

The struggle to belong:
Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.

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*The process of popular habitat production in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area
(AMBA): in search of relations, agreements and disagreements.
(Draft version)*

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Introduction

The Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA) has a long history in urbanisation; part of it is conformed by the settlements and neighbourhoods that emerged informally and that, along time, began to consolidate and integrate into the urban fabric. Although its integration acknowledges different forms and cleavages, it is impossible to avoid the fact that the old informal peripheral urbanisations are, nowadays, popular urbanisations integrated to the metropolis. Nevertheless, and in spite of their presence in the city for the past 30 years, and in some cases, even more than 50,¹ little is known about the way in which the processes of popular habitat production that contributed to the consolidation of those neighbourhoods evolved. Within this framework, this paper explores these processes in order to account for their course and for the way in which the traits of their evolution are related to their integration (in different degrees and forms) into the urban fabric. In this sense, this paper tries to articulate two levels of analysis: on one hand, the neighbourhood level that takes into account the urbanisation processes and the integration and consolidation of popular neighbourhoods into the urban fabric and, on the other hand, the family level that takes into account the families' course of action and the development of the habitat production processes they develop.

1. Development of popular neighbourhoods in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area

The history of popular habitat in the AMBA goes back to the end of the 19th century. Although there have always been *caseríos* or *rancheríos* (*small groups of poor housing*) in the city, they were generally established before the suburban towns that, later on, became integrated to the

¹ Such is the case of some shantytowns located in the City of Buenos Aires and in the first ring municipalities (Villa Tranquila in Avellaneda).

metropolis. This happened only after the 1860s² when the city opened to immigration and, together with it, various forms of popular habitat³ emerged and developed. Immigration produced a high demand for housing giving way to the conformation of *conventillos* or *inquilinos* (*tenements*). Towards the end of the 19th century large houses, owned by patrician families that abandoned them after the plagues that affected the city during the 1870s, became collective lodgings for immigrants. Lack of sanitation and cramped occupation of spaces turned them into the prototype housing for those sectors that were most in need. The *inquilinos* (*tenements*) were the only housing alternative available to lower income sectors until the middle of the 1930s. After this date, the agro-export model that had led the development of the Argentinean economy ended, giving way to an import substitution process. Thus, towards 1938 for the first time in Argentina, industrial activities exceeded agrarian activities and, at the same time, Buenos Aires consolidated its dominance as the country's urban and productive centre. A significant urban phenomenon that began to consolidate during this period is that of *shantytowns* (*villas miseria*), both in the city centre and in the municipalities located in the first ring of the conurbation.⁴ These neighbourhoods, spontaneously located in vacant public or private lots, have an irregular layout, precarious housing sometimes built with discarded materials and lack infrastructure services and equipment.

In the City of Buenos Aires, the shantytowns are located in central areas (port or railways) and in the Southern sector near the Riachuelo. The first metropolitan shantytowns developed towards the end of the 1930s. During the 1940s, new population centres appeared in the City's Southern neighbourhoods and in adjoining municipalities. In the first ring municipalities, shantytowns are located near the central and industrial areas, as well as in the Matanza-Riachuelo and Reconquista basins that are prone to flooding.⁵ Initially, settlement in shantytowns was meant to be a temporary solution. Later on, when the import substitution model was exhausted, it became a permanent housing solution. The *shantytown* phenomenon

² It is important to note that the urbanisation of Buenos Aires and its conurbation is a process that developed very slowly since its foundation (the first one in 1537 and the second one in 1580) until well past the middle of the 18th century. The creation of the Río de La Plata Viceroyalty, in 1778, and the later authorization for foreign trade given to the port of Buenos Aires were the first steps towards this urbanisation process.

³ Towards the 19th century, the City of Buenos Aires went through a process of strong population growth due to the arrival of large numbers of European immigrants between 1871 and 1887, a situation that carried on until the first decades of the 20th century. In 1869, the city had 178.000 inhabitants. Approximately twenty years later (according to the 1887 Municipal Census) the number of inhabitants was 433.375 and 52% of them were foreign. In 1914 the population of Buenos Aires was four times higher than that of 1887, amounting to 1.575.814 inhabitants. Thus, during the last two decades of the 19th century and the first ones of the 20th century, the city's population grew very fast and the city itself expanded at a rhythm unknown until then (Gutman & Hardoy, 2007).

⁴ The city's first shantytowns emerged at the beginning of the 1930s, but the phenomenon consolidated with the expansion of the import substitution process. In 1931, the State sheltered -within the framework of the world crisis- a group of Polish immigrants in a few empty warehouses located in Puerto Nuevo, originating the first population centre called Villa Desocupación. The following year, another group of houses, called Villa Esperanza was conformed (Blaustein, 2001).

⁵ At present, shantytowns in the Greater Buenos Aires are located in environmentally fragile districts, mainly in basins prone to flooding, near traffic roads that enable access to central areas. They are very important in the Southern first and second ring municipalities: Avellaneda, Quilmes, Florencio Varela, the San Francisco-Las Piedras basin or in the North West, the Reconquista-Luján basin. In spite of this, the phenomenon can also be seen in some municipalities located in the Northern areas of the RMBA that traditionally housed high income population sectors, such as San Isidro.

lasts until nowadays in the city Centre and in adjoining municipalities. As the rest of the urban fabric, it has gone through processes of extension, consolidation and densification, integrating itself to –although in a differentiated manner- the city’s economic and urban dynamics. These processes produced in these neighbourhoods, among other issues, the emergence and growth of a very dynamic real estate market both for the sale and purchase of plots and houses, as well as for the renting of houses and rooms.

During the 1940s, 50s and 60s, there was a large influx of new internal migrants due to the import-substituting industrialisation process and the reconfiguration of regional economies that enabled the consolidation of large areas occupied by self-built neighbourhoods that frequently settled in non-structured and scattered areas, usually prone to flooding. A new form of popular habitat developed in these areas: the *economical plots subdivision* (Clichevsky, 1975; Torres, 2001). The *economical plots subdivision* enabled access to legal ownership of suburban land to low income population sectors through payment in installments during one or two decades. Salaried industrial workers constituted a solvent demand for these new ventures, backed up by large subsidies that greatly reduced the cost of transport, by subsidized credit lines promoted by official banks and by a context of full employment. Scarce regulations and the low provision of services required for the subdivision into plots eased access to ownership. Nevertheless, the low costs of urbanisation and transport was transferred to the long journeys needed to reach the working sites, to the low quality of urbanisations and to the cost of building. The development of *economical plots* would not have been possible without the existence of “strong subsidies that radically reduced the cost of suburban transport, that was nationalised in 1947-1948,⁶ thus enabling the daily trip to and from work of urban workers” (Torres, 2001) and the building of new urbanisations along the city’s outskirts.

The 1977 Decree-Law n° 8.912 that rules land use in the conurbation’s municipalities, together with the crisis and economic changes during the 1970s put an end to the economical plots subdivision and, accordingly, to the access to land ownership for large low and lower middle income sectors. In spite of this situation, the demand of these sectors for urban sites (or for sites that are potentially liable for urbanisation) keeps growing in the metropolitan city. This situation worsened during the military dictatorship that implemented in 1977 a sustained plan to eradicate shantytowns from the City of Buenos Aires⁷, and compulsively moved their inhabitants to

⁶ “The price of tickets in suburban railways increased between 1939 and 1959 from m\$ 1.60 to m\$ 7.50; while the general level of the cost of living during the same period increased from m\$ 2.60 to m\$ 78.7. This means that in the first case, prices multiplied by five and in the second one, by thirty (m\$ was the symbol that identified “*national pesos*” (“*pesos moneda nacional*”), the Argentinean official currency at the time). This radically cheap transport –exceptional if we compare it with international examples- was only viable as a State policy after the political change that enabled the nationalization of railways, including the extended Buenos Aires suburban network” (Torres, 2001).

⁷ Brigadier Cacciatore, the municipal major, launched the Shantytowns Eradication Plan. The Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda (1980:4) (Municipal Housing Commission) drew a report that defined shantytowns as the illegal settlement of families on public land and, in some cases, on private sites, where buildings do not meet minimum building or health and hygiene standards compatible with urban life, and configuring a high degree of family and population overcrowding. At the time, there were 400 thousand shantytown dwellers distributed in 600 population centres in the Federal Capital and in the Greater Buenos Aires. When the military took over power in 1976, exactly 224.885 shantytown dwellers lived in the city of Buenos Aires. This figure was given by the military authorities themselves, and it included 9100 inhabitants living in six Transitory Housing Nuclei and another 6930 who lived in the Rivadavia,

shantytowns in the conurbation and, in a lesser degree, to other provinces. A great part of this population sector returned to Buenos Aires during the 1980s, quickly re-populating the city's shantytowns.

Facing the end of the economical plots subdivision, the eradication of shantytowns from the central city and the lack of adequate housing policies, the beginning of the 1980s confronted a large unsatisfied demand for land and for housing that could not be channeled. Thus, two singular phenomena emerged during those years within the framework of the deterioration of the military dictatorship's power and its diminished capacity to control and crush the popular sectors' habitat production processes. On one hand, the emergence of building occupations in the City of Buenos Aires where there was an important vacant housing stock that, in a few years, became the object of irregular occupations. There are some paradigmatic cases, such as the layout of the ex-motorway 3, the ex-PADELAI and many others, involving at present 220 thousand people, according to a report issued in 2009 by the Ombudsman of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. On the other hand, land occupations in the Buenos Aires conurbation that produced hundreds of settlements during the following decades. Their characteristic trait was their collective and organized nature, and their purpose to comply with the minimum planning guidelines in order to favour a later regularisation. Nevertheless, in most cases, this regularisation did not finally come about and it has been the object of repeated social conflicts and the implementation of specific regularisation and improvement policies during the last few years.

At present, the different forms of popular habitat show a remarkable vitality and growth –with the exception of the economical plots subdivisions that are not viable in economic and regulation terms-, particularly due the lack of adequate housing policies that would enable to channel the popular sectors' demand for land and housing. The shantytowns and settlements have been steadily growing during the last few years. According to estimates produced by the INFOHABITAT team (2008), in 2006 there were around 819 shantytowns and settlements in the AMBA with a population of around 1.2 million people (10% of the population)⁸. Within this universe, there are many settlements that have emerged recently; they are small sized and very precarious, and their interstitial location has originated the category of “new urban settlements” that, according to the Ombudsman of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires amounted in 2006 to around 24 in the city of Buenos Aires only.

García and Mitre neighbourhoods. Although the latter were not “shantytowns” but neighbourhoods built by the Banco Hipotecario (Mortgage Bank), the Municipal Housing Commission renamed them as shantytowns in order to enable their eradication to carry out real estate businesses later on (Blaustein, 2001).

⁸ See in www.infohabitat.com.ar.

Table 1: Forms of Popular Habitat in the AMBA

		Habitat informality	
		Sites	Buildings
Typologies	Shantytowns	Settlements	Tenements (<i>inquilinos</i>)
	Settlements	Informal subdivisions	Occupation of buildings
	Informal subdivisions	New Urban Settlements (NUS)	Hotels-boarding houses
	New Urban Settlements (NUS)		
Origin	Shantytowns originated in 1920 but reached their peak during the 40s.	The first settlements appeared during the 80s.	The origin of tenements is linked to the immigration waves occurred at the beginning of the 20 th century.
	The first settlements appeared during the 80s.	Informal subdivisions reached their peak during the 40s and 50s.	Occupation of buildings began during the 80s.
	Informal subdivisions reached their peak during the 40s and 50s.	The NUS began to arise during the 90s.	The hotels-boarding houses originated when tenements (<i>conventillos</i>) were excluded from the 1960 Rent Law.
	The NUS began to arise during the 90s.		
Localisation	Shantytowns and NUS predominate in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (C.A.B.A.). Shanty towns are also located in some RMBA municipalities. Settlements and informal subdivisions develop in the RMBA municipalities. In general terms, in non-consolidated areas. Los asentamientos y los loteos informales se desarrollan en municipios de la RMBA.		All the typologies of informality on sites develop fundamentally in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (C.A.B.A) and in the first ring. In general terms, they are located in central areas.
Relation with the urban fabric	Shantytowns and NUS do not follow the design of the urban layout. Settlements and informal subdivisions follow the traditional blocks (<i>manzanas</i>) layout.		

Source: Di Virgilio, Arqueros & Guevara (2011).

2. The process of habitat production in the AMBA and in the analysed cases

In general terms, the phenomena we analyse in this paper may be encompassed under the generic name of Production of Habitat (PH). This category labels a heterogeneous universe of social production and reproduction practices of the social conditions needed to live in a city⁹. From an analytical standpoint, we acknowledge three fundamental forms of PH: i. The Capitalist Production of Habitat (CPH) refers to the production and access to housing (and land) through the market and it is determined by the logic of profit; ii. The Social Production of Habitat (SPH), self-building, self-production and other processes that are differentiated because they highlight the nature of the use value of land and housing over that of the exchange value; iii. State intervention in urban matters to sustain - by means of housing policies, infrastructure works and collective equipment- the above mentioned processes and enable their deployment (Guevara, 2010). There is certainly a certain overlapping among the processes of CPH and SPH when delimited in this way, that may be analytically differentiated but that are closely interlinked in real particular cases. It is a methodological cut that enables us to understand some distinctive characteristics of both processes.

In the different forms that popular habitat takes in the AMBA (see Table1) different logics and modalities of habitat production may be identified. The tenements (*conventillos* and *inquilinos*) are organized according to the logic of profit and appropriation of urban rent by the owners. In this sense, the logic that drives development and the dynamics of this type of habitat is clearly capitalist. The same logic could be pointed out regarding the economical plots subdivisions where the agents, with a small investment, geometrically increase in value the non-urbanised land and speculate with the later public investment in infrastructure and services, thus making this phenomenon more acute. This does not hinder them from articulating a capitalist logic with habitat self-building by the involved families.

Shantytowns and settlements, on their side, in the first moment basically respond to the social reproduction logic. In the case of the shantytowns, self-building processes predominate, while in the settlements, due to their organised nature, it is possible to think in habitat self-production processes. Nevertheless, as time elapses, the population density in shantytowns and settlements as well as the emergence of the informal real estate market deeply change these dynamics.

These traits can be clearly seen in the cases analysed in this paper. Barrio INTA and Villa Tranquila (shantytowns) are the product of migration processes within the context of import substitutions from 1940 to 1970. In this sense, they are the product of the arrival of migrants “by dripping”. Recent changes in the urbanisation processes that took place in the metropolis generated an accelerated densification process in these neighbourhoods, parallel to the development of the informal market –particularly dynamic due to the building of rooms for rent- that deeply modified their demographic structure. This process is far more incipient in the settlements.

⁹ In this universe, we include housing not only as a physical unit, but as a wide set of services –privacy, safety, access to basic services, mobility, etc. In this paper we use housing and habitat as synonyms, but we refer to this idea of housing in a wide sense, i.e. as habitat or environment.

Barrio INTA is located within the Southwestern limits of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, in the Villa Lugano neighbourhood. Its location may be characterized as the *outskirts within centrality* of the Buenos Aires conglomerate. Its location is linked to the availability of vacant sites in the City's Southern areas and to the existence of labour-demanding industrial establishments. During the 1980s, at the end of the military dictatorship, the neighbourhood was re-populated: families that had been expelled by the military came back to their neighbourhood and new families in need of a dwelling, due to a deficit in social housing policies, joined in as well.¹⁰ During the 90s the first urbanisation works began in the INTA neighbourhood. Although there were some difficulties and delays, INTA went through an important process of improvements during the last 15 years: all the main roads were paved; most passageways have disappeared; and water supply networks and sewerage were built and connected to the dwellings, among other issues. The absence of vacant sites in the neighbourhood discourages plot occupations as a way to achieve land ownership. As a result, real estate transactions have increased, accompanied by processes of densification, plots subdivision and verticalisation. According to official data produced in 2002, the neighbourhood had 3467 inhabitants and around 900 households, i.e. a small shantytown when compared with the City's large ones.

Villa Tranquila, on the other hand, is located near the centre of the municipality of Avellaneda, in the first AMBA ring. It conforms a compact fabric with an internal structure of passageways through which water and electricity are precariously provided. Only some of the streets surrounding the neighbourhood and its main street are paved. At present, occupations in Villa Tranquila are still a mechanism used for habitat production. Occupations are concentrated in interstitial sectors and the border area, while in the more consolidated sectors the predominant mechanisms are the purchase and sale of dwellings, cession and/or plot subdivision. According to the 2004 census carried out by the Municipality of Avellaneda, the neighbourhood had 7039 inhabitants conforming 1917 families.

Barrio San Jorge is also located in the Municipality of Avellaneda, in the locality of Villa Dominico. This neighbourhood is completely incorporated to the urban fabric and does not show any discontinuities with the rest of the city's layout. It originated in 1985 after an organized seizure. During and after the occupation, the neighbours always tried to observe State regulations. After the organised occupation of the site, the only available mechanisms for access to habitat were the purchase – in this case also accompanied by subdivisions- and cessions because there were no vacant plots in the neighbourhood and the neighbours avoided the occupation of spaces destined to streets and collective equipment. The only occupation after the original seizure was carried out a few years ago in a plot located in the centre of the neighbourhood next to the site of a factory.

The San Gerónimo settlement is located in a peripheral site of second ring of the Metropolitan Area, in the Municipality of Almirante Brown. The land, originally rural, was donated by its

¹⁰ It is important to note that shantytowns located in the City of Buenos Aires were subject to a violent process of compulsory eradication during the last military government (1977-1983). Within that context, some of the City's shantytowns were completely eradicated, as is the case of shantytown located in Bajo Belgrano. In other ones, the resistance to this policy put up by some families stopped total eradication, although they all suffered a strong reduction of their population. In this sense, the total population living in shantytowns was reduced from 213.823 inhabitants in 1976 to 37.010 in 1980. In 1976, INTA was inhabited by 9000 people and after the partial eradication, only 20 families were left.

owner to the Catholic Church that gave out the plots to families with housing needs. During the 70s the plots were transferred to the Asociación Cultural Esdeva (Esdeva Cultural Association), in charge of carrying out the subdivision in plots and the placement of families. Its layout foresees street planning and green areas, following a formal urbanisation strategy. According to the last population, dwellings and households census carried out in 2001, the neighbourhood has 1879 dwellings for 1932 households. The total population is 8614 inhabitants.

3. Characteristics of habitat in the studied shantytowns and settlements

In order to account for the traces that the processes of habitat production have left in the AMBA's popular organisations, we have carried out a survey in the four selected neighbourhoods to gather information about certain aspects, such as forms of access to plot and/or dwelling, time elapsed since access, form of access, relation of occupants with the regularisation process for land ownership, scope of the process, etc. Within the framework of the survey, we obtained data about the situation of approximately 370 plots. A probabilistic sample was used in each one of the neighbourhoods in order to gather information about a relevant number of plots (self)produced in the different types of habitat (shantytown and settlement). An average of 100 plots was surveyed in Barrio INTA, in Villa Tranquila and in San Gerónimo. In San Jorge, considering it is a fairly small urbanisation, 65 out of the 73 plots that make up the neighbourhood were surveyed.

In the AMBA, the proportion of owner households increased noticeably during the last twenty years: at the beginning of the 1990s, 64.6% of households in the RMBA were in that situation; ten years later, that category comprised 72.9% (INDEC, 1991 and 2001). From the standpoint of its social value, renting is considered a temporary situation, a matter that is expressed not only in the proportion of households found in this category (10.94%) but also in its decreasing numbers along the decade (13.2% in 1991). Facing these numbers, it is possible to think that access to land ownership constitutes an essential element in the housing experience of the AMBA households.¹¹ Thus, land ownership becomes relevant not only for what it expresses in itself (relation with ownership) but as much as it also informs about the characteristics of the real estate market and the socio-cultural values that permeate its structure.

As we pointed out previously, in popular urbanisations access to ownership is not achieved necessarily through market mechanisms. In the analysed cases, 44.3% of the households gained access to ownership by purchasing the building. The rest used other mechanisms, such as cession from a family member (8.2%) and occupation (47.5%). But, in these urbanisations, the purchase of a plot does not necessarily mean a legal deed: only 18.2% of those who purchased their property through a sales and purchase transaction signed a legal deed. Due to their urban characteristics and to their logic of conformation, the most informal situations in terms of ownership are found in shantytowns; both in Barrio INTA and in Villa Tranquila urban re-ordainment actions have been carried out in order to make land ownership clear. Nevertheless, the rhythm of these actions is very slow and has not advanced much. Thus, while an average of 27.9% of residents declared that he/she was benefited by land regularisation, this percentage

¹¹ The same situation may be found in other Latin American metropolitan areas, among which we can mention Sao Paulo (Menna Barreto Silva, 2002).

falls to 5.4% in Barrio INTA and 15.5% in Villa Tranquila, while it rises to 37.2% in San Gerónimo and 67.2% in San Jorge.

Regarding the number of years of residence in the neighbourhood, the study enables us to note that, as an average, households have lived for 18 years in the same plot, showing a strong stability among resident families. The most stable families seem to be those of San Gerónimo, with an average permanence of 22 years in the neighbourhood. This situation can be explained by the relative safety in land ownership provided by the fact that it is located in a peripheral site and that, since it is a Church property, residents are not exposed to eviction demands. Villa Tranquila stands on the other end, with an average of 13.6 years, hiding different “waves” of population settlements in the neighbourhood.¹² On the other hand, San Jorge and INTA show an average of 17 years, which also accounts for the existence of stable population sectors that have lived in the neighbourhood since its origins – 1985 in San Jorge and 1980 and 1983 in INTA after its post dictatorship re-population.

Within this context, the main housing strategy for most families has been the progressive improvement of their situation through the investment of money resources and labour in their own plot and dwelling.

At the same time, in an important proportion (around 30%) of households, some of the spouses declared that he/she had always lived in the same neighbourhood, while in 17% of the surveyed households both spouses said they had always lived there. These figures are higher in San Jorge: in 44% of the households both spouses declared that they have always lived in the neighbourhood, showing a great stability in the course of their residence. In Villa Tranquila this proportion goes down to 22.4%, while in San Gerónimo and Barrio INTA it abruptly descends to 7.3% and 3.0% respectively.

The gathered data enable us to observe that the plot occupation intensity is higher in the shantytowns¹³ than in the conurbation settlements. A fact that draws our attention is that among the surveyed urbanisations, Villa Tranquila shows the lowest plot occupation rate (1.1 household per plot vs. 1.2 and 1.3 in San Gerónimo and San Jorge respectively); nevertheless, it is important to point out that plots in this neighbourhood have the smallest average size (119 m²) and the average largest households.¹⁴ It is possible to think that although plot occupation intensity is smaller, this may be basically explained by the fact that these very small plots are a consequence of previous subdivision processes.

¹² This situation is clearly seen when the average years of residence in the neighborhood is calculated for households with young adult heads and with heads over 40 years old. Whilst the average years of residence do not exceed 5 years among young adult heads, among the older ones it exceeds 25 years.

¹³ The shantytowns, due to their growth “by dripping” or for being relatively “spontaneous” have, as we have seen, smaller average plot dimensions, so that the increase in land use intensity can only be achieved by building more storeys; while in the settlements, since they originally tried to follow the urban fabric in order to achieve regularisation, the intensity given by plot subdivision is more frequent than multi-storey building.

¹⁴ In San Jorge the plots have an average size of 194m² and in San Gerónimo of 294m². Also, the average size of households in Villa Tranquila is de 4.5 members per household vs 4.4 in San Gerónimo and 3.9 in San Jorge.

Combining the different variables referred to the characteristics of households and the problems they face, we drew up a synthetic consolidation index using the three categories (consolidated, partially consolidated and non-consolidated). The results show that 37.3% of the surveyed households show important levels of consolidation, while 43.5% may be considered partially consolidated and 19.2% are not consolidated. Some differences may be observed in the three neighbourhoods: Villa Tranquila shows the highest level of non-consolidation (26.1%) while San Jorge and Barrio INTA are in the opposite end with 41.8% and 43.2% of consolidated dwellings respectively.

Table 2: Characteristics of households residing in AMBA popular urbanisations. 2008.

Dimension	San Gerónimo	San Jorge	Villa Tranquila	Barrio INTA
Spouses who always lived in the plot (%)	28,5	67,3	42,9	7,7
Number of years living in the plot	22	17	14	17
Purchased plot	48,3	42,9	40,2	45,7
Average plot surface (m ²)	274	171	117	106
Changed the surface of plot (%)	1,1	13,1	4,3	13,8
Average price of plot (\$)	9.407	13.069	5.521	6.807
Average age of original owner	55	50	46	47
Plots with only one family (%)	78,1	82,5	92,9	74,7
Plots with only one dwelling (%)	71,9	79,4	92,9	74,7
Plots with no toilet (%)	4,2	1,6	3,1	7,1
Plots with only one toilet (%)	74,0	65,1	80,6	59,6
Plots with more than one toilet (%)	21,9	33,3	16,3	33,3
Overcrowding (%)	57,5	49,2	39,2	46,7
Consolidated dwelling (%)	35,3	41,8	30,7	43,2
Partially consolidated dwelling (%)	48,5	45,5	43,2	38,3
Non-consolidated dwelling (%)	16,2	12,7	26,1	18,5
Purchased property with legal deeds (%)	27,5	22,2	15,9	4,4
Benefited by land regularisation (%)	37,4	67,2	15,5	5,4

Source: Own elaboration based on surveys carried out during 2008.

Strategies for access to land and evolution of dwellings

As previously mentioned, during the last few years the mechanisms used to gain access to habitat in shantytowns and settlements grew as a product of neighbourhood consolidation and the lack of vacant land. Thus, purchase and sale as well as cession of dwellings were added to the traditional forms of occupation. In this sense, market operations and the processes of plot subdivision and cession intensified in popular urbanisations located near the city centre, combined with growth in height –less frequent in peripheral areas–.

In analytical terms, four relevant dimensions for this analysis may be differentiated; they may be combined to generate household typologies and the typical courses they take in informal urbanisations, depending on the housing strategies developed by those households:

- i. Access to land
 - a. Occupation

- b. Informal purchase
- ii. Access to housing
 - a. Self-building
 - b. Improvement
 - c. Purchase of finished dwelling
- iii. Evolution of plot
 - a. No changes
 - b. Subdivision through cession (to family members)
 - c. Subdivision through sale (as a capitalisation strategy)
- iv. Regularisation
 - a. Process not began
 - b. Process not concluded
 - c. Definite land regularisation

*Access to ownership by purchase of the dwelling or the plot*¹⁵.

In Villa Tranquila the case of the Moreno family shows the development of this process. In this case, the original plot was subdivided by the owner and sold in parts to different families “[...] *they bought that room from the woman who lived here...Yes, because when the woman was here, she sold some parts, she sold that part to the man who was there and she sold them that [other] room*” (interview 4, Villa Tranquila, Province of Buenos Aires, February 2011). Our interviewee’s family, in turn, bought the dwelling from its second owner “*We bought [this lot], we bought it if [...]*” (interview 4, Villa Tranquila, province of Buenos Aires, February 2011). One of the greater worries families face when carrying out this kind of operations is to legally record the operation “[...] *I have the papers, everything, but it is not valid because...but if it is handed over, even it is only a little piece of paper*” (interview 4, Villa Tranquila, Province of Buenos Aires, February 2011).

These operations generally include a certain flexibility regarding payment forms and methods that are different from those carried out under State regulations. In this sense, the Perez family told us that “*I met a woman from out here and she asked me if I would make up mi mind, I said yes, but that he was the only one to go out to work [her husband], and he works until today, only. And we came and we looked, and then we began to pay little by little for the house, with some mistrust, but we paid*” (interview 3, Villa Tranquila, Province of Buenos Aires, November 2010).

At other times, the subdivisions are made directly on the dwelling, so that each subdivision makes up a separate dwelling from the rest. The case of the Fernandez family in Barrio San Jorge accounts for this situation “*This plot belonged to his family, the man left his wife and*

¹⁵ They are market operations that show some kind of “irregularity” regarding State regulations. In this sense, the formal-informal duality was questioned by some researchers during the last few decades (see Rolnik, 1997). It is not the object of this research to participate in these discussions, we will only point out that this market has multiple contacts with what has been called the formal market and that, therefore, they are not precisely differentiated markets, but one same market within capitalist urbanisation (Harvey, 1997). It is possible to point out that market operations in shantytowns present some flexibility that other spaces in the city generally lack (see Cravino, 2006).

settled down with that woman and the woman had a house half a block away [...] He rented the room [from one of her husband's relatives] that belonged to his wife, and then sold it and it was subdivided, and three [houses] were made" (interview 1, Barrio San Jorge, Province of Buenos Aires, June 2010). In this case, the plot has a construction on the ground floor that corresponds to two dwellings, and a construction on the first floor that is the dwelling of the interviewed family.

Access to ownership through cession

Families frequently resort to cession as a mechanism to solve second generation housing problems. In general terms, cession is accompanied by subdivision of the original plot. This can be seen in the case of the Santillán family, since four dwellings were built on their plot: a) the main dwelling, inhabited by Maximiliano and Elva, the plot's original owners, and their younger children; b) and c) two more dwellings were built in the back yard, one of them for Laura, their third daughter, and the other one for Javier, the second son, together with their respective families; d) finally, the fourth dwelling where their first son, Alfonso, lives was built on top of the original one. *"It is like this, my old man lives in front, on that side lives my sister, I live here, and my brother lives up there, where the stairs stand"* (interview 8, Barrio INTA, City of Buenos Aires, September 2010). Our interviewee tells us that in the case of Laura and her family, *"[...] my old man gave them a plot that belonged to my grandma, in Catán [Gonzalez Catán, a locality in the Province of Buenos Aires], and because it was too far away from work, here in the capital [meaning the City of Buenos Aires], they divided up the plot and built there [in the parent's back yard]. My old man told them 'take that part and we give it to you'"* (interview 8, Barrio INTA, City of Buenos Aires, September 2010). On the other hand, Alfonso was helped by his parents *"Because my old man built the top floor to come and live. Because he rented, suddenly he lost his job because they fired him from the construction [...]"* (interview 8, Barrio INTA, City of Buenos Aires, September 2010).

Building of the definite dwelling

Building a dwelling is a process that takes place during a long period of time and it is generally developed through self-building. Families that start to build their dwelling from scratch have to go through this process, but also those who purchase a dwelling in the market. In this sense, as Cravino (2006) points out, shantytown dwellers gain access to a dwelling with the resources they can manage to gather but, far from considering it as the definite dwelling, they conceive it as subject to potential improvements and enlargements.

The building process, far from being linked to family growth seems to depend from the economic and material resources that families may gather along time. Nevertheless, the final objective: the definite dwelling seems to depend from the size of families and the needs they identify as necessary to meet in order to live with some comfort and privacy.

Through the analysis of cases, we were able to identify three stages in the development of a dwelling. At first, the families generally build one room with a kitchen and a toilet. Then they continue with the dwelling's common-use areas (living-dining room, for instance). The cycle

closes with the building of definite rooms. During this process, the spaces inside the dwelling change their use according to family needs and to the number of rooms available for the development of family life.

When the dwelling is built from scratch: the Fandiña case

When the family owner of a dwelling is the one that occupies a plot, the process begins with the demarcation of the piece of land where a small house will be built. The Fandiña family arrived to INTA during the neighbourhood's re-population stage "[We arrived to the neighbourhood] in 1986 more or less. That is a long time ago, there were very few houses. There were very few people, and the place was ugly... there were ditches, you see? Impossible to go out on rainy days". At the time, the family members were Rafael and Fandiña, and four of their five children.

During that year, before the whole family settled there, Rafael built the first part of the dwelling "he (Rafael) came on Saturdays and Sundays, I think... meanwhile, we put out for sale the small shanty (ranchito) we had [...]". In this way, the family built one room with an integrated kitchen and a toilet. "We built it little by little. Little by little we made the part where the toilet is now, and it was a room like a small square, about six by seven, it was very small". During this first stage, the dwelling "[...] was made with building materials but the roof was made of corrugated iron". Once the first stage of the building was finished, the family moved to the neighbourhood "[you all slept here?] Exactly. When one of us came in, it was walking over the others [...]"

Fandiña Plan, Barrio INTA, stage 1



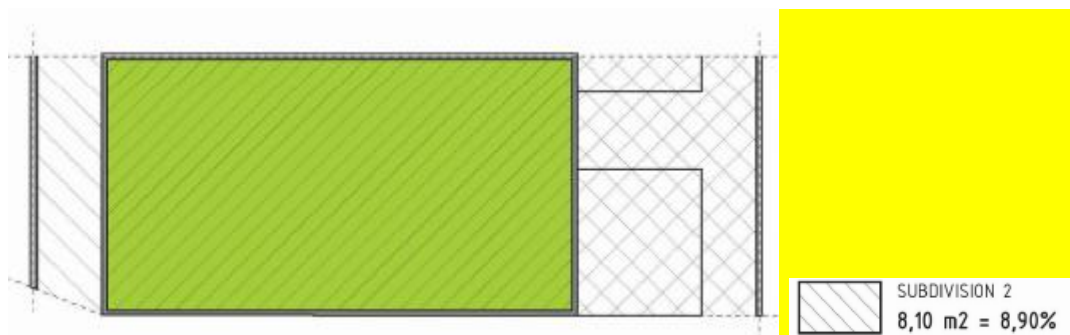
In 1987 the couple's fifth daughter was born. At the time, Rafael lost his job, *He was working and just after that we were left with nothing, because he was out of work and I [Fandiña] said to him, I had a little daughter, and I said: It can't be, I am going to look for a job [...]*. Four years later, in 1989, the family built an extra room, demolished the first toilet to enlarge the kitchen, and built a new toilet, "[...] we built a small room, here at the back and nothing more. It was a long little room, it was very low but it had windows and it was cool, in summer everybody was there because it was cooler".

Fandiña Plan, Barrio INTA, stage 2.



Towards 1996, during the neighbourhood's urbanisation process, the family subdivided part of the plot in order to gain access to a dwelling built next to the plot behind their own. During the same year they built another bedroom that the couple used during several years.

Fandiña Plan, Barrio INTA, subdivision 1



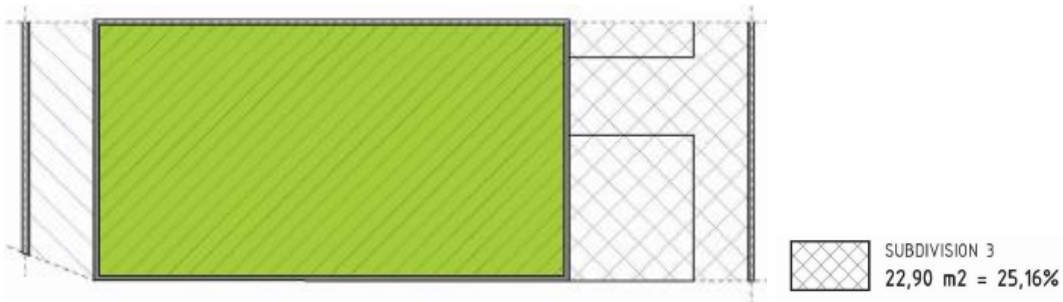
Fandiña Plan, Barrio INTA, stage 3.1



Towards 1998, their third daughter left the house to live with her couple. She came back to the family house three years later, in 2001, with her two daughters. In 2003, the family made a new subdivision, this time on top of their dwelling, in order to sell it. The product of the sale would

add resources to continue with the building “[...] the man asked them to sell and my husband said, ‘I want to sell because I need more money to buy building materials because if not we will never finish building’ ... and so...he sold that little room”.

Fandiña Plan, Barrio INTA, subdivision 2.



With the money they received from the sale plus “some more money that was coming in” the family began building the top floor. In this way, Rodolfo built in 2003 two rooms on the top floor.

Fandiña Plan, Barrio INTA, stage 3.2.



Thus, Noel and her two daughters took up one of the new rooms, and Fidel –the couple’s eldest son- the other one. In this case, Rafael and Fandiña decided to help Noel with her housing problem because “Now she is not working, I sent her to that enterprise and when she was going to work she had a terrible pain on her side and her appendix was removed. And they sent her replacement immediately because she was working in a bank and you know that banks don’t wait, and when she went back, they said no because they already had a replacement [...]”. The

room she uses with her two daughters “[...] *still needs a lot (to be done) inside, there is no plaster, no flooring like that [points at tiles]. It has a concrete floor [...]*”.

In 2007, Fidel left his parent’s house with his new family. Towards 2008, Fandiña tells us “[...] *when I was about to retire I bought some building materials on credit, and I did it to build*” a third room on the top floor, and a new kitchen. Up to now, these are all the improvements the family was able to carry out.

Fandiña Plan, Barrio INTA, stage 3.3.



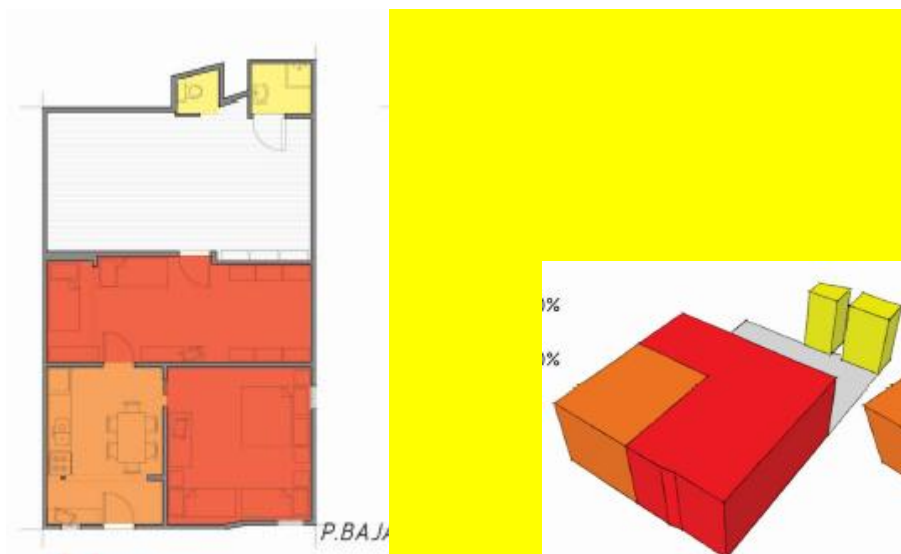
The dwelling’s building process began in 1985 and goes on until now; when the family arrived to the site it had six members (the couple and four of their five children), at present, they are eight (the founding couple, 4 of their 5 children and 2 grandchildren). Since then, and up to 2008, the family managed, “*little by little because the money we earned was not much, you see?*” with a great effort, to build the dwelling’s common-use spaces: living-dining room, toilet and kitchen, and one room for each one of their children. In the coming years they will be able to finish the process: plastering walls, fixing electrical fittings (that are now exposed), cover floors with tiles and painting.

When a dwelling is purchased and later on it is improved: the case of María.

The case of the María family accounts for the development of a dwelling’s enlargement and improvement process. In 1998 María and Martin arrived to Buenos Aires with three of their four children from the Province of Mendoza, moved by lack of employment in their own province. During the first few months they lived with one María’s sisters and her family in the Municipality of Lanús, until they decided to move because of family trouble. In this way they arrived to the Municipality of Avellaneda, where they rented a room in “*one of those corrugated iron houses, like this one here, upstairs [...]* all the floors were made of wood and the walls of corrugated iron [...] downstairs, you had to go down the stairs and there was the

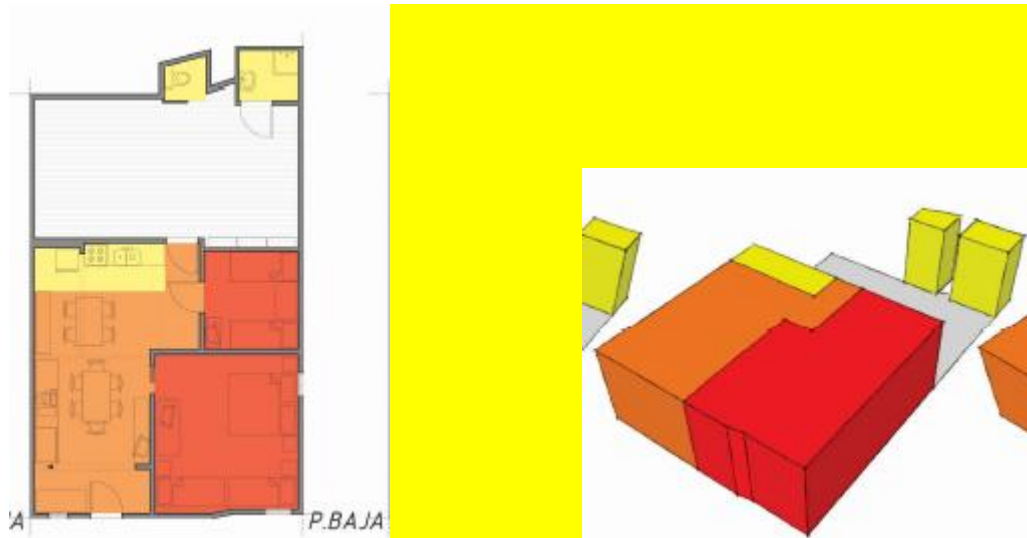
toilet. And other people lived downstairs, it was all divided up where people lived, so you had to keep a timetable to have a bath, you can't shout, you can't talk, nothing... it was despairing". In 2003, María says, "I met a woman from out here and she asked me if I would make up mi mind [to live here in Villa Tranquila], I said yes, [...]. And we came and looked, and then we began to pay little by little for the house, with some mistrust, but we paid". The dwelling they purchased is located in a consolidated area of the neighbourhood; to get there one has to go through a long passageway that begins next to the neighbourhood's main avenue and runs along its course up to the railway. At the time of purchase, the dwelling had two rooms, a kitchen-dining room, a toilet and an open back yard. According to María, the house "was a labyrinth", "[...] it did not have the shape of a house ¿you see? If someone knocked at the door, he could go wild knocking because I couldn't hear it".

María Plan, Villa Tranquila, original dwelling.



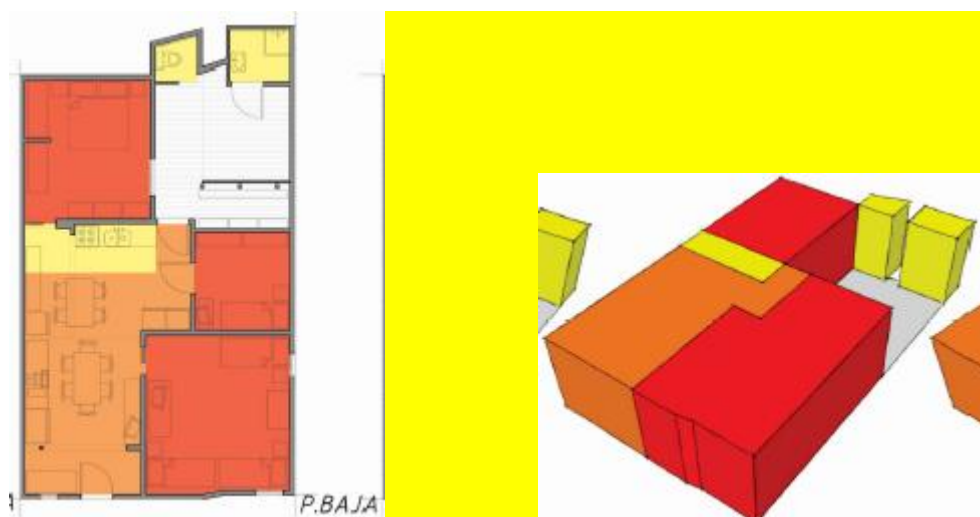
In this way, the following year the family began to carry out changes in the dwelling; this process was going to last until 2007. First, they tore down some dividing walls, "...because we, down there [in Mendoza], we are used to a kitchen and a long dining room, ¿you see? So, we began to break those [the dividing walls] when Guadalupe began her communion". By then, two of the four children slept in a small room, while the couple and the other two daughters used the largest room in the dwelling.

Maria Plan, Villa Tranquila, stage 2.



A few years later, the family built the third room in the dwelling “Because it was too complicated to be sleeping with the girls, and also because they were quite grown up, you see? Because for me, my best education is that everyone should have his privacy”. To do this, they used part of the back yard.

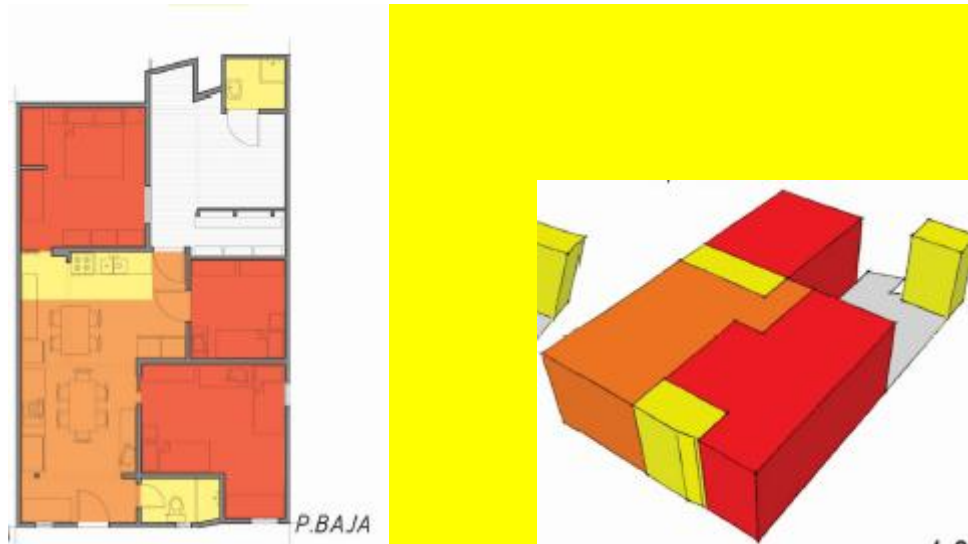
Maria Plan, Villa Tranquila, stage 3.



Towards 2007, Lucía, couple of the eldest son moved into the dwelling. Thus, the couple uses one of the rooms, the three daughters use the other, and Lucía and Pablo use the third one, sharing with the rest of the family the common-use facilities of the house. In 2008, the neighbours of the sector where María’s dwelling is located built, with the Municipality’s assistance, part of the sewerage. María and her family, then, decided to move the toilet to another part of the dwelling “...because we have the sewers, before when the cesspit was

blocked I called the woman and she came and unblocked it, and sometimes she couldn't come, so I said 'well... we take a bit from this room and put the toilet here'".

Maria Plan, Villa Tranquila, Moving the toilet.



In 2009, Agustín, couple of the second daughter, moved into the dwelling where he stayed for a few months. During that year, Pablo (the couple's oldest son) and Luciana bought another dwelling a few meters away from the family house and moved there.

As in previous cases, the reforms were self-built "... because we don't have enough to pay a bricklayer. So, we began to look and to ask, little by little. He, my husband, put that door, asking; as the saying goes 'asking you reach Rome' [did you both build or was it only him?] No, we both did it, and sometimes my son."

The family used savings from the family head's salary, "and whenever my husband earned a little, and another little, and another one..." plus some money she earned doing odd jobs "I am not a seamstress, but if clothes have to be fitted, I do it [...] I manage and I can tell you that sometimes we were tight and that saves us, because I earn and I save". The family has not been able to finish the process of improvements to the dwelling. In this sense, María said to us "...and now we are a Little stuck because the baby was born [her grandchild, daughter of Pablo and Lucía]. [...] So I have to finish the toilet and the outside toilet as a washing room and so I will make the yard a little bigger".

Checklist of preliminary ideas

- The price of plots in shantytowns and settlements is cheaper than the price registered in the formal real estate market, but in both markets localisation and accessibility play a relevant role in land value. Thus, neighbourhoods located nearer (or with better accessibility) to the conglomerate's main centre show higher prices than those further away (or with worse accessibility).

- The forms of access to a plot vary according to the neighbourhood's level of consolidation (whether its urban layout is or is not regularised).
- In the neighbourhoods located in the centre of the conglomerate, plot subdivision is combined with growth in the dwelling's height; whilst in peripheral areas verticalisation is less frequent.
- In general terms, second generations still face difficulties when trying to have their own dwelling. Within this framework, families tend to solve this problem through the cession of part of the plot or the dwelling. It often happens, therefore, that several generations live on the same plot.
- The process of building and transformation of dwellings is mediated by the economic resources that family may resort to. The objective [definite housing] depends on the size of the family. The uses given to the rooms vary along the whole process.

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