

Internship of urban and rural organizations from México and Nicaragua ends with enthusiasm

« We have never been alone; it's that we've had no time to meet »¹

Between the 9th and 16th of July, an internship organized by both the *Unión Popular Revolucionaria Emiliano Zapata* (UPREZ), member of the *Movimiento Urbano Popular* (MUP) and the Latin-American Office of Habitat International Coalition (HIC-AL) was realized in Mexico City and its neighborhoods.

On the occasion of this event, more than 40 members from 22 social organizations from urban and rural areas of 11 Mexican States (Aguascalientes, Baja California, Chiapas, Distrito Federal, Estado de Mexico, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Michoacan, Oaxaca, Veracruz y Yucatan) and from Nicaraguan housing cooperatives, assisted to theoretical and practical courses and visited various experiences related to urbanization and housing subjects in different places of the Mexican capital and of the Mexico Valley. They exchanged their knowledge during 8 days of intense conviviality, with the commitment to pass it on their organizations and communities.

Almost 30 speakers, academicians, professionals from various fields, social leaders and civil servants from federal, state and local instances linked to housing, urban development and habitat subjects, helped for the achievement of this internship.

The first day was dedicated to the presentation of the participants, to their expectations, to the detailed program and the characteristics of the work to do. Before starting the visits to various building rehabilitations and new housing constructions experiences for Mazahua's Indian communities, in the historic center of the city, the basic concepts of social management and production of habitat were exposed, in the perspective of HIC works at regional and international levels, and of Mexican social organizations that have been struggling for more than 20 years to made their right to housing and to the city real. This day ended with a presentation of the backgrounds, achievements and main limits of the Housing Improvement Program² of the Federal District, only large scale program in Mexico focused on social production of housing (it has permitted the realization of more than 100,000 actions during the last 5 years, in favor of low income sectors of the population).

The second day started with visits to a new housing experience for Otomies communities (winner of the National Award for Social Production of Housing in 2004), and to degrading housing situations, overcrowded places and situations of evictions in the Colonia Roma. Back to the conference room, the day continued with a presentation of the federal programs of housing funding, made by civil servants from the Housing National Commission³ (CONAVI), who were questioned on the lack of politics able to mix credits, savings and subsidies, to face the necessities of the majority of the population. This intense afternoon included presentations and debates about various revolving and cooperative funds experiences, based on social organization, responsibility and trust.

Wednesday morning was dedicated to the right to housing and right to the city subjects. The different national and international law frames related were studied, through their potentialities, limits and necessary changes. As for the Mexican case, the consecration of the right to housing in the 4th article of the Constitution was noted, even if this right is limited only to the families and not dedicated to all individuals, which would correspond to a universal conception of the Humans Rights. The presentation also insisted on the fact that the right to housing is not reduced to having four walls and a roof, its whole satisfaction (as

¹ Words of a Mexican participant during the collective evaluation session, realized Monday 16 at the HIC-AL office.

² Programa de Mejoramiento de Vivienda.

³ Comisión Nacional de Vivienda.

recognized by international instruments) needs the existence of aspects like the access to basic services (drinkable water and sewing, energy, transportation, garbage collect), to city equipments (education, health, entertainment), to working possibilities, a healthy and agreeable environment, that are necessary to have a decent life. The afternoon of this third day was dedicated to a visit of the Santa Fe area, rich transnational business center of the city, where also, for more than 30 years, is located the housing cooperative of Palo Alto. This visit was noticed by the participants, because of the warm welcoming of the members of the cooperative, and because the interesting story of their forms of organization, of their struggles and relevant achievements. They successfully defended their right to keep on living in this area, one of the most expensive in Latin America.

On Thursday morning, subjects more specifically linked with rural housing and the new housing law at national level were discussed. In that idea, the detailed inclusion of social production of housing in various chapters and articles of the law was underlined as a significant achievement, as well as the consecutive obligation for the government (at national, federated and local levels) to recognize it and to help it by the implementation of a system of tools (juridical, financial, administrative, etc.). Penalization process of irregular establishments were also discussed, and seen as a violation of the right to housing, through the example of the modifications that are being made to the Urban Development Code of Michoacan State. In the afternoon, interventions were concentrated on problems and alternatives related to risk prevention and mitigation from the perspective of the civil protection, and on the development, implementation and following of technologies in the different phases of a disaster, underlining that disasters always have an antropic component. Then, the participants had a meeting with Mexican Federal District authorities to learn the main characteristics of the social programs that are being underway, with particular details about the districts improvement program⁴, in various places of the town.

The next two days took place in the installations of the Center for Sustainable Development Incalli Ixahuicopa⁵ (www.guardianesdelosvolcanes.org) that depends on the Metropolitan Autonomous University, in a joint project with the organization Guardians of the Volcanoes, in the State of Mexico. The activities included talks and training in the agro ecological site and the forestall site School El Faro, where the participants were able to learn in detail urban agriculture, compost, bio fertilizing, fruit growing, organic garden production, water collecting, residual waters treatment and recycling techniques. In a brotherhood gesture between Nicaragua and Mexico, various trees were planted in the surrounded forest. In this place, they also shared a diagnostic of the environmental problems and social struggles of the communities of the area, linked with the uncontrolled growth of huge housing units and with the real estate speculation. They also assisted to a presentation of the international instruments about the right to water and the backgrounds, contents and advances of the national campaign to raise it to a constitutional level.

On Sunday, they were invited to participate to an UPREZ Assembly in Ixtapaluca, one of the neighbor areas of the Mexican capital where the development of massive housing construction in private hands can clearly be perceived. In this place, they shared points of view and various experiences about organization forms, collective work and decision taking. In the afternoon, they had the opportunity to have a guided visit of the plant nurseries, canals and *chinampas*⁶ of Xochimilco, in the south of the town, where they could eat on board of a typical *trajinera* (small boats made on wood and colorfully decorated).

At least, the last day, they had a visit to the Tlalpan Delegation, where they gathered with inhabitants of various localities of the area to share experiences of community programs

⁴ Programa de Mejoramiento Barrial.

⁵ Centro para la Sustentabilidad Incalli Ixahuicopa.

⁶ Traditional culture technique, permitting cultures on a lake.

to improve districts. This sharing was completed by a presentation showing the theoretical elements of the participative planning of urban development and housing politics. Some examples from other towns of the continent were also presented.

After the lunch, more than three hours were dedicated to the collective evaluation of the work done during the week, and to the sharing of proposals and commitments for the monitoring of the event (this will include a visit of the Mexican organizations to Nicaragua in the coming months). The participants declared themselves very happy and pleased with the event, and, even more important, various manifested: “we bring with us the optimistic feeling that yes, we can do a lot of things” and with “powerful living experiences”; “the people’s will; people that believe in their dreams and struggle to achieve them”. The event was concluded by the giving of documents and a CD with all the presentations, other documents and videos linked with the subjects studied during the internship. Moreover, the people coming from other regions of the Republic were given a box full of HIC and HIC-AL publications for their organizations, housing institutes and public universities of the respective states.

Soon, all the materials and photos linked to the event will be available at www.hic-al.org
More information and contact: hic-al@hic-al.org