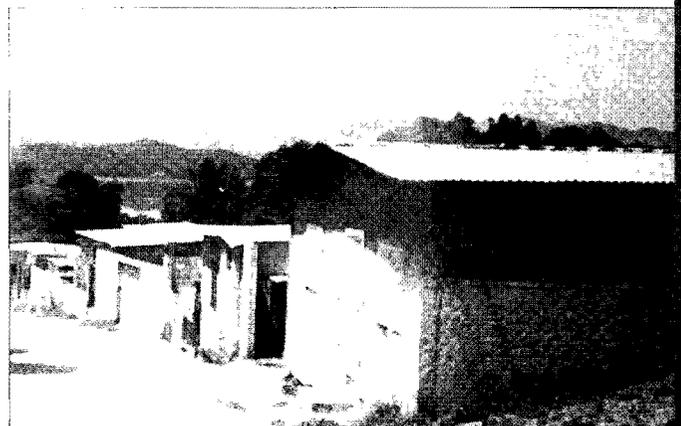


Figure 1: Existing urban scene: Bella Vista

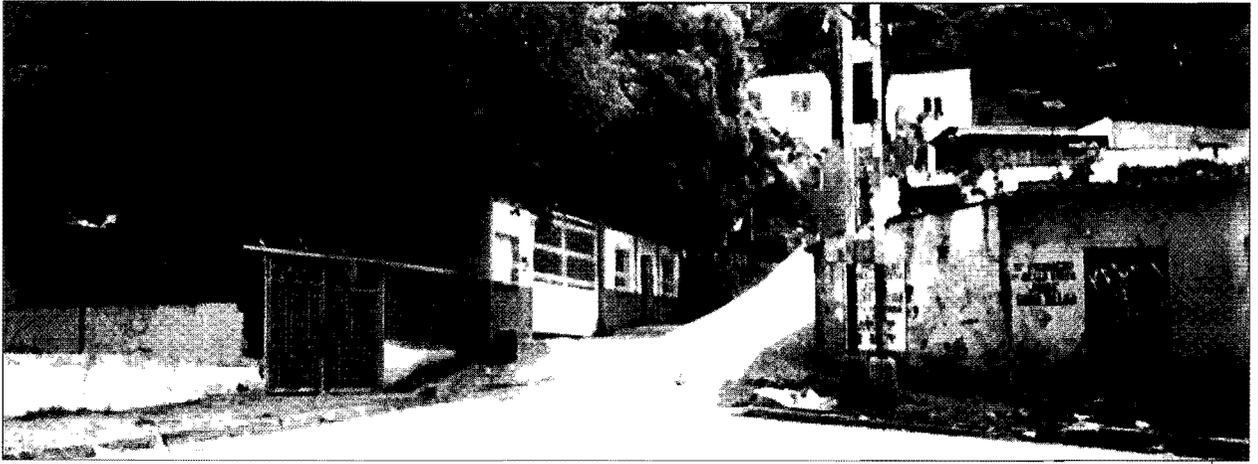


Figure 2: Existing urban scene: Bella Vista

### 1.2. Case Palo Negro, Maracaibo

This neighborhood is located in a low density disperse city, without geographic restrictions for urban expansion. Palo Negro is characterized by a grid type occupation, with geometry modifications due to natural and cultural events, that generate changes in directions and

dimensions. The residential fabric is conformed by small dispersed buildings located predominantly in large lots, whose arrangement is determined by the street pattern<sup>3</sup>. This neighborhood has a large population of Wayüu an Indian tribe of the north area of the State of Zulia.



Figure 3: Existing urban scenes: Palo Negro

### 1.3. Case Petare, Caracas

This neighborhood is located in a high density city that lacks available low cost urban land, in a hillside site, with irregular topography and steep slopes that can reach up to 40%. Characterized by an extensive and homogeneous residential fabric with a discontinuous street pattern, Petare has a compact occupation, with some public services mixed with the residential fabric<sup>4</sup>.

All cases have in common:

- a) Absence of a defined urban structure,
- b) Interior discontinuous urban patterns unrelated with the surrounding context, generally conformed by formal developments.
- c) Lack of legibility, due to a perceptive homogeneity of the urban morphology in Petare and, due to a fragmented perception of small similar pieces in expression and dimension in Palo Negro and Bella Vista.
- d) Important deficit of public services and infrastructure, mainly sewers and drainage.

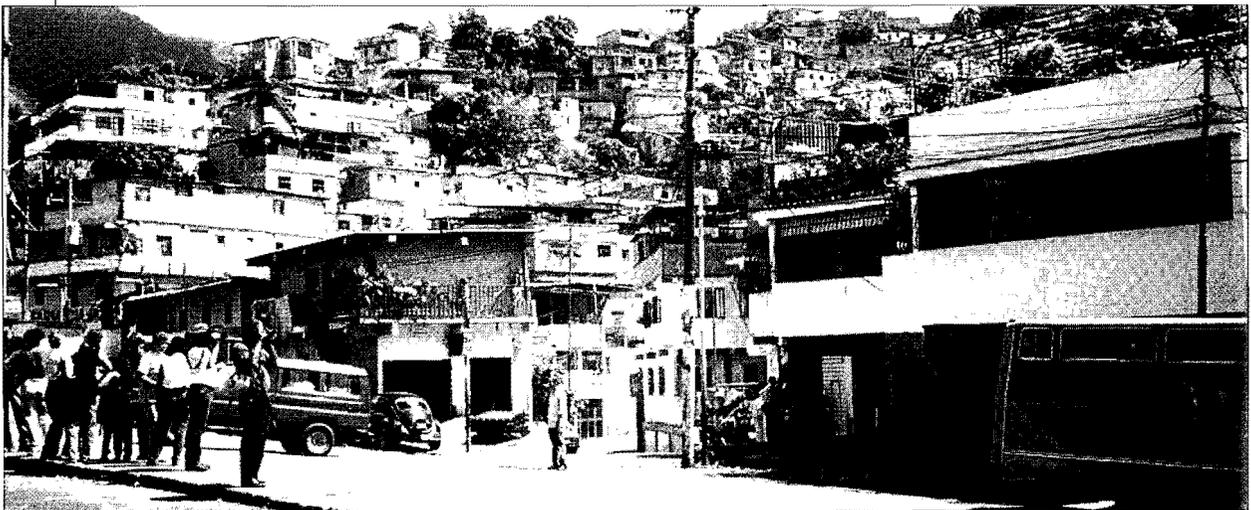


Figure 4: Existing urban scene: Petare