Spatial Justice: The Role of Housing and Social Policies in Social Inclusion and the Transformation of the Periphery

A Comparative Analysis of the Carambanchel Project in Madrid and Social Policies in Podgorica

Prostorna pravda: uloga stambene i socijalne politike u društvenoj inkluziji i transformaciji periferije

Komparativna analiza projekta Carambanchel u Madridu i socijalne politike u Podgorici

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Abstract Contemporary urban development is increasingly characterized by processes of intensive urbanization, wherein housing policies often fail to address the needs of the broader community. The predominance of market-oriented housing models has resulted in high-density developments concentrated in central urban zones, where residential space is commodified — treated as a luxury good rather than a fundamental human right. This approach exacerbates social inequality, leaving peripheral urban areas infrastructurally underdeveloped and socially neglected, lacking in both quality public amenities and affordable housing options. The absence of spatial justice in urban planning produces patterns of spatial segregation, further marginalizing vulnerable social groups and obstructing balanced, integrated urban growth. While Podgorica has, for decades, expanded its housing stock predominantly through market-driven strategies — placing considerable pressure on central areas while overlooking the developmental potential of the periphery — Carabanchel (Madrid) emerges as a paradigmatic counterexample. There, social housing has been conceived as an architectural, urban, and social experiment that challenges conventional models. By juxtaposing these two urban trajectories, this paper seeks to demonstrate that inclusive social housing strategies can serve as effective instruments for empowering peripheral urban zones and mitigating the spatial and social consequences of inadequate housing policies.

Keywords social housing; inclusive housing; housing policies; periphery; spatial justice.

Sažetak Savremeni urbani razvoj sve je više obilježen procesima intenzivne urbanizacije, u kojima stambene politike često ne uspijevaju da odgovore na potrebe šire zajednice. Dominacija tržišno orijentisanih modela stanovanja dovela je do visokog stepena zbijenosti u centralnim gradskim zonama, gdje se stambeni prostor komodifikuje i tretira kao luksuzno dobro, a ne kao osnovno ljudsko pravo. Takav pristup produbljuje društvene nejednakosti, dok periferni gradski prostori ostaju infrastrukturno nerazvijeni i društveno zapostavljeni, bez kvalitetnih javnih sadržaja i dostupnih stambenih rješenja. Odsustvo prostorne pravde u urbanom planiranju proizvodi obrasce prostorne segregacije, dodatno marginalizujući ranjive društvene grupe i onemogućavajući uravnotežen, integrisan urbani razvoj. Dok se Podgorica decenijama širila pretežno kroz tržišno vođene stambene strategije — opterećujući centralne zone, a zanemarujući razvojni potencijal periferije Carambanchel (Madrid) pojavljuje se kao paradigmatičan kontra primjer. Tamo je socijalno stanovanje koncipirano kao arhitektonski, urbani i društveni eksperiment koji dovodi u pitanje konvencionalne modele. Upoređivanjem ova dva urbana pravca, rad nastoji da pokaže kako inkluzivne strategije socijalnog stanovanja mogu predstavljati efikasne instrumente za osnaživanje perifernih zona, ublažavanje prostornih i društvenih posljedica neadekvatnih stambenih politika.

Ključne riječi socijalno stanovanje; inkluzivno stanovanje; stambene politike; periferija; prostorna pravda.

1 Introduction: Theoretical Framework and Concepts of Social Housing

The theoretical framework of social housing architecture encompasses several key perspectives, ranging from social and economic, through urban planning and architectural approaches, to the broader cultural and political context. The need for social housing arises as a response to inequalities in housing policies and the growth of urban centers, which produce marginalized social groups. Social housing is essentially interpreted as an instrument for realizing the right to housing, a right recognized in numerous international documents, European charters, and national legislations (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), UN-Habitat (2020), European Federation for Public, Cooperative and Social Housing, etc.). In line with this, the aim of this research is to analyze the role of housing and social policies in achieving social inclusion and the transformation of peripheral urban areas, using a comparative case study of Carabanchel in Madrid and current social housing policies in Podgorica, within the context of urban expansion. Accordingly, several research questions arise, focusing on how inclusive planning approaches contribute to spatial justice in peripheral areas, and how these policies foster balanced urban development. Given that social policies significantly influence spatial justice and the level of social inclusion, the central hypothesis of this paper can be formulated as follows: *Peripheral areas that are included within social and housing policies achieve a higher degree of social inclusion and contribute to more balanced urban growth*. In order to credibly conduct a comparative analysis between Podgorica and Carabanchel in Madrid, it is necessary to establish evaluation criteria and an analytical framework, which primarily include urban, architectural and social aspects. Moreover, it is also essential to understand the political, legal, and institutional frameworks surrounding Podgorica and Carabanchel, as they play a key role in the implementation of social policy. In addition to the comparative case study analysis, the methodological framework of this research includes qualitative and quantitative methods, which include the analysis of legal and policy documents, as well as urban and social policy frameworks, combined with spatial analysis methods. It is very important to emphasize that the idea of this paper is to look at the positive and negative circumstances that emerged as a result of the Carabanchel project, with a focus on the spatial, social, political and economic context, which can serve as a model example for observing social policies and the engagement of the periphery. The purpose of the research is therefore to draw conclusions from a comparative study of the two cases, aiming to identify strategies that can promote a fairer and more equitable development of the city. Hence, the goal of this study is to understand which urban planning strategies, architectural interventions, and policies specifically contribute to this objective, based on both positive and negative experiences, as illustrated by the case of Carabanchel in Madrid, which serves as the core focus of the research. To better understand the research context, the study begins with an analysis of the historical development of social housing.

The development of social housing architecture has been shaped by different theoretical paradigms. Modernism offered the concept of standardization, rationalization, and functionality, where housing was viewed as a "machine for living." Le Corbusier (1923) advocates this idea in his work *Vers une architecture*, later exemplified in the residential project *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseille (1952). However, criticisms of the uniformity and dehumanization of these models, especially after the Second World War, led to new postmodern approaches. This is reflected in the iconic case of the demolition of the modernist housing project of Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis in 1972. Postmodernism insists on acknowledging local identity, community, and a diversity of typologies.

Figure 1a A view of Pruitt Igoe; children visiting the library. Source: Alex Ihnen, 2011.; **1b** The demolition of Pruitt-Igoe public housing buildings, 1972. Source: Alex Ihnen, 2011.; **1c** Situation Pruitt, slums in St. Louis. Source: Igoe Myth, United States Geological Survey (USGS), 1968.

Figure 2a Grantorps bostadshus, Flemingsberg, architect Hans Matell and Leif Johansson, 1973. Source: Holger Ellgaard, 2021.; **2b** Hagaludsgatan, Hagalund - Solna in Stockholm, 2021. Source: Sniper Zeta, 2021.

Harvey (2008) emphasizes that housing should not be regarded solely as a market commodity, but rather as a right, while Castells (1983) highlights the role of housing as part of social policy and an instrument of redistribution. The complexity of the topic requires a broad and diverse review of the literature, which covers the fields of urbanism, architecture, political-economic criticism, socio-legal frameworks, community theory and the ethics of space, and the like. Among contemporary theories, the theories of Sassen (1991), which deal with global urban inequalities, stand out; her contemporary theoretical perspective points to the role of the real estate market and global capital in suppressing social housing (2014). Rolnik (2019) criticizes neoliberal housing policy, privatization, and the commodification of space, particularly in the context of post-socialist and global developments. Aalbers (2016) also offers a strong critical assessment of the instrumentalization of housing for financial purposes, which violates the principle of social justice. A very relevant theoretical reference is Soja (2010), who develops Lefebvre's concept of spatial justice, insisting that the right to the city is not only a political issue but also a geographical one. Fainsten (2010), on the other hand, establishes a normative model of urban justice based on democratic processes. Combining urban, sociological, political-economic approaches, Madden & Marcuse (2016) offer a theoretical manifesto, insisting that housing must be treated as a right, not a marketable commodity. Roy (2010) theorizes about urban poverty, pointing out the connection between social housing and the politics of inequality it implies.

Figure 3 Gellerupparken Block B4, Aarhus, 2019. Authors: Vandkunsten & Transform. Source: Helene Høyer Mikkelsen, 2020.

In addition to the theoretical framework, practical examples of successful policies will be presented below. Scandinavian countries, with their cooperative housing models, demonstrate how social policy can shape long-term and inclusive housing systems, combining public responsibility, social integration, and sustainability. Among the best-known examples is the *Million Programme* (Figure 2) in Sweden (1965–1974), during which 650,000 new housing units were built and made affordable to a wide range of citizens — working-class families, students, and immigrants — all of which were subsidized by the state.

Denmark is known for its cooperative housing model (*almene boliger*), where residents purchase a share in housing complexes, thereby acquiring the right to live under more favorable conditions, primarily intended for the middle and lower social classes. The Gellerup Plan is one of the largest housing projects in Denmark (1968–1972); conceived as a satellite city, with 2,448 apartments in two neighborhoods, the project holds unique architectural value (Figure 3). Norway developed a national social housing strategy between 2014–2021 that focused on several key goals: reducing the number of homeless people, improving housing conditions for children and young people, and enabling people with disabilities to live comfortably. Finland is also a global leader in social housing policies, demonstrated by the *Housing First* model in homelessness policy, which ensures permanent housing for people without a home (Figure 3). Other Contemporary approaches establish participatory design models (Turner, 1976), sustainability (the Vauban district in Freiburg; Figure 4), and flexibility (Aravena, Elemental, Chile) as leading concepts. In the latter, Aravena, the architect, builds half of the house, leaving the other half for the user to adapt according to their own needs (Figure 5).

Within contemporary architectural and urban discourse, the spatial dimension of social housing offers various concepts. However, the misplacement of social housing in the urban core can lead to social segregation and ghettoization. In this sense, the architecture of social housing also carries a strong social and cultural role, since the success of solutions is reflected not only in creating spaces for living but also in generating spaces that encourage interaction, inclusion, and social cohesion. Sennett (2012), for instance, emphasizes the importance of the "open city," where different social groups communicate through the city's shared spaces. Within this paper, social policies will be analyzed through the

Figure 4a Corporación Nacional de la Vivienda, Ciudad de Dios (basic core units designed for self-built extensions), 1958, Lima, Peru. Courtesy of Servicio Aerofotográfico Nacional, Peru. Source: Courtesy of National Aerophotographic Service, Peru, 1958.; **4b** El Ermitaño barriada: constructing a provisional dwelling, using a framework of wooden poles that will support esteras bamboo mats, 1962, Lima, Peru. Source: John F. C. Turner Archive, 1962.

Figure 5a Elemental's Quinta Monroy housing – original façade. "Half a House" concept. Original units built by Elemental. Source: Cristobal Palma, 2006.; **5b** Expansions to the original units completed by the residents. Source: Cristobal Palma, 2006.

comparative example of Podgorica and the Carabanchel project in Madrid, with an emphasis on strengthening the periphery and social cohesion, where social housing has the potential to transform the periphery from a space of marginalization into a space of empowerment. In this way, the possibility of whether the periphery can become a dynamic and equally integrated part of the city will be reconsidered, whereby the architecture of social housing acts not only as a response to the housing crisis but also as an instrument of social and spatial justice.

2 The Periphery as a Space of Marginalization: The Role of Spatial Policies in Empowering the Periphery

The periphery is often viewed as a space of exclusion. Already in Lefebvre's theories, the spatial organization of the city appears as a reflection of social power relations. In this sense, the periphery becomes synonymous with lower quality housing and living, carrying with it the connotation of ghettoization and social homogeneity (e.g. French *banlieues*). However, what if we perceive the periphery as a space of potential and innovation? In contemporary architectural theory and practice, the empowerment of the periphery is not seen solely through the physical renewal of space but also through the creation of conditions for social inclusion, economic sustainability, and the cultural affirmation of local communities. In this way, the periphery ceases to be a passive product of urban expansion and becomes a space of opportunities, experiments, and emancipation. In this study, and in line with the outlined thematic framework and research objectives, the urban periphery is examined through two key dimensions: participatory planning models, and innovative housing typologies and spatial interventions. Social housing, in particular, can serve as a model that operates on multiple levels: spatial integration, social inclusion, economic empowerment, culture, and identity. Treating the periphery as a dynamic space rather than merely a place of residence is a key indicator of success, as it avoids the effects of segregation and achieves social cohesion and community strengthening. Thus, empowering the periphery goes beyond classical urban patterns of city expansion and instead implies redefining the periphery as a legitimate and vital part of the urban fabric, where innovation does not emerge from the center but where new values are articulated at the margins. In this way, architecture assumes the role of a catalyst for transformation, while

the periphery becomes an opportunity for the future development of the city.

Numerous contemporary theorists question the meaning and role of the periphery in the dynamic development of the city. Harvey (1973) emphasizes that neoliberal urbanism favors the center while the periphery remains socially excluded, serving as a reflection of social and economic segregation. In this sense, the periphery is a site of class inequalities, where inclusive planning and the redistribution of resources can lead to urban justice. De Certeau (1989) interprets the periphery as a "tactic of using the city," from which the city's identity and resilience are built. Castells (1996) sees the periphery as both spatially and digitally excluded, while Jacobs (1961) criticizes monofunctional and neglected peripheries that degrade social life. Indeed, Jacobs advocates for the creation of vibrant, diverse peripheral neighborhoods with social and spatial variety. Likewise, Alison and Peter Smithson, along with van Eyck (1967), criticize modernist housing and planning models that marginalize the periphery. Rem Koolhaas, on the other hand, views the periphery as a space liberated from the rigid forms of the center, where spaces of freedom and flexibility are created. In the context of globalization, Sassen (1991) sees the periphery simultaneously as a space of exclusion and as a potential labor pool that enables the functioning of the center. Viewing the periphery as cultural capital that can develop outside the center, Bhabha (1994) interprets it as a site of "hybrid identities," where different cultures intertwine to produce a new cultural space, while Said (1978) perceives it as the "culture of the other." Contemporary urban theories also examine how models of urban growth and open economic systems influence the dynamics of development between the city center and peri-urban areas within the context of sustainable development. The authors of the book *Sustainable Development in a Center–Periphery Model* (Gabriel, 2024) employ an economic model to study the periphery, highlighting the strong interdisciplinary nature of this topic. Furthermore, new urban theories explore the potential of the periphery through patterns of ecological adaptability and the use of resources such as water, energy, and land (Ugalde-Monzalvo, 2024). When it comes to architectural and urban design concepts, the research focuses on opportunities where the periphery offers new perspectives through an innovative critical pedagogical platform that integrates theory, research, and architectural practice (McEwan, 2025). Additionally, numerous global initiatives have initiated discussions on balanced urban growth, emphasizing the need to integrate the periphery as an essential part of the urban fabric. UN-Habitat (2020) underscores the importance of sustainable urbanization, providing guidelines for policy frameworks that can strengthen peripheral areas through sustainable urban development. Examples of good practice such as Carabanchel (Madrid), Quinta Monroy in Iquique (Chile), and *Gemeindebauten* in Vienna, through social policies, architectural and urban concepts, did not lead to the degradation of the periphery, and serve as proof that through integral planning, the periphery can become an equal part of the urban fabric.

3 Carabanchel, Madrid: Social and Spatial Effects

The social housing project Carabanchel in Madrid represents a paradigmatic example of contemporary housing architecture on the urban periphery. The housing complex is located on the southern outskirts of the city and emerged in the early 2000s within the framework of a major urban expansion plan, the so-called *Programa de Actuación Urbanística (PAU)*. This plan was a response to the growing demand for affordable and quality housing, in the context of rapidly rising property prices and increasing social inequalities in Madrid. The client for the project was the municipal housing institution EMVS (*Empresa Municipal de Vivienda y Suelo de Madrid*), tasked with offering a new concept of social housing through architecture and peripheral planning. The project was part of a broader public housing program subsidized by the city, where a new concept of peripheral neighborhoods was initially intended to house young people (under 35), families with children, working-class families, people with disabilities, and socially vulnerable groups (such as single parents and victims of violence). The central idea was that social housing should by no means signify lower architectural quality but rather serve as a laboratory of contemporary architecture. The core policy ensured that apartments were rented at significantly lower prices than market rates, supported by municipal subsidies, with a point-based system introduced for priority categories. To avoid ghettoization, families of different incomes and backgrounds were deliberately mixed. Lease contracts were initially signed for 5–7 years, after which tenants, if they had not found better solutions, could purchase the apartments. Most architectural solutions were obtained through architectural competitions. For instance, the 82 Viviendas en Carabanchel (2003) project won with the idea of designing 82 different housing units. Another winning project, 141 Viviendas en el P.A.U. Carabanchel by Morphosis (Figure 6), as an alternative to monotonous high-rise blocks explores a radically different social model that integrates the topography of the landscape and the village. The public housing project 88 Social Housing (FOA – Foreign Office Architects) is known for its 67 apartments and the flexibility of its modular system (Figure 7).

A competition-winning project by the studio Extudio comprises 102 housing units with a large shared courtyard, garden, and swimming pool. It is based on a flexible housing module that allows for the expansion of the basic unit by adding "bucket" construction modules for additional bedrooms. This enables a construction system with aluminum molds, allowing rapid assembly without cranes. Additionally, Carabanchel 24, known for its container-based architecture concept, forms part of an initiative to revitalize the industrial area (Figure 9).
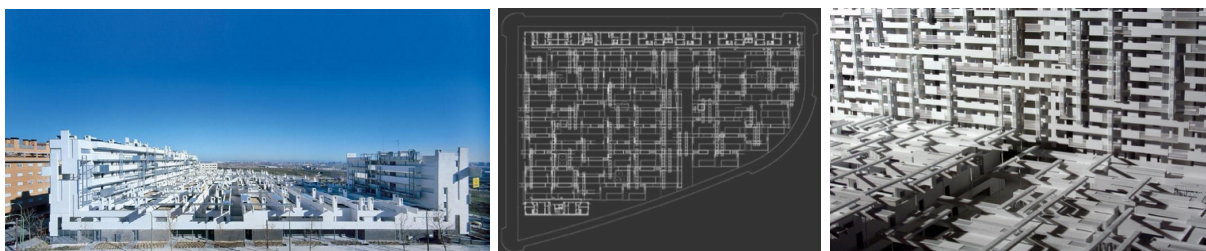
Figure 6a Morphosis: Social Housing in Madrid. Source: Morphosis Architecture, 2006.; **6b** Social Housing in Madrid – site map drawings. Source: Morphosis Architecture, 2006.; **6c** Social Housing in Madrid – model. Source: Morphosis Architecture, 2006.

Figure 7a 88 Social Housing in Carabanchel, Madrid, FOA – Foreign Office Architects. Source: Duccio Malagamba F. Andeyro & A. García, 2006.; **7b** Facade detail. Source: Duccio Malagamba F. Andeyro & A. García, 2006. **7c** Room interior with a terrace. Source: Duccio Malagamba F. Andeyro & A. García, 2006.
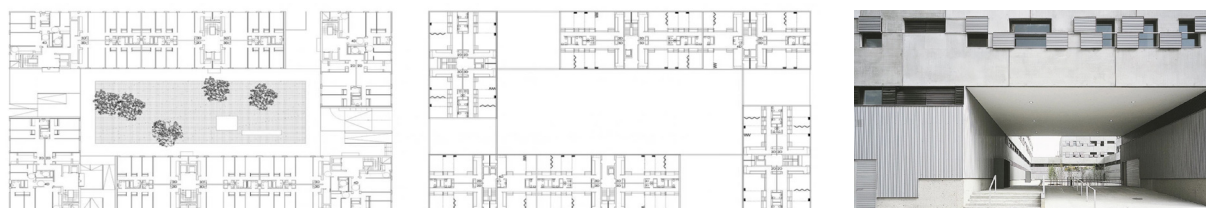

Figure 8a 67 Social Housing in Carabanchel, Madrid, Aranguren + Gallegos Arquitectos, first floor Source: Aranguren and Gallegos Arquitectos, 2003.; **8b** 67 Social Housing in Carabanchel, Madrid, Aranguren + Gallegos Arquitectos, second and third floor. Source: Aranguren and Gallegos Arquitectos, 2003.; **8c** 67 Social Housing in Carabanchel, Madrid, Aranguren + Gallegos Arquitectos, entrance. Source: Eduardo Sánchez, 2003.
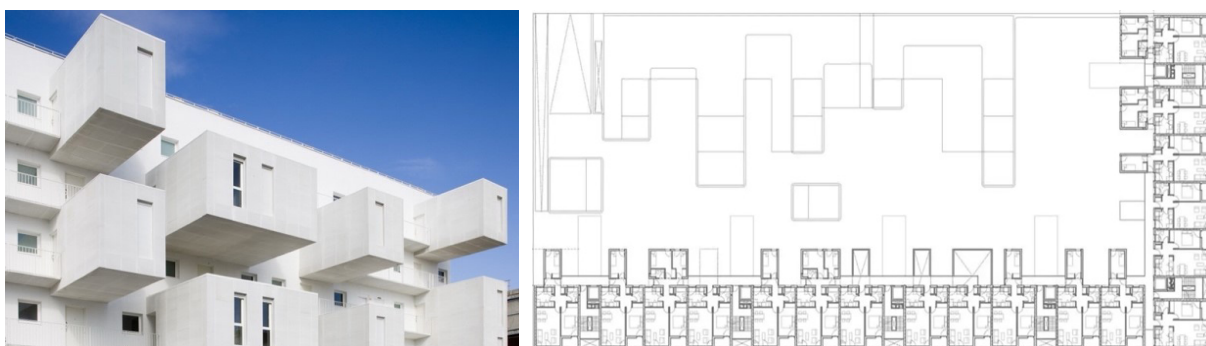

Figure 9a 102 Social dwellings in Carabanchel, Dosmasuno Arquitectos – facade. Source: Elena Bianchi, 2022.;
9b 102 Social dwellings in Carabanchel, Dosmasuno Arquitectos – plan. Source: Dosmasuno arquitectos - Ignacio Borrego, Néstor Montenegro and Lina Toro, 2007.

The overall aim of the entire project was to demonstrate how social housing could surpass minimum standards and become a field for architectural experimentation. Residential blocks, organized around shared courtyards and gallery access, offer diverse apartment typologies, including duplex units. In this way, Carabanchel functions as a laboratory for exploring the possibilities of dignified, functional, and innovative housing within the constraints of a limited budget.

On the other hand, it is important to consider the urban context of Carabanchel, which is typical for the peripheries of large metropolises. It is a planned neighborhood, connected to the city center through new transport routes. Although the architectural vision included abundant shared spaces, the lack of social infrastructure such as schools, healthcare facilities, and cultural amenities revealed the limitations of planning that focused primarily on the residential function. Despite being a spatially successful architectural experiment, such a periphery remains a site of partial solutions. This demonstrates that an architectural concept alone is not sufficient, and that in the absence

Miličević, et al. Spatial Justice: The Role of Housing and Social Policies in Social Inclusion and the Transformation of the Periphery: A Comparative Analysis of the Carambanchel Project in Madrid and Social Policies in Podgorica

ACTA ARCHITECTONICA ET URBANISTICA

of adequate functions, the periphery can become a place of isolated housing.

In contrast, the *Gemeindebauten* social housing complex in Vienna (Figure 10) exemplifies the continuity of a successful social policy, offering high quality long-term subsidized housing with integrated public services from its inception to the present. This model shows that comprehensive, high-quality planning — combining diverse apartment typologies, public infrastructure, and long-term systemic support — results in a stable and functional peripheral urban environment.

Additionally, the IBA project in Berlin (Figure 11) stands out for its flexibility and experimental architecture, particularly when compared to newer social housing projects after 1990. Through mixed residential blocks and participatory models, different social groups are granted access to central areas, thereby reducing social segregation.

In summary, architectural innovation alone is not sufficient: without comprehensive social policies and long-term economic support, even the best architectural projects can become a problem rather than a solution. In this sense, Carabanchel, although architecturally excellent, illustrates the risks of monofunctional, isolated neighborhoods. This points to the conclusion that peripheral areas are not merely spaces of housing deficit but also potential fields for experimentation, social innovation, and urban development.
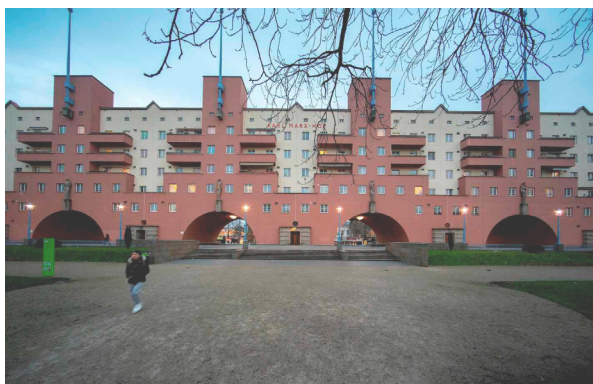

Figure 10a Karl-Marx-Hof, social housing complex built during the rule of Red Vienna between 1918 and 1934. Source: Joe Klamar, 2024.; **10b** Atzgersdorf, 1230 Vienna, Austria. Source: Harald Schilly, 2014.
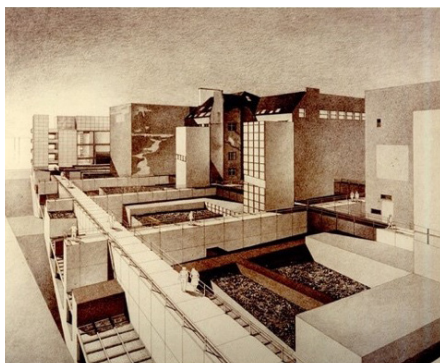

Figure 11a IBA social housing drawings, Berlin, West Germany. Source: Eisenman Architects, 1981-1985.; **11b** IBA social housing, Berlin, West Germany 1981-1985. Source: Eisenman Architects, 1981-1985.

4 A Critical Review of Market-Oriented Housing Policies: The Case of Podgorica

Housing policies in Podgorica (the capital city of Montenegro) reveal a significant discontinuity between the socialist period and contemporary post-socialist development. During the era of self-managed socialism, housing was treated as a fundamental social right and an integral part of social policy. Between 1950 and 1990, Yugoslavia built approximately 2 million social housing units, providing housing for around 8 million people. Housing construction was a strategic priority, ensuring accessibility and social security. The state and local communities were the main actors in providing

housing stock, with housing cooperatives and labor cooperatives playing a key role in the distribution of apartments. This enabled a relatively even territorial distribution of new housing capacities.

The first wave of uncontrolled growth of the periphery occurred during the regional wars in the 1990s, when formal and informal refugee settlements were formed (such as Konik camp, 1998-1999), concentrated on the outskirts of Podgorica. A large number of residents, in improvised conditions, created a large number of settlements, with low quality of life, and outside any architectural, legal and urban regulations. This is supported by numerous quantified data from MONSTAT (2022), as well as UN Habitat (2020), and the increase in the number of residents and households, as well as

Figure 12a Podgorica - City Kvart, collective housing complex built in 2015-2016. Source: Savo Prelević, 2019.;
12b Podgorica - Ljubović Kvart, collective housing complex built in 2019. Source: Andrea Jelić, 2020.

satellite images, the number of illegal connections to the network, extracts from cadastral and GIS services, etc. Today, these refugee camps have grown into huge illegal residential settlements, where refugees, Roma, immigrants and many other low-income groups live, and are an example of spatial and social segregation. All this suggests that the state had no clear strategy, no plan, and no control mechanisms, but rather these processes were spontaneous events. On the other hand, paradoxically, it was the state that created some of these refugee camps, without any urban, architectural or social policies.

Following the war crisis of the 1990s, and especially after Montenegro gained independence and foreign investments increased, social policies became characterized by the strong privatization of housing stock and the withdrawal of the state from an active role in construction and allocation. This is reflected in rapid, often unplanned construction in central urban zones, while peripheral areas remain marginalized, with poor infrastructure and a lack of comprehensive urban policies.

This creates a dual problem: an oversaturation of commercial housing in the city center, whose speculative development neglects broader social needs, and the peripheral areas developing spontaneously through individual construction and without proper urban control, deepening social inequalities (Figure 12).

Housing thus became a market commodity, which automatically led to rising prices on the market, and thus to unaffordable housing, and socio-economic disparities. In addition, Podgorica became a strong economic generator of development, causing very pronounced interregional migrations, which resulted in a sharp increase in the number of inhabitants, most of whom moved mainly from the northern cities of Montenegro. Such a migration wave was recorded by a very precise statistical increase in the population, but also in informal settlements (MONSTAT, 2022). The process of the legalization of buildings, initiated as part of state strategy to map illegal buildings and introduce them into the system, is also one of the quantitative indicators of the unplanned growth of the periphery (the were over 15,000 applications for the legalization of buildings in Podgorica in 2017-2023). Continuous migratory pressure on the capital contributes to the rapid expansion of informal settlements on the city's outskirts, while the state lacks policies for the prevention or control of such processes (Figure 13). Supporting evidence of inadequate social housing policies is that during the five-year period between 2020–2024, apartment prices increased by 65.8%, with the average price in Podgorica in 2024 reaching €1,938/m^2 and a growth trend of 4%, indicating that mass housing is oriented toward higher-income clientele. The inaccessibility of housing for many citizens, who migrate continuously to the capital, forces them to settle in peripheral areas, constructing illegal buildings of very poor quality, generating a trend of uncontrolled

Figure 13a Podgorica - Kakarićka gora, illegal houses built in 2005. Source: Srđa Boljević, 2024.;
13b Podgorica - Malo Brdo, illegal houses built in 1990. Source: Vesko Belojević, 2011.

urban growth and a negative image of the city. According to UNECE data, more than two-thirds of all informal settlements in Montenegro are concentrated in Podgorica and coastal areas. Illegal construction occurs in the periphery, where land is significantly cheaper due to the lack of basic infrastructure and utilities, and as such, is disconnected from the city. The absence of public housing programs and social policies positions Podgorica as a city where neoliberal housing patterns prevail, neglecting peripheral areas.

In the sense, we can conclude that alarming data on the uneven spatial development of the city, social inequality, and the uncontrolled development of the periphery, reflect current housing policies in Podgorica. This is indicated by the lack of a spatial strategy aimed at strengthening the periphery, as well as the disconnection of social policies with urban planning and sustainable development. Although there are legally established housing policies, their inadequate implementation is evident, which will be discussed below.

5 Discussion

In order to conduct a comparative analysis between housing policies in Podgorica and the above-mentioned reference examples, it is first necessary to place them within a broader context of influential factors. To explain their similarities, analogies, and differences, it is essential to examine the legislative, institutional, and planning frameworks, which differ to a certain extent between the cases. Accordingly, the research begins with an analysis of the relevant legal documents within Montenegrin legislation that address housing policy and sustainable development. The National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2030 (Government of Montenegro, 2020) is identified as a key document, emphasizing that, in addition to adequate spatial management, the quality of housing is a crucial factor for the sustainability of cities and the quality of urban life. The strategy further states that, by 2030, it is necessary to ensure safe and affordable access to adequate housing for all, while local governments must efficiently manage local social housing policies. In Chapter 3.4.6., it is noted that the participation of local governments in improving housing conditions must be strengthened, particularly regarding the implementation of the Law on Housing, as well as access to funds for the construction and maintenance of social housing units. Within this framework, attention should be directed toward solving housing problems faced by young families, large households, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, while also improving the quality of housing in informal settlements. However, demographic and housing data indicate a concerning trend: despite the slow growth of the population, the number of housing units increased by 27% between the two most recent censuses. These new units primarily belong to the commercial market, which remains unaffordable for a large portion of the population. Housing policy, as an important aspect of urban quality of life, is defined by the National Housing Strategy (Government of Montenegro, 2011). This law was intended to enable the government

and local municipalities to address the housing needs of vulnerable groups more effectively — those unable to solve their housing issues on the open market — and to bridge the gap between income levels and housing costs. Nevertheless, the shortage of affordable housing for low-income and young households remains evident, seriously undermining the quality of urban life. The same document, in section 2.5.3., emphasizes that combating social exclusion must be a strategic priority, which can be achieved through improving housing standards for vulnerable groups and strengthening social housing systems. Moreover, since the timeframe of this law has expired, it is clear that an update and adaptation to current needs is urgently required. On the other hand, the Law on Social Housing (Government of Montenegro, 2013) clearly defines the conditions for social policies and target vulnerable groups eligible for support. However, these initiatives are implemented case by case, without an integrated approach or market analysis that could identify the broader need for affordable housing at the city level. Although Article 11 of the law provides for the allocation of land for the construction of social housing, successful examples of this practice have not yet been realized — directly contributing to the persistent housing challenges discussed above. The National Housing Strategy (Government of Montenegro, 2011) also recognizes the need for more active engagement at both the local and national levels in addressing social housing issues and residential construction for vulnerable households. However, it identifies insufficient urban planning coverage and weak implementation of existing plans as key limiting factors, further encouraging informal construction. Chapter 4.1. of the Strategy outlines the vision and mission for national housing development, highlighting housing affordability — defined as the relationship between housing costs and income levels — and integration, referring to the contribution of housing to social cohesion and broader social stability. From the above, it can be concluded that, although social policies and housing frameworks in Montenegro are clearly defined in legislation, none of these laws have been effectively implemented through tangible examples of architectural or urban practice. Moreover, Montenegrin legislation lacks a clear link between housing policy and the empowerment of peripheral areas, treating these issues separately and in a fragmented manner. In contrast, housing policies in Madrid, exemplified by the Carabanchel project, emphasize local policies that actively integrate and engage the urban periphery, giving it new architectural and spatial value. The key difference lies in the implementation process — while in Montenegro these policies remain largely theoretical or limited to individual social cases, in Madrid there are established national and municipal programs that mobilize public land for major urban development projects aimed at the regeneration of urban areas, such as the recent conversion of a former prison site into 508 housing units (2023). This strategic and integrated approach to planning has become standard practice in Madrid, whereas in Montenegro, this category of housing and approach are absent from spatial planning documents — revealing a lack of alignment between legislative provisions and urban planning frameworks. In the urban planning documents of Podgorica, urban

sprawl, although a proven urban phenomenon, still does not exist as an argument for the creation of proactive and preventive housing policies, while the city periphery is still not treated in planning as having spatial potential for the possible sustainable and balanced development of the city. On the other hand, in Madrid, the legal framework for social housing is fully integrated into spatial planning, with the objectives of empowering the periphery, ensuring higher architectural standards of social housing, and promoting social cohesion and participation. This indicates the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of the process, which requires a fundamental change in the approach to planning, and which integrates architectural, urban, ecological, social and economic criteria for the analysis of the periphery.

6 Conclusion

In accordance with the set research objective, the hypothetical framework of the work can be considered fulfilled, given the satisfaction of most of the criteria by which the Carabanchel project can be considered a successful example. Also, according to the established methodological framework and criteria for comparison, it can be clearly stated that social housing policies in Podgorica still operate within a framework of partial and short-term solutions, lacking a clear strategy and vision that would simultaneously address social needs and the urban challenges of growth and expansion. In contrast to the comparative practices discussed earlier, where architectural and urban experiments, combined with clear policies, created space for more inclusive and sustainable forms of housing based on public interest and social justice, housing policies in Podgorica remain guided by market logic, focused on remediation rather than prevention.

Moreover, current housing policies, driven by market interests, contribute to maintaining a highly unjust city, in which spatial and economic segregation is further increased. The absence of strategic planning, institutional support, citizen participation, and housing programs leads to fragmented and insufficiently coherent measures, which in the long term cannot produce sustainable housing models. As a result, the periphery becomes a spatial field for illegal construction, producing social segregation, with spatial consequences that are permanent and detrimental to the city. This opens the space for future critical reflection on housing policies, which must be preventive, aligned with a balanced urban development dynamic, surpassing immediate needs, and aimed at long-term sustainable housing models that empower the periphery and make it an integral and important part of the urban fabric. In summary of the conclusions, and in relation to the experiences of the Carabanchel example, it is important to emphasize that social housing policies as a method of activating and strengthening the periphery in Podgorica must be:
- part of a broader strategy and planning document
- part of legislation related to affordable housing
- part of participatory and inclusive policies
- part of a sustainable housing concept
- part of contemporary architectural practice

This means the success of such solutions will not lie solely in the physical construction of housing units but in the process of integrating the community into the urban system, emphasizing accessibility to public amenities, participatory planning, and solutions that foster social cohesion. In this way, the periphery could become a resource for a fairer, more inclusive, and long-term sustainable urban development.

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Miličević, et al. Spatial Justice: The Role of Housing and Social Policies in Social Inclusion and the Transformation of the Periphery: A Comparative Analysis of the Carambanchel Project in Madrid and Social Policies in Podgorica

VOL. 1 · ISSUE 2 · DECEMBER 2025

53

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