

## COMMENTS

The round-table discussion prompted responses from participants who, after the event, contributed comments on the proceedings. Some are included below.

### **Özgönül Aksoy**

Architect, former dean of the faculty of architecture, Black Sea Technical University (KTÜ), Trabzon, Istanbul, Turkey

I have two comments to make on the discussions. Firstly, the title “Shelter: the Access to Hope” is not appropriate. Shelter, logically, cannot be an access. It is not an approach or road, but it is something which covers, which contains with no direction. It is a central form and it is a core. So, the title should be “Shelter: the Core of Hope”. This conveys the immediacy of the problem without looking for solutions in the future.

*Grameen Bank Housing  
Project, Bangladesh.*

Secondly, I fear that we are interpreting the term “habitat” too narrowly by understanding it as “to settle homes”. The root of this word is “habit” and it covers all our activities. In the West, the idea of work is separate from the idea of living. You work for your living in the West. But this is not our tradition. In the East, when we work we are also living. By underlining this difference, I want to approach the concept of “home as a core of production”

If we look back, we find that home is traditionally not only a place for dwelling, but a place for working and for production. An understanding of this leads us to propose something similar for our contemporary habitats. We need to develop our houses as productive units and so find support from business and industry. Such an approach is not only income-generating, but it enhances the quality of life. Through these activities at home, families can share the benefits of life-long occupations and the pleasure of productive work

This idea was once proposed to the Turkish Ministry of Construction through a housing project conceived by graduate students at the Black Sea Technical University within the framework of a national competition. Homes were designed with greenhouses on their balconies to nurture seedlings which would then be planted in the common areas of the settlement to produce vegetables for market. The aim was to create, through this work, a means of unifying, firstly, families, and then the community, with an accompanying increase in the social and cultural exchange amongst all ages and sexes

Many areas of work can be carried out within the home. education, agriculture, textile-related jobs, services, and so on. It is in this sense, that I would like to change the title, once more, to “Shelter. the Core of Life” because, personally, I don’t like hopes. Instead I like to work.

### **Gönül Tankut**

Dean, faculty of architecture, Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara, Turkey

How can we provide housing for the very poor? This is an age-old question and it saddens me that we are still asking it. The panel pointed out that twenty years ago, low-income housing was the major issue in Third World cities. It created severe environmental and social problems. Solutions, such as loans for regularisation and up-grading of squatter settlements, and sites and services all faded out over the years. Today the demand/supply gap has grown and is becoming worse. Do planning and administrative authorities have any new solutions? That is the question now.

Many people still live in conditions below human decency, let alone dignity. The problem is not that there is no spectacular architecture, but it is the lack of a human and malleable environment. It is a sense of space and a sense of belonging that is important, not the beauty of buildings. To this

end, all interested parties should be involved in the building process. The transparency of the planning and building process is crucial. Yet the real key to success is the idea of empowerment, of enabling people to build low-rise buildings for themselves, allowing them to participate even with limited knowledge and skill, and, even more importantly, allowing them to add a layer of their own, in symbols and meanings.

The scarcity of suitable land is at the root of the problem. An example cited is Bombay, designed for one million people and now with a population of twelve million. Nevertheless, we should be careful not to eat up agricultural land and invite ecological disaster. We need to de-centralise, and this means that the public transport infrastructure has to be developed, and subsidised. De-centralisation also means subsidised housing. The development of growth poles, and new job opportunities, means the growth of new metropolises composed of small towns. But the opening up of more land deals with the effect, not the cause. Furthermore, conventional planning and land-delivery systems, and associated costs of structure, infrastructure, and cost of services, will make the land un-affordable to those in need. In Karachi, some government-planned schemes remain empty.

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Building, as a product or a process, has an impact on the community, either alienating it or strengthening it through creating bonds. Architecture should not create pathologies, as in the slab-blocks everywhere. Our overgrown cities stand in contrast to work done on the conservation of historic city cores where a sense of identity is developed. These older parts of towns reflect a much healthier relationship between human society and the rest of life.

The real agenda needs to address the following questions:

- How can we defeat land speculation and the commercial exploitation of urban land which dominates all city planning?
- How can we achieve real transparency in planning?
- How can we break the nexus of politicians, administration,

and developers?

- How can we overcome or transform the unacceptable credit mechanisms now in place?
- How can the quality of manufacturers' products be improved?
- How can workers' skills and understanding of new materials be improved?
- How can we get clients to know what to expect from manufacturers and workmen?
- How can we stop merely copying Western countries?
- How can the building and architectural profession develop viable solutions?
- How can we motivate professionals with an interest in cities, in the environment, and communities to organise the people, create a voice and develop a lobby?

These questions need to be addressed and answered because any person is credible merely through his being human, and this should allow him access to resources and to lead a dignified life.

### **Dogan Kuban**

Emeritus professor, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey  
Member of the Award Steering Committee, 1978-1983

Hope for adequate shelter is hope for a better world. The lack of shelter is a parallel phenomenon to hunger, and the well-being of a society is measured in its response to both needs. If there are more than one billion hungry men, there will be more shelter-less people. If every man and every woman had shelter, it would be a perfect, happy world. All the speakers on the panel seem to have described failures in all the years of enthusiastic effort to find solutions to the problem of housing. I must confess that there are no longer any new overall solutions, because to provide housing to the needy is part of a vision of life which has never been a priority in capitalist societies, except in unrealised or evanescent utopias. However, these ob-

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servations do not preclude discussion of the everyday problems of human habitat and the proposal of limited solutions.

Food and shelter are essential to human and animal life. It is sad, that in a supposedly civilised world, shelter remains a problem. Although human society has reached a high level of performance, in this context, animals are more civilised. All squirrels have similar shelters, and all bears hibernate in similar conditions. Professionally, there have been good, ingenious solutions to the problem of shelter, yet people squatting in caves and hovels exist side by side with people in luxurious residences

Housing was essentially an economic problem in pre-industrial times. Today, while the economic factor remains important, housing is a political problem, because it is the lack of political will which hinders the provision of shelter for the poor and food for the hungry. It is the unbounded capitalistic exploitation of people that disregards the misery of the shelter-less. In the industrially less-developed world, especially in the large urban agglomerations, one has to add a cultural factor to the political one. The culture of urban life is not well established, and the specific problems of housing are created by the survival of pre-urban cultures within cities.

Officially, all countries recognise the right to shelter for every human being. If this were the *sine qua non* of every global, governmental, and municipal policy, all urban, architectural, financial, organisational, cultural, and aesthetic problems could be solved, and the world would be radically different. But, even mentioning such a priority is still anathema to the well-to-do classes of the world. The switch of subject from shelter itself to politics is not sympathetically received by most professionals, planners, architects, or representatives of international organisations. They prefer to go directly to business. But, shelter is not a technical problem, it is a philosophico-political problem. And, why has the global shelter problem never been solved? Because the discussion has become a pseudo-discourse, and it becomes more superficial every day. The real problem is forgotten under the modes of financing, technicalities, project management, and the

greed of the business world. The problem is simple: a civilised world has to give shelter to everybody. We have the means for its accomplishment. We don't have the good-will.

The major structural hindrances to such a world are the following:

- immigration from rural to urban areas;
- land and building speculation as an inherent component of urban, even national politics;
- the pre-urban culture of immigrants; and,
- the domination of the uncultured masses in politics through the so-called democratic system in which the exploitation of ignorance plays a major role.

In great urban agglomerations, the problems of housing cannot be solved because man is not adequately humanised to allow every fellow human being to have shelter and food. We are neither socially nor psychologically mature enough to share, and we are not prepared to create necessary institutions to make a megalopolis workable. We don't even know what man needs more, a house or a car. The priorities are intentionally blurred by the capitalist media. In the Third World, the present structure and image of the great metropolis is incompatible with the simple demands of rural immigrants. New groups of decision-makers, brought to power by the simple numerical mechanism of voting, create basic situations of conflict between problems and solutions through their different cultural background and incomprehension. Thus, the crucial problem for a city like Istanbul is that decision-makers cannot produce solutions for such a colossal human settlement and its complicated problems, which are above their perception and understanding. This is why land speculation at plundering levels, illegal housing, financing, and black-market money are inherent and constituent parts of the economy. Consequently, they are part of the value systems and administrative structures. The dominant law is lawlessness. This is not literary emphasis or exaggeration; it is a fact.

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On average, immigrants to urban areas do not acquire urban behaviour for two or three generations. Urban behaviour needs a minimum of tolerance, self-discipline, and education. These qualities are not attained by merely moving one's abode to the city. Thus, there is a great gap, which cannot be bridged, between the image of the city - a strange mixture of modernity, technology, and nostalgia for the past - and the rising demands of the new city dwellers. While great cities are themselves irrational entities, their problems, such as traffic, pollution, infrastructure, housing, social welfare, and management of risks, need rational solutions. Unfortunately, the representatives of the politically dominant non-urbanised masses cannot face such complexity with rationality. The formulation of long perspectives of action is beyond the capacity of the new political classes. While day-to-day needs are provided by ad hoc temporary solutions, the long-run problems of infrastructure remain unsolved, or are replaced with partial answers.

Accepting their tentativeness, I would like to offer my criticisms of the major themes discussed by the speakers:

Throughout the discussions, there were good examples, and adequate technical propositions. If they are not answers to the global need for shelter, they provide a morsel for hungry stomachs. Everything has been experimented with since the industrial revolution. Different approaches, such as sites and services, upgrading, social housing, and the like, have been respectable approaches of long standing. In every case, the determining factors of success were the underlying local politics and culture of the decision-makers. The patterns of demand were voiced by politicians. While the forms are culturally defined, the procedures are politically defined. This is why all discourse on housing, habitat, and shelter, on a technical level, has become obsolete.

When we start to consider the housing problem under the headlines of efficiency, economy, market value, aesthetics, impressions, and the like, we bring it into the general class of architecture. At this stage, housing is a

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simple urban and architectural problem. Each case needs a different approach. One can only remark that forgetting the specificity of each case and trying to dictate the general principles of application has been probably one of the reasons for failure. The level of architecture in any housing project cannot be above the local or national average. But, if we want to give a home to every man, then the discussion is philosophical. It becomes the discussion of life and its qualities, and the inseparability of man and his abode. If we discuss the right to shelter, it also becomes political. When these two questions are answered within a common-sense discourse, the problem of building arises, with its technical and aesthetic parameters. If one starts from the projects and their implementation, the sociological and philosophical implications cannot be absorbed. The discourse around housing becomes incoherent and dominated by politics and profit, or around an architectural problematic. Here, the architectural profession tends to create fiction around housing. Project becomes ideology. It is identified as the vision of the ideal home. Thus, a discussion starting from the human situation, man-to-shelter relations, and the right to shelter towards the project is the correct approach.

Whether public action can ameliorate the situation is questionable. Homeless people are always angry. They are already involved in illegal speculation. Public dissent can promote movement toward a solution, but this is a political action and does not change the nature of shelter. To describe the activity of urban crowds as dynamism is a naive observation. Crowds in the streets seem dynamic like the ants in and around ant-hills. But, in an ant-hill, every ant has a function. The disturbing stir and movement of urban crowds is not necessarily a positive dynamism, but is uneasiness, instability, movement without motivation. The aimless strolling of poor, hungry, jobless, and angry crowds should not be taken as dynamism.

Charles Correa speaks of empowerment, which means self-control of their environment by local communities. This is again a political act, and its discussion by architects should be on a political platform. It is nothing less than revolution. In practice, even incremental changes of the immedi-

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ate environment are sources of disorder, because the building economy is structured for plunder. The ethos of architecture in the field of urban planning and housing does not exist. To empower the inhabitants of a district to control the physical change of their environment seems one of the ways towards a solution, but it is theoretical. To work, it requires some homogeneity in the social fabric. And, of course, its modalities are different in each case. Today, as far as my Turkish experience has shown, to empower people to manage the building of their own habitat means to empower illegal, speculative mechanisms. Public control is needed, but this control has failed, in most cases, because of the lack of correct motivation. This is why participation, co-operation, and similar mechanisms are all outside the architectural sphere of discussion because general public opinion is not yet ready to accept that every human being has a right to a shelter.

Arif Hasan speaks of transparency in planning. Transparency implies an openness to participation. At this stage of urban civilisation, if a plan is not participatory and transparent, it is not a plan, but a document for speculative intentions. For all practical purposes, as in the case of Turkey, people are not aware of the changes to city plans through the intervention of political authorities. A healthy approach may be to make the publication of every plan and urban transaction legally compulsory. But, whether the public could force municipalities to make the concession toward transparency is a moot point, because speculative manipulation of urban land is a great political leverage at the hand of political parties, party bosses, and mayors.

From a different angle, all the common problems of housing, when housing is seen as a technical problem, seem irrelevant. The problem of the scarcity of land is a fake problem. As my experience in Turkey has shown, the lack of building land was never a problem. The problem was its improper allocation by politicians for speculative purposes. The final culprit has always been the politician, although he is only an agent of the historical circumstances which brought immigration to the cities, political democracy (not the real democracy), population increase, industrialisation,

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and illiteracy. One cannot make a good soup with these ingredients. The politician is the monster (not master) cook of this soup. In speculation, every agency, private or public, consciously or unconsciously is an accomplice, because every area of public and political life is geared to the land speculation which provides, in Istanbul alone, black-market funds equal to the yearly official budget of Turkey. Without getting rid of criminal speculation, it is irrelevant to speak of planning, homes, or aesthetics. Informal settlements in great metropolitan areas are witness to the organisational capacity of the new decision-makers. It is the direct result of the lack of political motivation, cultural capacity, and education amongst administrators and politicians. It is not a technical problem. Where there is political will, capable specialists are sought and found. This is the case of the adequate, even beautiful solutions presented here. But, all over the world, there are only a handful such projects, in comparison to the extent of large-scale squatting.

Problems of financing, especially on the international scale, are completely dominated by international politics. Financing is geared to feasibility. But what are the objectives of feasible projects, and who are their authors? They are selected by politicians. Accordingly, from the beginning, any project is directed by political priority. Thus, the offered project does not necessarily correspond to the real needs of societies, but to the political needs of the decision-makers. This is the vulnerability of the system of international loans and credits.

Sometimes, old and sound concepts are disguised and offered up again under different words. Sustainability is one of them. The old concept of maintenance, enlarged so as to cover the whole world and charged with a new symbolism against the plunder and rape of the ecosystem, became the new concept of sustainability. It implies taking a stand against the wastes of consumer societies. It is against, in a sense, industrial society. In a restricted sense, in the context of housing, it simply means adequacy and maintenance.

In describing urban life, there is the nostalgic cliché of the continuum of life in cities. There were indeed, in historical cities, both synchronic and

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diachronic continuities. social continuity, rich and poor together, historical continuity, and old and new together. The latter is no longer possible, because cultural identity through historical heritage has no meaning for recent immigrants to the cities in search of jobs and shelter. Today rich people are afraid of the poor masses They live in their cars and their controlled precincts, i e their own ghettos. The private car is a prison. Poor people enjoy the urban environment more, they stroll freely, without fear. But psychologically they are sick because they also aspire to these own ghettos and car-prisons.

John Turner brings in sympathetic slogans such as “credit to human beings” or “paradigms of equity” - they are more philosophical rather than technical propositions. “Credit to human beings” is a politico-cultural model. It is a humanistic utopia. It speaks of the universal right to shelter. You simply give the credit, and you are not supposed to ask for any guarantee This kind of philanthropy, however, cannot be expected from the existing system of loans. In the same way, the problem of equity is not an architectural or urban problem It is an historical human rights problem. The problem of equity is less and less important in contemporary capitalist society It becomes hilarious to speak of equity when one is surrounded by luxurious, walled compounds, on one side, and squatter agglomerations, on the other Architects or urban planners are not much interested in equity when offered jobs They are equally happy in planning the most luxurious residence or social housing.

Turner’s experience has led him to utter profound but romantic ideas, such as “architecture is a connector between heaven and earth” So, to give a house to every human being is, for him, to open the doors of heaven This seems like a religious injunction It has, theoretically, the same vision and authority. It may be needed, because man’s relation to life is weakened in the industrial age. And, as John Turner underlines, aesthetic sense is a clue to this lost relationship. But we may remark that this is a very old stance adopted by Eastern philosophers What John Turner proposes as a “wholistic way of looking at things”, means the wholistic description of

relationships, and not the things themselves. It has been exactly this that has differentiated the West from the East, but, now, we need more comprehensive ways to look at the world. While we may see the human being as a minuscule part of a great natural system, and thus define his or her position in the universe, we also need the objectivity of the Western tradition. This means a new synthesis.

If Western culture had not considered the world at large as independent from our relation to it, it could not have reached a scientific outlook. Thus, if Eastern philosophy seems wiser than that of the West concerning the situation of man in the world, scientific rationalism is indeed Western. And the world still needs it. For Muslims, the world of objects has always been defined in relation to man. Thus, relations were defined, but objects were not. This ended with scientific illiteracy and the domination by the West. The independent treatment of the intrinsic structure of the material world, and the study of the relationship of society to it, are two ways to reach a wholistic concept of a new vision where the interaction between society and the material world shapes human behaviour. Science and religion, as human constructs, were so dominant in the life of societies that we have never investigated beyond their established boundaries.

A wholistic way of looking at things, where “everything is in relation”, does not necessarily exclude everything from having its own reality. Life exists within the niche of nature. Each element of this living atmosphere has its own intrinsic, independent existence. It can be defined both as part of a relationship, or by itself. It is independent, because its death is not the end of the niche. Individual life is replaceable within the system, but the individual life and the individual object have an end. Man-to-shelter is a relationship which is unique, but man and shelter are also independent. Each of them can survive the other, yet man without shelter is an aberration of human culture. Civilisation should overcome this. Man without shelter has no dignity. Any society should be condemned where some people have several homes while large sections of society are homeless.

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The ultimate solution remains in a global policy which imposes a principle that each family or, better, each human being, should have housing. Included, then, in the concept of human dignity is the right to have a house. This would also mean that, like food, the house is a priority, before education, health and, obviously, before armaments. If only governments would start from this principle, housing would be a different problem. There wouldn't be this mish-mash of project-cum-policy discussion. New philosophies, new laws for land distribution, new politics, new methodologies, and even a change in political structures would take place. New programmes would be defined. Projects of great insight would be produced and implemented

The procedure is self-evident. Firstly, the inalienable right to shelter must be recognised. To achieve this, philosophical, political, and economic fights need to be fought and won. In a second stage, all governments have to prepare immense programmes for housing their citizens. Only then will projects be prepared and implemented. Generally, only the last stage of the housing problem has been the subject of seminars, debates, and controversies. But the problem remains unsolved from the beginning. Thus, without a change of philosophy of life and a corresponding political outlook, the housing problem will remain a matter of technical discussion without bringing relief to the billions of shelterless people.

