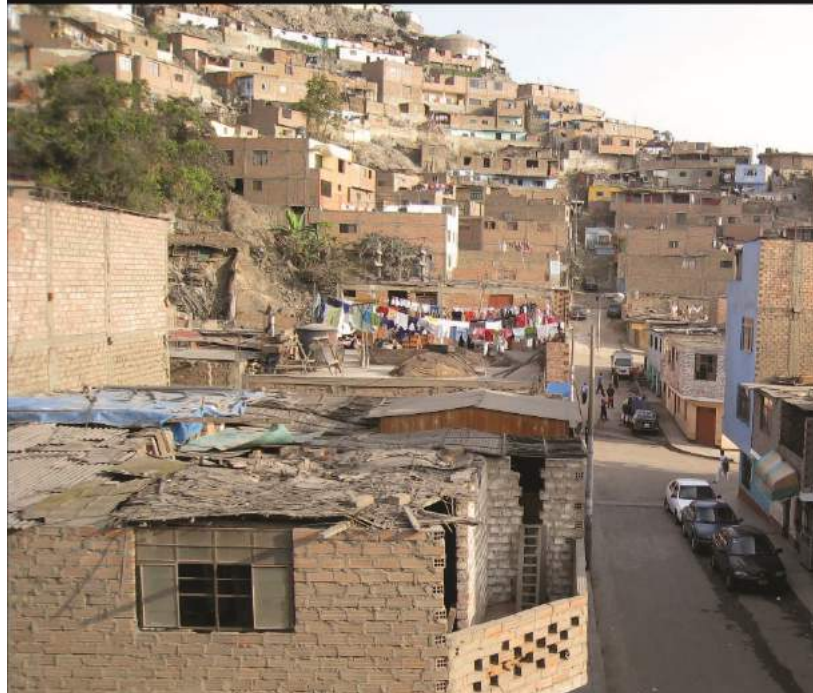
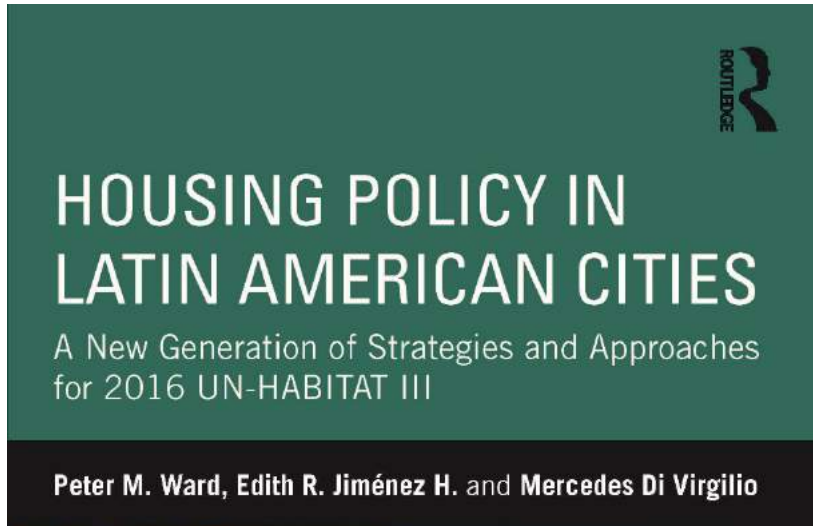



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## Políticas de vivienda en ciudades latinoamericanas. Una nueva generación de estrategias y enfoques para 2016 ONU-Hábitat III

*Peter M Ward , Edith R Jiménez , Mercedes Di Virgilio ,  
Angélica Camargo*

**POLÍTICAS DE VIVIENDA EN  
CIUDADES LATINOAMERICANAS**  
Una nueva generación de estrategias y enfoques para 2016  
ONU-Habitat III




Peter M. Ward  
Edith R. Jiménez Horta  
Mercedes Di Virgilio  
Angélica Camargo Sierra


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Hacia la década de 1960, la rápida urbanización en las regiones en desarrollo en América Latina, África y Asia, fue marcada por la expansión de asentamientos con población de bajos ingresos y que se desarrollaron informalmente. Para los años 2000 estos asentamientos constituyen usualmente entre el 20 y el 60 por ciento del área ocupada de las áreas metropolitanas y grandes ciudades. Además de las actividades de la red Latin American Housing Network (LAHN [www.lahn.utexas.org](http://www.lahn.utexas.org)), ha habido mínima atención directa a la enorme extensión de asentamientos informales formados hace 20 y hasta 40 años que hoy forman parte del anillo intermedio de las ciudades. En el marco de un proyecto coordinado y colaborativo de investigación, los autores y colaboradores ofrecen una perspectiva original en cuanto a los retos de densificación y rehabilitación que encaran actualmente los asentamientos irregulares en las ciudades latinoamericanas.

Investigadores, profesionales y expertos en temas de vivienda, política habitacional, investigadores en temas sociales, estudios comparados, desarrollo urbano, encontrarán este texto altamente significativo.

***This PDF contains the pre-publication version of the individual city chapter for this particular folder. See the Folder “Introductory Chapter and Bibliography” for background orientation and bibliography relating to this and other chapters.***

***For a published overview and summary of the spectrum of policies, see Peter M. Ward. 2015 "Housing rehab for consolidated informal settlements: A new policy agenda for 2016 UN-Habitat III", Habitat International, 50, 373-384 (Publications Section of this website)***

**Table of Contents**

*Index of Figures iii*

*Index of Tables v*

*List of Abbreviations vii*

*Preface and Acknowledgements x*

**Chapter 1.** Latin America’s “Innerburbs”: Towards a New Generation of Housing Policies for Low-Income Consolidated Self-help Settlements  
Peter M. Ward 1

**Chapter 2.**  
A Spectrum of Policies for Housing Rehab and Community  
Regeneration in the “Innerburbs”  
Peter M. Ward 24

**Chapter 3.**  
Opportunities and Challenges for Consolidated Informal Urbanization in  
the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara  
Edith R. Jiménez Huerta and Heriberto Cruz Solís 47

**Chapter 4.**  
The Challenge for Housing Rehab in Mexico City and Monterrey  
Peter M. Ward 73

**Chapter 5.**  
The Challenges of Consolidation in Precarious Settlements of Caribbean  
Cities: Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic  
Erika Denisse Grajeda 103

**Chapter 6.**  
The Consolidation of the City and Low-income settlements in  
Guatemala City  
Bryan Roberts 123

**Chapter 7.**  
New Approaches to Intervention in the Informally Settled Areas of Bogotá  
Angélica Camargo Sierra 148

**Chapter 8.**  
Rehab, “Los Aires” and Densification of Consolidated Settlements in

Lima, Peru  
Danielle M. Rojas and Peter M. Ward  
In collaboration with Olga Peek and Martha Lazarte Salinas 175

**Chapter 9.**  
Unique, or Just Different? Self-help, Social Housing and  
Rehab in Santiago, Chile  
Peter M. Ward  
In collaboration with Carolina Flores and Francisco Sabatini 205

**Chapter 10.**  
Residential Trajectories of the Older Irregular Settlements in the  
City of Montevideo  
Magdalena Marsiglia and María José Doyenart 226

**Chapter 11.**  
Transformations in the Originally Informal Consolidated Urban Areas of  
Metropolitan Buenos Aires  
María Mercedes Di Virgilio, María Soledad Arqueros Mejica, and  
Tomás Guevara 251

**Chapter 12.**  
Rental Markets and Housing Policies in Consolidated  
Informal Settlements  
Edith R. Jiménez Huerta and Angélica Camargo Sierra 280

**Chapter 13.**  
Urban Regeneration and Housing Rehabilitation in  
Latin America's Innerburbs  
Peter M. Ward, Edith Jiménez and Mercedes Di Virgilio 303

*Appendices to Chapter 2: Appendix Tables 2.1 – 2.4 326*

*Appendices to Chapter 4: Appendix Table 4.6 350*

*Bibliography 352*

*Editor Biographies and Author Affiliations 370*

## Chapter 11.

### **Transformations in the Originally Informal Consolidated Urban Areas of Metropolitan Buenos Aires**

**María Mercedes Di Virgilio  
María Soledad Arqueros Mejica  
Tomás Guevara**

The aim of this work is to explore the course of development of self-built housing in the “villas” and “settlements” of the Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires (*RMBA*). These processes are examined at different scales, namely transformations in the *barrio*, transformations on the lot and transformations within the household. The findings presented here are derived from research undertaken by the Latin American Housing Network (LAHN) that investigates processes of consolidation of self-built housing in informal settlements that have existed for 30 years or more.

The first section reconstructs the principal characteristics of the expansion of the *RMBA* and contextualizes the origin of informal urban settlements there. The next section describes some of the principal features of the various different informal settlements, and presents results obtained from the research conducted in Buenos Aires. A final section offers general housing policy implications based on our case study of rehabilitation in the consolidated *barrios* of the *RMBA*.

#### **URBANIZATION AND THE SELF-PRODUCTION OF HOUSING AMONG THE LOW-INCOME POPULATION OF THE RMBA**

The Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires (*RMBA*) constitutes one of the largest cities in Latin America. It consists of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, and the forty-three municipalities of the Province of Buenos Aires. The City of Buenos Aires is the central part of the Region, with the municipalities of its first and second rings forming the city’s suburban area<sup>1</sup>, while the areas in the third ring form the Region’s periphery.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The first ring of urbanization is made up of the municipalities of Avellaneda, Lanús, Lomas de Zamora, Quilmes, Morón, Hurlingham, Ituzaingó, Tres de Febrero, San Martín, San Isidro and Vicente López. The second ring is made up of Berazategui, Florencio Varela, Almirante Brown,

Defined in this way, the *RMBA* covers over 15 thousand square kilometers, with a population, according to the most recent census, of 14,935,402 inhabitants. Of these, 2,891,082 live in the City of Buenos Aires; 5,045,783 in the first ring; 4,864,499 in the second ring; and 2,134,038 in the third.

#### *Suburbanization in Buenos Aires, 1930-1990*

The urban development of the *RMBA* took place in three periods, each of them in response to a different socio-economic model. The first period lasted until the crisis of 1930 and was sustained by the agro-exports development model. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the city had undergone a rapid process of expansion. The second period of urban development in the Region began in 1930 and lasted until the 1970s. This period is distinguished by the model of industrialization through import substitution. During this time, the urbanized area expanded rapidly once again, with consolidation of the first ring, and incipient growth of the second ring.

An active force in the suburbanization of the *RMBA* came from the *loteos populares*. These were subdivisions of rural land in peripheral areas of the ongoing urbanization. The division and sale of lots in the *loteos populares* were undertaken by the real estate sector, while the state limited itself to providing the infrastructure for services and collective social facilities. Many families were able to complete the purchase of a lot in staggered payments, and then self-built their homes. However, this mechanism for gaining access to urban land was not without conflict. In some cases the provision of urban and service infrastructure was made long after the occupation by families of their lots. Also, in some cases the titling of the properties in the names of their owners was never effected.

It was during this period that the so-called “*villas miserias*” (or simply “villas,” see below) were first formed, both in the central city and in the municipalities of the first ring or belt (*cordón*). Their formation and consolidation were driven by sectors for which it was impossible to resolve the need for land and housing through market

---

Esteban Echeverría, Ezeiza, La Matanza, Merlo, Moreno, San Miguel, José C. Paz, Malvinas Argentinas, San Fernando and Tigre.

<sup>2</sup>The third ring contains Ensenada, Berisso, La Plata, Brandsen, San Vicente, Presidente Perón, Cañuelas, Marcos Paz, General Las Heras, General Rodríguez, Luján, Mercedes, Navarro, Lobos, Pilar, Escobar, Campana, Exaltación de la Cruz and Zárate.

mechanisms. In this context, these sectors impelled land occupation by individual family aggregation on publicly or privately owned lots. The layout of the *barrios* is different from the traditional pattern, and they show deficiencies in access to basic infrastructure and urban facilities (see Table 11.1). The phenomenon of these *villas* has persisted and like the rest of the urban fabric, they have undergone extension, consolidation and densification.

The third period of expansion of the urban area occurred under the neoliberal model, which began to be applied in Argentina halfway through the 1970s. During this time the patterns of structuring urban land were profoundly modified. First, the Decree-law 8912 of 1977, put a final stop to the *loteos populares* in so far as it prohibited the sale of lots without urban and service infrastructure. Next, the dictatorship<sup>3</sup> –as well as later governments – enacted a policy of building highways that completely changed the urban structure and the connections between the different parts of the Region. Along with the highways the urban area expanded into the *partidos* of the third ring, and into the vacant areas of the municipalities in the first and second rings as well. This process, which spurred a dramatic increase in the number of gated communities, was driven by real estate developers and by upper-middle and upper-income sectors who adopted the new urbanized areas as permanent residences or weekend homes. This phenomenon was called the “suburbanization of the elites,” and is the opposite of the process of the suburbanization of the popular sectors that was typical from the 1940s to the 1970s (Torres 2001).

At the same time the dictatorship violently eradicated the *villas* of the city, and repealed the rent law (*ley alquileres*) that had established a set of guarantees to tenants with respect to prices and conditions of access.<sup>4</sup> These measures – along with the disarticulation of the *loteos populares* – created even more obstacles for the low-income

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<sup>3</sup> In 1976 a military coup removed the constitutional government and installed a ferocious and bloody dictatorship of Argentina. This lasted until 1983, when democracy was restored by the pressure and outcry of civil society.

<sup>4</sup> The policy of eradicating the *villas* began in the middle of the 1950s during the *de facto* self-proclaimed government of “Revolución Libertadora”. However, the military dictatorship of 1976-1983 executed the most effective and violent eradication of *villas* in the history of the city. At that time 82.69% of the population that had been living in the *villas* before 1976, were dislodged (Arqueros and Canestraro, 2010). Nevertheless, once democracy had been restored, many of these *barrios* started to be repopulated. Others disappeared as the lands on which they were built were used for the development of public and private projects.

and even lower-middle-income sectors to have access to the city. In this context, new *villas* began to form in the Region (i.e. within the conurbation), and settlements (*asentamientos*) formed mainly in the second ring where there was more vacant land (see Table 11.1). The *asentamientos* are *barrios* created through occupation of vacant land, generally publicly owned, in interstitial areas of the *partidos* of the *Conurbano Bonaerense* (Buenos Aires conurbation). The *asentamientos* are characteristically collectively organized. The occupation of the lots was planned in advance, and was carried out respecting current urban regulations with regard to: minimum lot sizes, the layout of the streets, and the disposition of spaces for the installation of collective facilities and other services (Merklen, 2002).

To complete the picture of this low-income or “popular” habitat, since 2003 the National Government has been applying a set of programs aimed at the construction of social housing. In this context a large number of social housing *barrios* were built and most of them were located in peripheral areas of the Region, especially in the second and third rings. In sum, the growth of the region has been driven fundamentally by three forces: 1) popular sectors, who carry out new occupations of vacant land or densify existing informal urbanizations, 2) real estate sectors who promote the development of gated urbanizations and 3) State interventions that build social housing.

### **CONSOLIDATED SETTLEMENTS: THE VILLAS, ASENTAMIENTOS, AND BARRIOS THAT ORIGINATED WITH LOTEOS POPULARES**

At present, the Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires presents four main types of settlement types, each of them with its own particular characteristics (see Table 11.1 below).

<b>Settlement type</b>	Villas	<i>Asentamientos</i> (settlements)	<i>Loteos populares</i>	New urban settlements ( <i>Nuevos Asentamientos Urbanos</i> , NAUs). Recently developed <i>villas</i> in the City of Buenos Aires
<b>Origins</b>	<i>Villas</i> first developed in the 1930s but reached their peak in the 1940s. The first <i>villa</i> was developed in Puerto Nuevo (Villa Esperanza).	The first <i>asentamientos</i> date from the 1980s.	The <i>loteos populares</i> reach their peak in 1940s-1960s.	The first NAU originated in the 1970s, but NAUs reached their peak in the 1990s – 2000s.
<b>Location</b>	Located all over the <i>RMBA</i>	Developed in municipalities of the <i>RMBA</i>	Developed in municipalities of the <i>RMBA</i>	Located all over the <i>RMBA</i>
<b>Relation to the urban fabric</b>	Do not conform to the traditional urban block structure.	Conform to traditional pattern of blocks	Conform to traditional pattern of blocks	Do not conform to the traditional urban block structure.

Table 11.1. Types of popular housing on vacant land of the *RMBA*

#### *Villas* and *Nuevos Asentamientos Urbanos*

The “*villas miserias*” are settlements formed in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s in the City of Buenos Aires and the municipalities of the first and second rings of the Region (see Figure 11.1). These are densely populated neighborhoods (*barrios*) that may cover large geographical areas. Land occupation took place through processes of individual-family aggregation, without previous planning. The *villas* are characterized by having an irregular urban fabric and a dense clustering of dwellings. The houses were self-built by the inhabitants of the *barrios*. They are generally small in size and households show significant levels of overcrowding.

In recent decades the properties in the *villas* started to become the object of market transactions that are not officially recognized, such as the purchase and sale of the house, or of a part of it, and the renting of rooms or whole homes. In this context, the buildings have undergone processes of subdivision and vertical extension.



In the City of Buenos Aires settlement types that are similar to *villas* but formed more recently are labeled by the State authorities as *Nuevos Asentamientos Urbanos (NAUs)*. Although these *barrios* have the same features as the traditional *villas*, they have not been included in settlement policy. In fact, public intervention in the NAUs oscillates between tolerance and forcible removal.

#### *Loteos populares and informal settlements*

A third type of *barrio* in the RMBA takes its name from the *loteos populares* policy out of which it originated with the approval of the state. These settlements are adapted to fit prevailing regulations and their inhabitants have usually purchased their lots. However, in many cases residents do not have the title to the property, which can be the source of conflicts over possession or transmission to the next generation. Some of these *barrios* do not yet have complete service infrastructure or all the community facilities, and those that have are often deficient. Even those that were formal from the outset comprise low-quality habitats today.

A fourth settlement type is referred to simply as *asentamientos informales*, or informal settlements. These *barrios* originated from organized occupations, planned in advance, of vacant land in the municipalities of the Region (see Figure 11.1). For the most part, the size of the lots, the layout of the streets, the width of the sidewalks and the spaces for placing collective facilities obey the prevailing urban regulations. Generally the houses are self-built, but their size tends to be bigger than properties in the *villas* and they have greater possibilities for expansion or adaptation to family needs. Urban and service infrastructure was put in after the *barrio* had formed, sometimes through State initiative and sometimes through self-organization by the community. In these settlements internal subdivisions of lots is also common, either for sale or to help solve the accommodation problems of other family members.

Public policies for the *asentamientos* have generally been directed at the provision of urban and service infrastructure. There have also been interventions directed at regularizing ownership of the lots, but these have been less frequent. It is worth mentioning that both in the informal settlements and in the *barrios* that originated in the context of the *loteos populares*, the state tends to act in a fragmentary way, dealing with

one case at a time, and not formulating or applying a unified policy as usually occurs in other countries in Latin America (Di Virgilio, Arqueros y Guevara, 2012d).

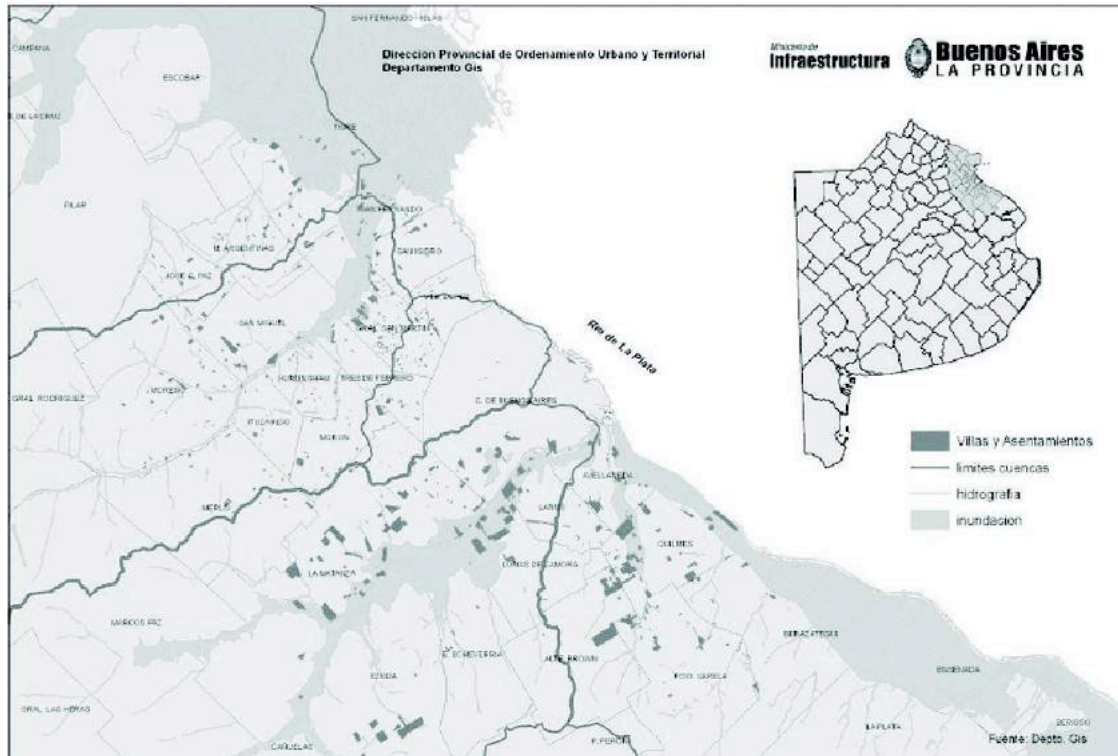


Figure 11.1. Villas and Asentamientos of the Región Metropolitana de Buenos Aires. Source: Dirección Provincial de Ordenamiento Urbano y Territorial.

## BUENOS AIRES “INNERBURBS”

For the reasons mentioned above, and those explained in the first chapter of this book, Buenos Aires innerburbs do not fit the model presented in the introduction and detailed in the other case study cities. This is mainly due to the particular dynamics of the suburbanization of the city that took place in from 1930-1940 and the marked differences between the *villas*, located in interstitial zones of the first ring of the central city, and the settlements that originated with the *loteos populares*, which appear in the first, second, and third rings of urbanization. The location of the last two types of urbanization is generally more on the periphery than the other consolidated settlements that are considered in this book. However the timing of their development and the stages assumed by their consolidation, allow comparisons to be made.

Figure 11.1 shows the distribution of the *villas* and the *asentamientos* in the Region, and Figure 11.2 shows the first and second rings of the urban area as well as the location of the cases chosen for this research. Although the *RMBA* is formed in three rings, we have left the third ring out, since the object of study of the LAHN research is settlements by low-income sectors located in the first suburbs of the Region.

Nevertheless, in Buenos Aires there is far less consistency and overlap between the rings of suburbs and informal settlements. This is because the process outlined above whereby the *loteos populares* were able to expand earlier across the metropolis and with lower levels of informality and irregularity. It was only when the mechanism of the *loteos populares* was exhausted in the 1970s (for economic and political reasons), that the growing demand for urban space generated the more widespread emergence of informal settlements that filled-in the interstitial urban areas that had not previously been occupied by the *loteos populares*, and which had not been taken over by the newer gated communities. Thus one began to see smaller developments and a less homogeneous consolidation of informal settlements in which self-building by low-income populations was the norm.

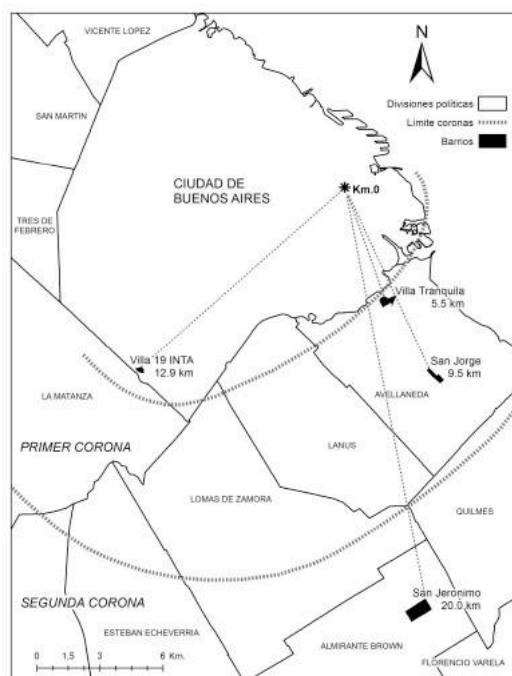


Figure 11.2. Location of Barrio INTA (Villa 19) and Villa Tranquila, and of the *asentamientos* San Jorge and San Gerónimo in the rings of the *RMBA*. Source: Di Virgilio, Arqueros and Guevara (2012a).

## CHARACTERIZATION OF THE *VILLAS* AND *ASENTAMIENTOS* STUDY SITES

The different features of the several types of popular housing can be clearly observed in the cases studied here: Barrio INTA (Villa 19) and Villa Tranquila are *villas* that emerged from the migration that took place in the context of import substitution from the 1940s to the 1970s; whereas San Jorge and San Gerónimo are informal settlements in the first and second rings, distinguished by their regular layout.

The data presented in this chapter derive from questionnaires applied in 2009 in these four settlements. The sample consisted of 400 cases selected at random. The questionnaires were applied to owners of the dwellings (with or without property titles). Later, six of the households surveyed were chosen for further in-depth study. With these in-depth cases it was possible to address the intersection between the histories of the households, and the evolution of their dwellings over time, and this allowed us to gain a better understanding of the nature and the function of the space of the self-built dwellings in *villas* and *asentamientos*.

### *The characteristics of the villas and asentamientos chosen*

#### Barrio INTA (Villa 19)

This housing settlement is located in the southwest section of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, in a *barrio* called Villa Lugano. This *barrio* had been eradicated during the most recent military dictatorship, but half way through the 1980s, new families and some of the original residents began to re-populate the area. During the early 1990s, the *barrio* was included in a government program designed to improve conditions of habitation and to transfer ownership to the inhabitants. It was in this context that a number of interventions were developed in order to provide the *barrio* with the infrastructure of basic urban services (water, drainage, electricity) and with urban infrastructure (paving and public lighting). During the following decade, real estate transactions became more active, accompanied by processes of densification, subdivision of lots, and vertical extension of buildings. According to figures from the 2001 Census (*Censo de Población y Vivienda*) there were 350 dwellings in Barrio INTA (Villa 19) accommodating 400 households and 1,650 inhabitants. By the end of the decade, the number of inhabitants had risen to 4,010.

### Villa Tranquila.

This settlement is located close to the center of the Avellaneda *partido*, in the first belt of the *RMBA*. It has a compact fabric with an internal structure of passages, along which water and electricity are precariously distributed. Only some of the streets around the *barrio* and the main road are paved. At the time of writing, occupations continue to be a mechanism for gaining access to land in Villa Tranquila. These are concentrated in interstitial sectors and in zones on the edge, while in the more consolidated sectors the predominant mechanisms are the purchase and sale of dwellings, and the cession and/or subdivision of lots. According to figures from the *Censo de Población y Vivienda* for 2001, there were 1,000 dwellings in Villa Tranquila, accommodating 1,150 households and 4,550 inhabitants. In the year 2004, the municipality conducted a new survey that showed a significant increase in the resident population: 7,039 people belonging to 1,917 families.<sup>5</sup>

### The Barrio San Jorge

This is also located in the *partido* of Avellaneda, in the same area as the Villa Domínico. The *barrio* is completely incorporated within the central urban fabric. It started in 1985 with an organized land invasion. From the start of the occupation the neighbors tried to respect local authority urban development norms. After the organized occupation of lots, the only mechanisms for gaining access to the habitat were purchase – accompanied in this case by further subdivision and informal concessions, as the *barrio* had no vacant lots, and the neighbors opposed any occupation of areas destined for streets and collective facilities. The only occupation of lots that occurred after the original invasion took place in recently years on a parcel of land in the center of the *barrio*, where a factory site had originally been earmarked. According the census of 2001, the *barrio* had 450 dwellings and 500 households. The total population of the *barrio* at that time was 1,800 inhabitants.

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<sup>5</sup> The increase in population may be a response to two dynamics: first, to the recent political-institutional crisis that Argentina went through between 2001 and 2002; or second, to the expectations created by the local government with the announcement and application of their urbanization program, *Programa de Urbanización de Villa Tranquila*.

### The asentamiento of San Gerónimo

San Gerónimo is located on peripheral land in the second metropolitan belt, in the *partido* of Almirante Brown. The land, originally rural, had been donated to the Catholic Church by the woman who owned it, and the Church gradually sold lots to families but without providing the residents with formal titles. In the 1970s the lots were transferred to the Esdeva Cultural Association (*Asociación Cultural Esdeva*), which would henceforth be in charge of dividing the lots and assigning families. The layout of the *barrio* consisted of planned streets and green spaces, following an urbanization strategy that would respect the official norms with respect to the layout and size of the lots. According to figures from the census of population, households and dwellings conducted in 2001, the *barrio* had 1,300 dwellings accommodating 1,450 households. The total population of the *barrio* at that time was 6,450.

#### *Findings from the questionnaires applied in the villas and asentamientos chosen*

In the *barrios* studied, we found that 58.75% of households obtained their property through purchase. The rest obtained it through other mechanisms including inheritance from a family member (14.36%) and occupation of the lot (26.89%). It should be noted that in these urbanizations the purchase of the lot or of the house does not imply obtaining a title to the property: only 18.2% of those who acquired their property did so with title. Furthermore, when the data were analyzed by case study settlements it became apparent that this figure was much lower in the *villas*.

With respect to the number of years spent living in the *barrios*, the study allows us to note that on average the households have been on the same lot for 18 years, suggesting a great degree of residential stability among the families living there. Most stability appears in San Gerónimo where residents have been in the *barrio* for an average of 22 years. This relative permanence may be explained by the relative security of ownership of the land, which because it was on the periphery and had been the property of the Church, was not subject to demands for expulsion. Villa Tranquila is the opposite; an average residency of 13.6 conceals the fact that different “waves” of settlement occurred in the *barrio*.<sup>6</sup> San Jorge and Barrio INTA (Villa 19) each show an average

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<sup>6</sup> This situation is clearly seen when the average number of years spent in the *barrio* by young heads of the household is compared to the figure for heads of households over 40 years old.

residence of 17 years, which also suggests a stable population living in the *barrio* since it started – that is since the creation of San Jorge in 1985 and the re-population of Villa 19 after the end of the dictatorship.

The data compiled for the study allow us to observe that the *villas*<sup>7</sup> are more densely occupied than the *asentamientos*. Among the settlements surveyed it is notable that Villa Tranquila shows the lowest density of dwellings per lot (with 1.1 dwellings per lot versus 1.2 and 1.3 in San Gerónimo and San Jorge respectively); however, it is worth pointing out, this *barrio* also has the smallest average lot size (117 sq. meters), and the average household size is highest.<sup>8</sup> Thus, although the lot density (lot occupancy) is lower, this is because numerous very small lots are the result of previous internal lot subdivisions.

Settlement	San Gerónimo	San Jorge	Villa Tranquila	Barrio INTA
Number of owner households included in survey	97	65	98	101
Number of houses	133	80	108	134
Number of households	135	81	111	151
Percent of lots with one dwelling	71	85	93	75
Percent of households living on the same lot continuously since arrival	28.5	67.3	42.9	7.7
Average number of years living on lot	22	17	14	17
Percent who purchased the lot	51.5	77.8	50.0	62.2
Average lot size (square meters)	274	171	117	106
Percent whose lot size has changed	1.1	13.1	4.3	13.8
Average price paid for the lot (US \$)	9,407	13,069	5,521	6,807
Average age of original owner	55	50	46	47

While the average number of years of residence is not more than 5 for young adults, for the older owners the figure is above 25.

<sup>7</sup> Due to the fact that the *villas* grew incrementally (“*por gotera*” or literally drop by drop), the average size of the lots in them is smaller, and an intense use of the land in general is generally only possible through extensions upwards. In the *asentamientos*, densification through horizontal subdivision of the lot is more frequent.

<sup>8</sup> In San Jorge the average area of lots is 194 sq. meters and in San Gerónimo it is 294 sq. meters. Further, the average size of households in Villa Tranquila is of 4.5 members, while it is 4.4 in San Gerónimo and 3.9 in San Jorge.

Percent of lots with one family	78.1	82.5	92.9	74.7
Percent of lots with one dwelling	71.9	79.4	92.9	74.7
Percent of lots without bathroom	4.2	1.6	3.1	7.1
Percent of lots with one bathroom	74.0	65.1	80.6	59.6
Percent of lots with more than one bathroom	21.9	33.3	16.3	33.3
Percent of lots with overcrowding	57.5	49.2	39.2	46.7
Percent with consolidated building	35.3	41.8	30.7	43.2
Percent with partially consolidated building	48.5	45.5	43.2	38.3
Percent with building not consolidated	16.2	12.7	26.1	18.5
Percent who purchased property with documents	27.5	22.2	15.9	4.4
Percent with regularized lot	37.4	67.2	15.5	5.4

*Table 11.2. Characteristics of households residing in popular settlements of the RMBA, 2008. Source: Di Virgilio, Arqueros and Guevara (2012b), (see also LAHN [www.lahn.utexas.org](http://www.lahn.utexas.org) Excel Matrix).*

In this context, the main housing strategy for the great majority of families has been that of gradually improving their situation through the investment of cash and labor in their own lot and dwelling. Combining the data on dwelling characteristics and problems, we have elaborated a synthetic index to place homes into one of three categories (consolidated, partially consolidated, and unconsolidated). Our findings show that 37.3% of the dwellings surveyed show significant levels of consolidation, 43.5% may be considered partially consolidated, and some 19.2% remain unconsolidated. Some differences emerge across the different *barrios*: for example, Villa Tranquila has the highest rate of unconsolidated dwellings (26.1%), while San Jorge and Barrio INTA (Villa 19) have 41.8% and 43.2%, respectively, of their dwellings consolidated.



## THE DWELLING, THE HOUSEHOLD AND THE LIFE OF FAMILIES LIVING IN CONSOLIDATED SETTLEMENTS

As previously mentioned, the research methodology developed by the LAHN included in-depth cases studies with the goal of linking transformations in the *barrios* to transformations on the lot and in the dwelling. Within this framework, and adopting a family history focus, we started our qualitative work by documenting the internal dynamics of the families: the formation of the family nucleus, their arrival in the *barrio*, the acquisition of the lot or the dwelling, the birth of children, changes and continuities in the labor situation of the adult members, migration and intra-city mobilities. We then attempted to understand how this related to transformations of the dwelling and of the *barrio*.

The reconstruction of family histories and of the changes made to the homes showed that arriving in the *barrio* was part of a long road towards finding a place to settle in the city. The families we interviewed were often of two types: 1) families who came to the urban area from different provinces or countries of origin, these being the *first generation* of the family to live in the city; and 2) families whose members were born in the settlement or arrived as children with their parents, these making up the *second generation* to live in the city.

The *first generation* families reported that before they came to the *barrio*, they had lived in other municipalities of the *RMBA*. In this sense, the residential displacements of the first generation show a larger territorial range in their trajectories and their mobility than those of the second generation. For example, before establishing permanent residence in Barrio INTA (Villa 19), the family of Fátima lived in Isidro Casanova, in the *partido* of La Matanza. In contrast, the second-generation families tend to show less mobility as they try to stay in the same area as their original families, either by setting up in the same *barrio* or in a nearby *barrio* in the same municipality. In all cases, the families were still at the family building stage of the life cycle when they arrived, usually comprising a couple with one or more children.

*Subdivision and cession of the lots: another form of access to land in consolidated villas and asentamientos*

For those families who were not included in the original land occupation (whether this was done collectively or by individual families), concessions are an important mechanism to which families have had recourse in order to resolve the housing problems of members of the second generation. Generally, this process is accompanied by subdivision of the original lot.

An important feature of self-built housing is that it provides access to home ownership. This occurs both in those cases where the dwelling is built entirely by the family, as well as in those cases where homes are acquired through informal purchase (outside the official market) after which the buyers use their own resources to make extensions and improvements (Cravino, 2006). However, the final objective, the ideal of a definitive home, seems to be determined by the size of the families and the needs they identify for comfort and privacy.

From our analysis of the cases we were able to identify three stages of development of the dwelling. At the outset families generally build one room with a bathroom and kitchen. Later they advance in the construction of the common spaces of the dwelling (a living room/dining room, for example). The cycle comes to a close with the construction of the final rooms. During this process, the use of rooms changes in line with the needs of the families, the availability of rooms within the family cycle and the incorporation of new members or the moving out of others.

*Processes of self-building in the villas*

The case of the Fernández family

The case of the Fernández family shows clearly the correspondence between the self-building of the dwelling and the dynamics of the family and of the household. It also shows what takes place when the family arrives in a *villa* that is in process of formation, and participates in occupying lots and consolidating the *barrio*.

The Fernández family arrived in Villa 19 in 1985 during the repopulation of the *barrio* (after it had been eradicated in 1977 during the military dictatorship). They came from a *villa* in Isidro Casanova – in the *partido* of La Matanza – where they lived “all cramped

up and on top of each other.” By then the family consisted of Ramiro and Fátima, and four of the five children (see Figure 11.3).

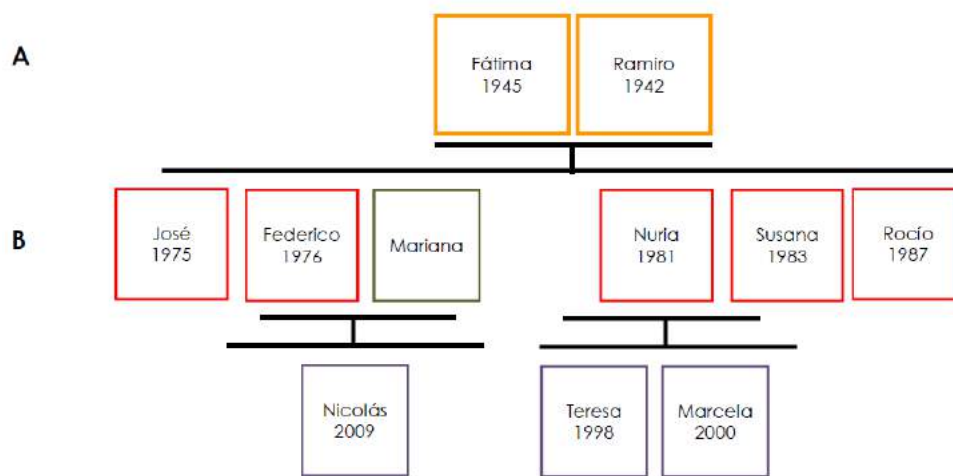


Figure 11.3. Example of the family tree of the Fernández family, 2012, designed as part of the in-depth case studies

In 1985, Ramiro began to build the first part of the dwelling, which consisted of a single room with a kitchen and a bathroom attached (see Figure 11.4). During construction the only person to inhabit the lot was Ramiro. The rest of the family moved into the *barrio* in 1986, once the first stage of the building had been completed. In 1987 the family’s fifth child, Rocío, was born. For some years Ramiro was left without a job, so Fátima began working. In 1989, with the savings from her employment, the family built another room, demolished the first bathroom of the house in order to make the kitchen bigger, and built a new bathroom. Thus the couple was able to have a bedroom of their own. The rest of the family continued to sleep in the original room, where everyday household activities were also conducted (see Figure 11.5).

In 1996, during the process of re-urbanization in the *barrio*, the family subdivided the lot and ceded it with the aim of providing easier access to the main road from a neighboring house, located in their back yard.<sup>9</sup> In the same year they built another bedroom. Thus some of the couple’s children were able to have a bedroom of their own, while the others continued to sleep in the original room (see Figure 11.6). Two years

<sup>9</sup> It is common in the *villas* for dwellings within street blocks not to have access to the public road, so that residents have to cross the lots of other families in order to reach the street. This is due to the type of urbanization of the *villas*, where the dwellings tend to tightly cluster on the land.

later, in 1998, the couple's third child, Nuria (now an adult), left the house and went to live with her spouse. However, she came back to the family dwelling in 2001 with her own two daughters, after ending that relationship. The Fernández family continued extending the house so Nuria and her two daughters could have a space of their own.

In 2003, the family subdivided and sold a part of their dwelling with the aim of obtaining cash that would allow them to continue with the building and consolidation of their home. With money from the sale and “any other money coming in” (*la plata que iba entrando*), the Fernández were able to start the construction of two rooms on a second floor (see Figure 11.7). The small size of the lots in the villas limits the horizontal expansion of the dwellings, so any significant extension usually requires building upwards.

Nuria and her two daughters occupied one of the new rooms and Federico – the eldest child of the marriage – the second one. This extension allowed the members of the family to be better distributed across the rooms, leaving the communal spaces for everyday household activities. This shows another characteristic of self-building in the *villas*: the need to create new space in order to secure privacy and intimacy for members of the family. Thus investing in building new rooms is often the priority and consolidating or finishing out the interiors often only happens later.

In 2007, Federico formed his own family and left the home of his parents. In 2008, after receiving a financial credit the Fernández family constructed a third room on the first floor. This allowed them to use the one of the downstairs rooms to extend the kitchen, and the living room / dining room of the dwelling. These were the last building changes made by the Fernández family to their dwelling (see Figure 11.8).

Case 1. Familia Fernández, Barrio INTA (Villa 19). Source: Di Virgilio, Arqueros and Guevara (2012b).

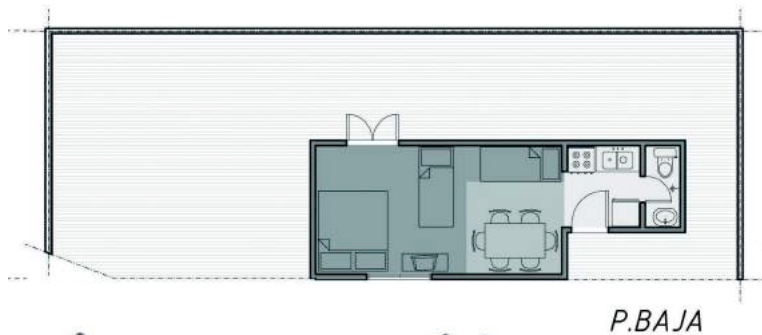


Figure 11.4. Plan 1: The original dwelling, 1985. The family completed the first stage of building the house, with a bathroom and a kitchen-diner (marked in light grey) and a single room that was used as a bedroom (dark grey) and living room (medium grey).

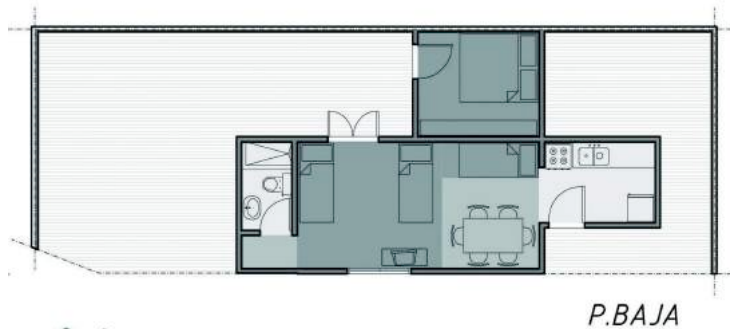


Figure 11.5 Plan 2: Extension and refunctioning of the dwelling, 1989. The family has extended the dwelling and recast the rooms built previously. The kitchen-diner has been extended and a new bathroom built (in light grey). They have built another bedroom (dark grey). The original room of the dwelling continues to be used as a bedroom (dark grey) and living room (medium grey).



Figure 11.6. Plan 3: Subdivision and concession of part of the lot, 1996. The family have subdivided part of their lot and concession it to a neighboring family. Also, they built another bedroom (dark grey).

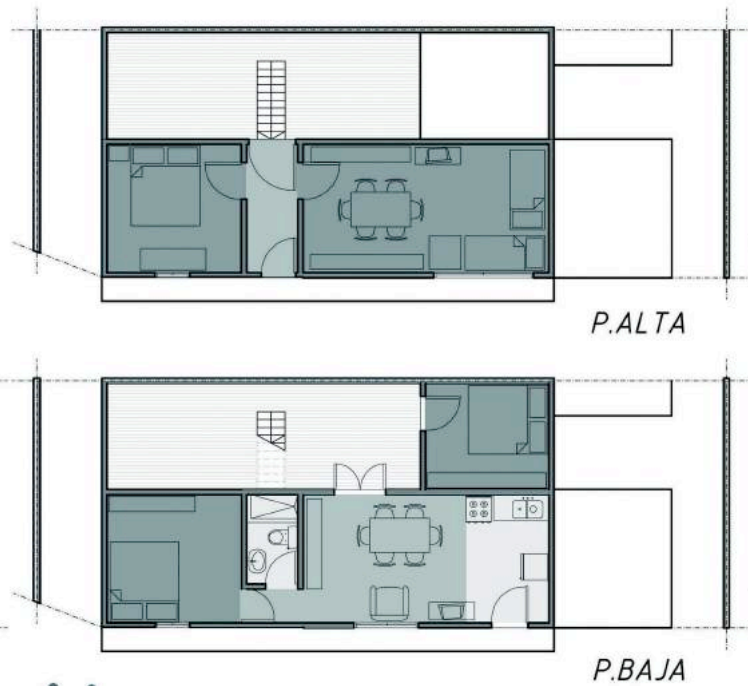


Figure 11.7. Plan 4: Extension of the dwelling on the ground and vertically, 2003. The Fernández have made another subdivision, this time of the dwelling itself. The sale of a part of the building allowed them to obtain money to make an extension. They built two new rooms on the first floor (top). They moved the kitchen (light grey) to the dining room (medium grey), which ceased to be used as a bedroom (bottom).

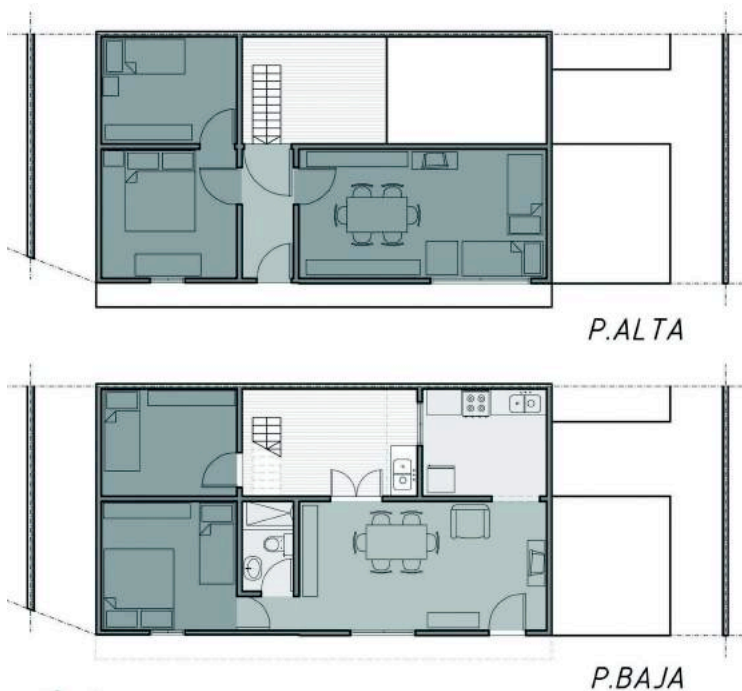
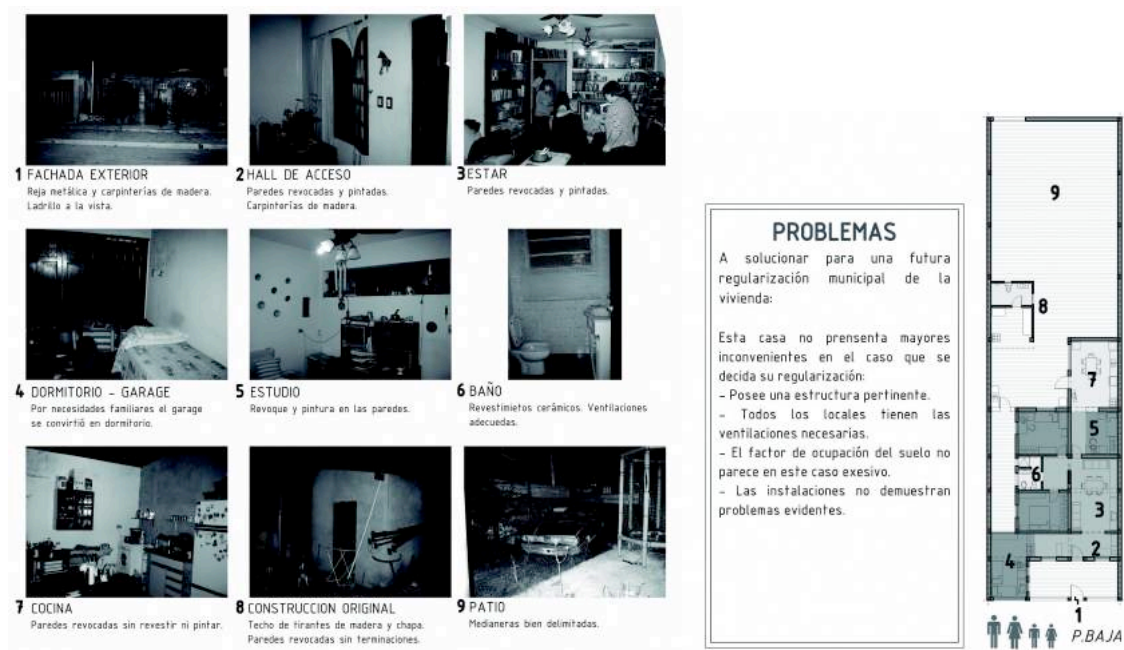


Figure 11.8. Plan 5: Extension of the first floor and recasting of the ground floor (bottom), 2008. The Fernández family replaced one of the rooms on the ground floor with the kitchen and built a new bedroom on the first floor (top)



Key to Photos	
1	Outside wall - Paint and plaster finishings. Balcony without rails.
2	Living/dining room - Paint and plaster finishings. Roof of concrete girders.
3	Kitchen - Plaster finish without paint.
4	Bathroom - Tile finishing. Hot water from electricity.
5	Patio - Wall of hollow blocks and ordinary brick towards the kitchen.
6	Patio - Stairs comprise a very steep metal staircase.
7	First floor - Stairs steeply, narrow, deep and difficult to climb safely.
8	Bedroom 1 - <i>Ladrillo</i> walls, unplastered. Exposed electric wiring.
9	Bedroom 2 - Roof of wooden tie beams and corrugated iron sheeting. Little ventilation.
Problems remaining	
A	Stairs - The staircase to the first floor does not comply with local planning and building norms. It is narrow and poorly constructed for the total height rise.
B	Bedrooms - As primary bedrooms, these need appropriate ventilation.
C	Balcony - The balcony is hazardous with no guardrails or safety parapet.
D	Bathroom - The bathroom needs repair of hot water installations and better ventilation.

Figure 11.9a-b. Examples of structural deficiencies Fernández family home. The plans on the right show the location of the problems identified in the photos (Numbers 1-9). The list “problems remaining” refers to those that should be resolved for the dwelling quality and structure to be properly regularized.

The case of the Fernández family demonstrates several important elements of self-building and consolidation in the *barrio*: the link between the physical development of

the dwelling and the growth of families; the cyclical nature of household dynamics due to the exit and return of family members; and the actions undertaken to obtain funds that will allow improvements to the dwelling.

In spite of the progressive consolidation of the dwelling, there are still things to be done to the interior spaces. Also, the building has some problems that put its occupants at risk: the electrical installations are exposed, the hot water boiler is dangerous, and several rooms do not have proper ventilation. There are also structural problems like the absence of guardrails on the balcony of the house and a staircase that does not comply with local codes (see Figure 11.9).

#### *The case of the González family.*

The González family came to Barrio San Jorge when it was impossible for them to continue to pay the cost of renting the apartment they occupied in the *barrio* of Barracas in the City of Buenos Aires. As noted above, the *barrio* of San Jorge started in 1985 with an invasion; lots here are 180 sq. meters each. That same year, the González family made an informal purchase of the lot adjoining theirs, doubling the size of their property to 360 sq. meters. Also that year the process of building the dwelling began, with the construction of one room and a bathroom (see Figure 11.10).

At this first stage, the dwelling was built with corrugated sheeting. By then the family consisted of the pioneer married couple (Homero and Elisa), and their two children (Mauro and Graciela). The family conducted all of its everyday activities in a single room. In 1989, the González family had enough money to proceed with the process of dwelling expansion and Elisa consolidated the first section of the house by replacing the walls of corrugated sheeting in the main room and original bathroom with bricks and plaster. She also built the foundations and the necessary reinforced columns that would provide the basis of the structure that would eventually become the definitive house (Figure 11.11). Starting that year, Elisa took primary control of the house construction, while Homero continued to be involved with the neighborhood organization that was working for municipal recognition and improvement of the *barrio*.

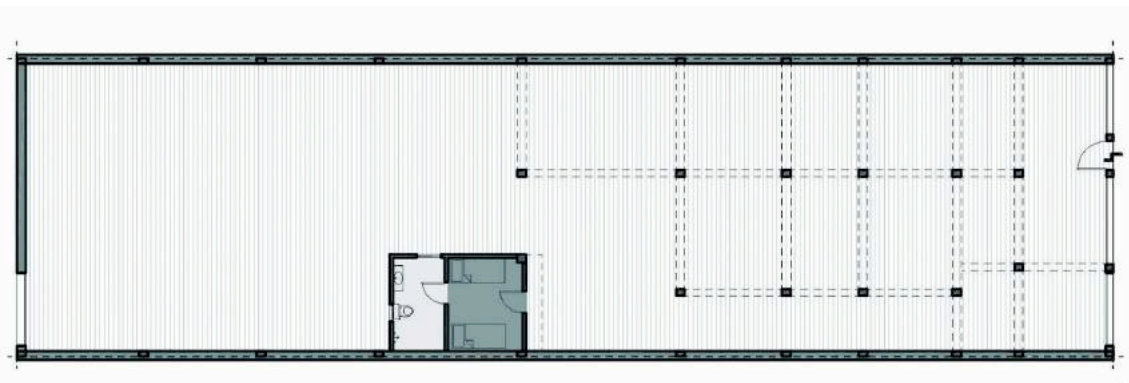
Two years later, in 1991, the family built a concrete roof (*losas*) and the walls (*cerramientos*) in a part of the structure, adding a bedroom and a kitchen-diner to the



building. The couple moved into the new bedroom, while their children continued to use the room next to the bathroom. The everyday activities of the family now shifted to the kitchen-diner (Figure 11.12). In 2001, the González household completed the roof (ceiling) and the walls of the structure that Elisa had laid out in 1989. In this context, the original kitchen was replaced by a bedroom, and two new bedrooms were built. Thus the dwelling now had four bedrooms. They also put in a new kitchen in another part of the dwelling, an extra bathroom, a living-dining room, and an entry hall for the house. The bedroom adjoining the original bathroom of the house was turned into a laundry room. These were the final modifications made to the dwelling (Figure 11.13).



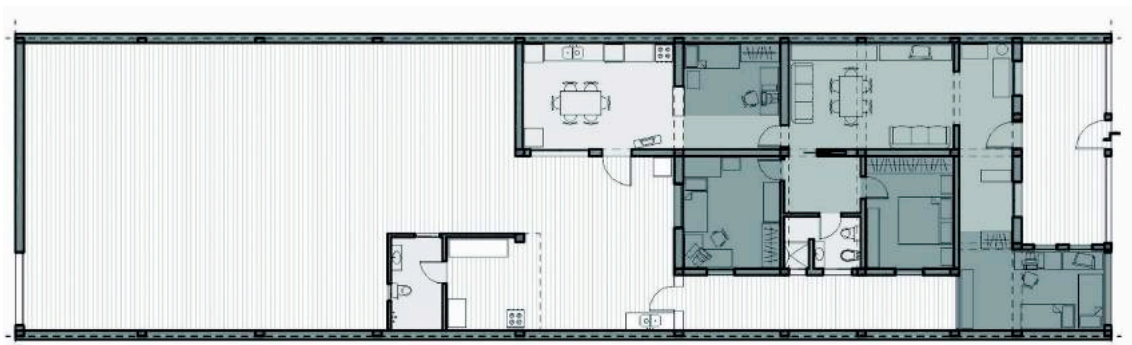
*Figure 11.10. Plan 6: Familia González, Barrio San Jorge, the original dwelling, 1985. The González family have put up the original structure of the house, which consisted of a single room (marked in dark grey) and a bathroom (in light grey).*



*Figure 11.11. Plan 7: Planning of the definitive structure of the dwelling and consolidation of the original dwelling, 1989. The González family have improved the original construction of the dwelling and created the future structure of the building (in grey dotted lines).*



*Figure 11.12. Plan 8: Walls of part of the structure, 1991. The González have put in a kitchen-diner (in light grey) and added a bedroom (in dark grey) to the structure completed by Elisa.*



*Figure 11.13. Plan 9: Enclosing the whole structure and refunctioning spaces in the previously built parts, 2001. The family has completed the building of the house by replacing the old kitchen-diner with a bedroom (dark grey), installing a new kitchen-diner (in light grey), two more bedrooms (dark grey) and a living room - dining room (medium grey) and a hallway (medium grey). The one room of the original building has been replaced by a laundry room.*

The case of the González family shows many of the typical features associated with self-building, especially when it takes place on larger lot sizes that, as in this case, permit the extensions to occur horizontally (rather than upwards). It also leaves a substantial part of the lot available as garden and yard space (Figure 11.13). In such cases as these, the dwelling has opportunities to evolve, adapting to current normative regulations and building standards. This demonstrates that when the lots are of a larger size it is simpler (in physical terms) to undertake extensions and refurbishment to the built space. The process of building the dwelling lasted twenty years, and in 2007 the families of Barrio San Jorge obtained titles to the their lots. At present, the family is

planning to build two more dwellings at the back of the lot, one for each of their two children. This initiative will allow them to overcome the accommodation problems of their children, who do not have the purchasing power needed to gain access to urban land through the market. However, it would also mean creating a new form of irregularity since the new dwellings will not meet the minimum size requirements for obtaining their own property titles.

## **NEEDS AND PRIORITIES FOR POLICIES RELATED TO CONSOLIDATED INFORMAL URBANIZATION<sup>10</sup>**

### *At the macro level*

In this section we review some of the main directions of our research findings during the course of our fieldwork, and the subsequent analysis of the materials that we collected. This will provide a basis on which to identify needs and priorities for policy implementation to improve the *barrios* and regularize ownership.

First, we find that regularization procedures involve at least three types of actors: the State, territorially-based organizations, and the families residing in the *barrios*. Historically it has been the territorially based organizations that have channeled the demand-making of the *barrios*, and on many occasions have been primarily responsible for obtaining improvements to the area – with or without government support. In this context it is necessary to keep the following priorities in mind:

- To involve different types of local actors in a multi-actor discussion, allowing agreements to be made on the planning and management of the process, and at the same time ensuring that each party assumes their corresponding responsibility.
- To implement mechanisms for communication, transparency and participation, which are fundamental for making the regularization procedures viable. By their very nature these procedures imply a minimum of agreement that will have to be sustained over time, on the basis of a consensus about investment priorities in public space, namely:

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<sup>10</sup> A preliminary version of these arguments was published in Di Virgilio, Arqueros and Guevara (2012c).

- layout of the streets;
  - priorities for infrastructure and collective facilities;
  - agreement about different house types for construction (in the case of relocations), that meet different family needs;
  - development of a system of solid waste disposal that will be efficient and sustainable over time.
- To form mechanisms of mediation and management of conflicts at the level of the *barrio* between families, groups of families, and even between members within a single family. A policy that does not take these inherent social conflicts into account, including in the physical design, will find it hard to be sustainable in the long run. The most common conflicts tend to be linked to the following: succession and inheritance of the property; subdivision by members of the family; concessions of part of the lot or of space for building; the maintenance of public spaces; respect for roads and spaces for transit; ventilation and illumination; and domestic connections to services of electricity, water, gas, cable TV, etc. It may be helpful to create some sort of register of these informal operations that is more agile and flexible than the formal property register, and which would provide a better basis for conflict mediation between families and family members.
- To centralize the regularization procedures in a government entity in order to facilitate development of the process and/or to improve the mechanisms of territorial implementation. Currently the absence of a single and unambiguous agency for regularization policy leaves these procedures with a great deal of discretion.

The *second* macro policy direction concerns the timing of the regularization procedures. In general, the development of these procedures tends to take a long time. Alongside other complex problems such delays are a product of the bureaucratic nature of public administrations. For all this it is necessary:

- To consider alternative forms of ownership and titling when the individual regularization of the property is not possible. These alternative forms might include collective or communal property holding that highlights the use value of self-built homes rather than exchange value and formal titles. These alternative forms of property ownership could also be guaranteed by the State, or even by a

private citizen who would receive some compensation in return for ceding the land. Fundamental here, is not so much the actual ownership of the land as much as security of tenure, and especially the perception of security of tenure. This is necessary in order to leverage financing for the improvement of dwellings by households. Security of tenure, or the perception of that security, is just one of several conditions for households in informal settlements to have sufficient incentive to allocate part of their income and labor to the upgrading and by follow-up strategies to strengthen the following home improvements: materials, design, refunctioning of environments, installations, ventilation, illumination, circulation.

- To prioritize the economic and financial demands by the community, and provide material support for strategies of progressive improvement.
- A possible downside in these less formal property rights is that it will reinforce the notion of “second class rights” (*derechos de segunda*), or exclude popular sectors from society by making it impossible for families to have access to individual private property.

The *third theme* refers to the persistence of neoliberal policies for the management of urban land, which have had the effect of producing an increase in the housing deficit of the *RMBA*.<sup>11</sup> In this context, and with horizontal expansion heavily restricted, the *villas* and the *asentamientos* — among other forms of land occupation — have experienced processes of densification, accompanied by subdivision of the lots and vertical extension of the dwellings. Both the building upwards and the subdivision of lots are closely related to family expansion, or to market-led opportunities to sell or rent informally. All these processes create obstacles to providing clear ownership rights and to accommodating informal settlements within current legislative frameworks.

Thus we need to re-think procedures of regularization of ownership, creating alternatives that will improve access to land for low-income populations. Regularization policies will be unable to cope if there are no clear mechanisms for

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<sup>11</sup> Cravino, Del Río and Duarte (2008) calculated the number of people affected by the housing deficit for the *RMBA* as a whole to be over a million in 2006.

providing access to land and housing that will help to decompress the demographic pressures and demands in these *barrios*. Alternative forms to open up greater access to urban lands include:

- Financing small-scale densification projects tailored to the economic capacity of the households taking part (e.g. micro credits). These should include technical and social assistance to allow for a more intensive residential land use in compliance with municipal, environmental and urban norms. This will also require the survey and registration of the structural conditions of existing buildings in order to evaluate the needs for improvement or replacement of the existing housing stock, and whether or not these can be resolved in situ or will require relocation.
- Creating a land and housing “bank” to facilitate the absorption of growth or enable relocation when necessary in order to open up street entrances and access, or undertake works of infrastructure and community services;
- Reducing demographic pressure through policies of: construction of “social interest” rental housing; sites and services together with appropriate technical, social and financial support for self-help; and opportunities for the collective self-management of housing and habitat.

#### *Meso and Micro policies for the villas and asentamientos*

The broader approaches outlined above provide a framework for the direction of public policies. However, each must address the specific nature of the *villas* and *asentamientos* through meso- and micro level policies, given the differences that we have described.

#### Meso level

In the case of the *villas*, before regularization of ownership can be undertaken concerted intervention is required to improve the broader housing environment. Often the City of Buenos Aires seeks to undertake regularization of title without previously improving the quality of life of the *barrio* residents (Barrio INTA Villa 19 is one such case).

- Before title regularization can be undertaken it is imperative to have surveyed and identified the configuration of street blocks, and the installation of basic service infrastructure (water, gas, electricity).
- Other precursors to title regularization are: improved collective transport between the *barrio* and in the surrounding neighborhoods, and the creation and/or improvement of public space (streets, plazas, recreational areas, etc.)

- If regularization procedures are to be *sustainable*, then it is important that the residents of the *villas* participate in the planning, decision-making and implementation of these municipal interventions.

#### Micro level (lot and dwelling)

As emphasized above, opportunities and priorities in rehabilitation at the micro level are different in the cases of the *villas* and the *asentamientos*. In the *villas* the most urgent tasks are directed at creating the conditions for a decent habitat, as a preliminary step towards title regularization. Here the most urgent interventions are:

- To respect established laws – including Article 31 of the Constitution of the City - that lay down the requirements and guidelines that cover policy interventions in the *barrios*, including recognition of the internal forms of organization that the *villas* have created.
- To provide the conditions that will allow and facilitate the processes of participatory planning and implementation in undertaking *barrio* improvements.
- To finance projects that derive from this participatory planning process.
- To provide technical support through interdisciplinary teams that will both empower and help *villa* residents in the housing development process.
- To promote and integrate procedures that will facilitate democratic access to land, providing opportunities for subdivision of lots and addition of floors to the dwellings in the *villas*.
- To offer interventions that will make dwelling improvement possible, raising minimum standards that will guarantee the safety and well-being of the families.

In the case of the *asentamientos*, priorities will be:

- Once the *barrios* have been improved, to formally recognize the land tenure of *barrio* residents (through property titles or other forms of recognition).
- To promote the democratic access to land occupancy, providing opportunities for subdividing lots and adding additional floors.
- To facilitate local organizations in order to create sustainable solutions and approaches to problems that may arise in the future.
- To provide interdisciplinary technical assistance in order to:
  - Ensure that internal lot subdivisions do not create negative impacts on the quality of life at the level of family or *barrio*.
  - Support families in the rehabilitation and refurbishment of their accommodation.

- To guarantee that the infrastructure networks (water, drainage, electricity, etc.) are adequate to accommodate internal growth and densification.
- To provide incentives for self-sustaining “green” technologies in the *barrios* in areas such as: recycling, energy, collection of rainwater for spot irrigation, etc.

It should be noted that the initiatives highlighted for the micro and meso levels can be achieved only if the structural changes described for the “macro” level are carried out first, and this requires local and regional authorities as well as society as a whole, to commit to democratic solutions and approaches that will help overcome urban inequality. In our study the first step will require the participation of the residents of both the *villas* and *asentamientos* in decision-making, planning and implementation of regularization policies, for infrastructure as well as of property titles and tenure security.

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