Launched in 1968, the PREVI-Lima housing competition brought informal urbanisation to the attention of architects worldwide. The competition brief required the design of low-rise, high-density expandable homes, grouped in neighbourhoods. Here Sharif S Kahatt puts PREVI’s experimental project within the social, political and theoretical context of the time.
The aim of the PREVI-Lima was to produce a new generation of *unidades vecinales* (neighbourhood units) with spatial and formal qualities able to ultimately achieve social meaning and to create a sense of community through the dwellers’ appropriation of the houses and public spaces. *Unidades vecinales* were the most significant product of the Peruvian Modern Project, a political and cultural modernisation movement that gained momentum in the 1940s. This overlapping of Anglo-Saxon modernisation and traditional patterns endured for several decades, reaching its climax in the 1960s. Proyecto Experimental de Vivienda (PREVI) (1968–75) was a Peruvian government initiative and United Nations-sponsored project. It was the most significant effort to overcome the housing and urbanisation crisis in a third world country in those years, and its strategies are still relevant today.

Lima’s *barriadas*, or shantytowns, emerged in the 1950s and were one of the fastest growing forms of urban settlement for the poor. Between 1940 and 1972, the city grew from nearly 650,000 to 3.5 million inhabitants, an increase of approximately 500 per cent, and the number of squatters grew from 1 per cent to 25 per cent of the total population. In response to this, the Peruvian government launched a consulting group to identify the housing crisis problems and the potential solutions. The Comisión de la Reforma Agraria y Vivienda (CRAV) (1956–8) was led by architect Adolfo Cordova, advised by architect Eduardo Neira and anthropologist José Matos Mar. The housing deficit was the result of deep structural social and economic problems, and CRAV therefore proposed the improvement of the *barriadas* as the best way to tackle it.

Accordingly, the team promoted the idea of site-and-service developments (neighbourhoods with a minimum number of units that provided only basic services such as power, water and perimeter walls) and self-help construction to overcome the government’s lack of economic resources to provide mass housing. This resulted in the expandable housing unit concept, the *viviendas elemental* (elemental houses), that were to be completed progressively by their owners with technical assistance provided free of charge by the government through the Corporación Nacional de la Vivienda (CNV). CRAV also believed that the self-help process would connect the people with their houses as they built them. Hence from the mid-1950s, ideas of participation in architecture and urbanism began to take shape in Lima’s squatter towns. Indeed, even though participation has always been associated with advocacy and participatory planning ideas drawn from the international scene, British architect John Turner took from his involvement in housing in Peru an understanding of the possibilities of pluralistic and inclusive representation of citizens’ interests in urban development.

Turner worked in various Peruvian cities for government agencies between 1957 and 1965, dealing with emergency housing and on the improvement of the *barriadas* and self-build projects. This context of uncontrolled urbanisation and informal settlements was surveyed and exposed by him in his article ‘Dwelling Resources in South America’, in the now legendary 1963 issue of *∆*. Since then, and in Turner’s subsequent writings on the subject, *barriadas* and self-build have represented people’s fundamental freedoms: to budget one’s own resources, community self-selection, and to shape one’s own environment. According to Turner, enabling the individual to have these choices was the best way of realising freedom in the contemporary industrialised society. Similarly, ‘open form’ and ‘open design’ – as the ‘open work’ theory – were already present in urban housing experiments such as Ciudad de Dios (1954–8), the first site-and-service project in Lima by the Corporación Nacional de la Vivienda.
PREVI-Lima competition, 1969
The Peruvian and international proposals developed by the PREVI Office. The proposals show diversity in the design of the clusters and different interpretations of public space and pedestrian networks.

Another three projects were presented by:
P-24 Cooper, Grafe, Nicoli, Garcia B.
P-25 Ueda, Berzin, Castel, Talashiki
P-26 Cunihan, Seminario
Synthesising all these experiences, the PREVI competition was promoted by Peruvian president and architect Fernando Belaúnde and sponsored by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) between 1968 and 1975. Its objective was to outline solutions to the overwhelming informal urbanisation in developing countries and to create new models for economic housing. The main aim of PREVI’s director, the British architect Peter Land, was to adopt current thinking on prefabrication and mass-housing production and to adapt it to the constraints and sociocultural context of a developing world city such as Lima. Land, who had been teaching urbanism in Lima since 1964, had been working on preliminary studies for low-income housing since 1966, and in 1968 was all ready, along with his project office, to launch the PREVI international competition.

The competition brief was for a proposal for 1,500 housing units on a desert site of 40 hectares (98.8 acres) next to the Pan-American Highway, 8 kilometres (4.9 miles) north of Lima’s downtown. Plots were to be no smaller that 80 square metres (861.1 square feet) or larger than 150 square metres (1,614.5 square feet), with a built area between 60 and 120 square metres (645.8 and 1,291.6 square feet). The basic unit was to be the one- or two-storey patio house that could be expanded up to three storeys high, based on a standardised modular design for easy production. PREVI’s plan was for an initial settlement of 8,400 inhabitants, growing to a population surpassing 10,000. In order to minimise built space and maximise public space, an innovative approach was required. Sustainable factors such as orientation, ventilation, sun and noise control needed to be considered. The project also needed to serve different family sizes and interpret Lima’s traditional public spaces – plazas, church atria, paseos and alamedas – in order to encourage social interaction.

PREVI thus called for an urban-architecture project based on six main requirements: establishing high-density, low-rise urban housing as an urban principle; organisation of the neighbourhood based on the concept of ‘cluster’ around a plaza to generate a sense of community; interpretation of the notion of casa-que-cresce (expandable house), with a garden/patio to allow growth and change; a landscape plan with lighting and street furniture; prefabricated low-cost materials for mass production; and the envisioning of an entirely human-scale pedestrian environment neighbourhood with traffic separation.2

The jury met in Lima in September 1969 to elect the six winning proposals, though none was ever fully realised.3 Conflicts between Peru’s new military regime and UNDP officials meant a dead-end for PREVI. Although the PREVI Office produced a new neighbourhood plan for 2,000 units, including 24 of the originally proposed 26 clusters, the project was scaled down in scope and its potential impact greatly reduced, its 500 evolving units becoming just a test of the solution. Nevertheless, PREVI’s houses embody the hybridisation of the Peruvian Modern Project and also embrace the physical overlapping and rich negotiation of the complexities of local urban culture.

After PREVI, Peter Land left Lima and the project experienced a number of delays before finally being inhabited in 1977. Since then, only one unidad vecinal (Los Proceres) in the early 1980s deliberately followed this strategy in Lima, and the idea slowly vanished. However, though it may have been idle for many years, such a concept now seems to be serving as an important platform for fresh mass and popular housing initiatives around the world. One can see Turner’s ideas recaptured and developed in Mike Davis’ Planet of Slums; or more specifically, the whole idea of PREVI revamped in Chile’s Elemental housing competition in 2003 and the various city housing projects by Alejandro Aravena/Elemental office (see pp 32–7). Bold ideas seem to be back. ☙

Notes


3. The organisation of the competition, although effectively carried out by Peter Land and his team at Banco de la Vivienda, was officially run by the Colegio de Arquitectos del Peru and the International Union of Architects (UIA), and the announcement made by the Housing Ministry and the United Nations Organization on 23 September 1969. The members of the jury (Eduardo Barclay, Manuel Valega, Ricardo Malachowski, Darío González, Alfredo Pérez – Peru; José Antonio Coderch – Spain; Halldor Gunnlogsson – Denmark; Álvaro Ortega – UN; Carl Koch – USA/UIA; Ernest Weissman – UN; and Peter Land – UN) chose six ‘official’ winners of the competition. These were Atelier 5 (Switzerland), Maki, Kitutake, Kurokawa (Japan), Ohl (Germany), Mazzari, Llanos (Peru), Chaparro, Smirnoff, Wyzkowski, Ramirez (Peru) and Crousse, Páez, Pérez León (Peru). Although there was an official recognition of the winners, none of the winning proposals was built in its entirety; nor was the project divided between the six winners as suggested.

Alejandro Aravena graduated from the Catholic University of Chile, where he is currently Elemental-Copec Professor. He established Alejandro Aravena Architects in 1994. He was a visiting professor at Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) from 2000 to 2005. He is a member of the Pritzker Prize jury and has been named International Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). Professional work includes educational facilities, institutional, corporate and public buildings, museums and housing. Awards include the Silver Lion at the XI Venice Biennale, the Marcus Prize 2010, the Avomi Prize for Innovator of the Year and the Erich Schelling Architecture Medal 2006 (Germany). His work has been widely published and exhibited in lectures and exhibitions in more than 30 countries. Since 2006 he has been an executive director of Elemental SA, a for-profit company with a social conscience that works on infrastructure, transportation, public space and housing projects in partnership with the Catholic University and the Chilean oil company COPEC.

Ricky Burdett is a professor of urban studies and of political science at the London School of Economics (LSE) and a director of the LSE Cities and the Urban Age programme. He is also a global distinguished professor at the Institute of Public Knowledge at New York University. He is chief adviser on architecture and urbanism for the London 2012 Olympics and the Olympic Park Legacy Company, and was architectural adviser to the mayor of London from 2001 to 2006. He has curated numerous exhibitions including ‘Global Cities’ at Tate Modern (2007), was director of the 2006 Architecture Biennale in Venice and chairman of the jury for the 2007 Mies van der Rohe Prize. He is architectural adviser to the City of Genoa and a member of the Milan Expo 2015 steering committee. He is a council member of the Royal College of Art and sits on the mayor of London’s Promote London Board.

Fernanda Canales graduated from the Ibero-American University in Mexico City (1997), where she went on to become a professor of design and urbanism, and has an MA from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC) in Barcelona (2001). She is currently completing a PhD at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid. Her independent practice of architecture and research is based in Mexico City. Her office is currently engaged in both public and private projects, for which she has won several competitions, including the new CEDIM Campus in Monterrey as well as the new CEDIM Campus in Monterrey as well as the CEDIM Campus in Monterrey. She received an Honorific Distinction as best young architect in Mexico in 2004 and was included in MoMA’s ‘Small Scale, Big Change’ exhibition. She is currently a professor in public culture and urbanism in the Visual Arts Department at the University of California, San Diego, where she co-founded the Center for Urban Ecologies (CUE).

Derek Dellekamp founded Dellekamp Arquitectos in 1999, where he continues to be the creative mind behind each of the office’s projects. He also co-founded MXDF, a Mexico City-based urban research workshop, in 2004. From 2004 to 2005 he lectured as an adjunct professor in Mexican universities, and is currently a visiting professor at the Rice School of Architecture. Dellekamp Arquitectos is dedicated to the development and supervision of architectural projects regardless of scale or programme type with a rigorous research methodology. It aims to find unique solutions to the specific conditions of each project in order to maximise its intended budget, image, use, context and spirit. The coordination and collaboration with various disciplines such as engineering, graphic design, industrial design, environmental engineering and landscape architecture makes up a great part of its activities. The practice is also involved in ongoing architectural research and is constantly a part of the academic and teaching realms, as well as research studies, lectures, publications, biennales and exhibitions.

Alejandro Echeverri has been a professor and was the director of the Study Group in Architecture at the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana of Medellin (2002–3), and was an invited professor of urbanism at the ETSAB, Barcelona, from 1999 to 2000. His work received the National Architectural Design Award, given by the Colombian Architectural Association, in 1996, and he won the National Urban Planning Award given by the Colombian Architectural Association in 2008, the Urban Design Award from the Pan American Biennial, Quito, in 2008, and the Curry Stone Prize 2009. He was general manager of the Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano (EDU), of the municipality of Medellín from 2004 to 2005, and the director of urban projects for the municipality of Medellín from 2005 to 2008. In addition to his private practice, he is also a director of urbanMedellin, the University of EAFIT urban research centre.

Daniela Fabricius researches and writes on issues relating to the contemporary city, and is the editor and author of the book 100% Favela (Actar, forthcoming), which focuses on the favelas of Brazil and their urban context. She holds a BA in visual art and comparative literature from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and an MArch from Columbia University, and has taught at the Pratt Institute and the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently a PhD candidate at Princeton University’s School of Architecture.

Created in 1999 by fellow students (Fernando Forte, Lourenço Gimenes and Rodrigo Marcondes Ferraz) from the faculty of architecture and urbanism at the University of São Paulo, Forte, Gimenes & Marcondes Ferraz (FGMF) produces contemporary architecture without any restrictions regarding the use of material and building techniques, seeking to explore the connection between architecture, environment and humankind. No matter what the project, it prioritises the interdependence between the built object, its environment and the end user.

EquipoArquitectura is a team founded in 2003 by the Chilean Fernando García-Huidobro and Nicolás Tugas, and Peruvian Diego Torres Torrri, all of them architects from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. García-Huidobro and Torres Torri are also part of the Elemental team, a do-tank devoted to developing projects of social interest and public impact in Chile and, more recently, abroad. Tugas currently works at CCRS Arquitectes in Barcelona, which focuses on different scales of urbanism.

Jorge Mario Jáuregui is an architect-urbanist based in Rio de Janeiro. He graduated from the National University of Rosário, Argentina, and from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. He has been researching and working with the sociospatial division between Rio’s favelas and the rest of the city since the 1990s. He is also coordinator of the Architectural and Urban Studies Center of Rio de Janeiro, associate researcher at the Laboratory of Morphology SICYT-FADU/UBA Buenos Aires, and a member of the Art and Psychoanalysis Cartel of the psychoanalytic Letra Freudiana Institution in Rio de Janeiro. He is responsible for more than 20 projects of the Favela-Barrio (Slum-to-Neighbourhood) programme implemented by the Rio city government beginning in the 1990s. Since 2007 he has been working on two large-scale urban redevelopment projects in the communities of Complexo do Alemão and Complexo de Manguinhos for President Luiz’s PAC (Growth Acceleration Programme), which were opened in 2010. Current projects under development include site works related to the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games. He was the recipient of the Sixth Veronica Rudge Green Prize in Urban Design, from Harvard GSD, in 2000.
Adam Kaasa is the communications and outreach manager for LSE Cities. He is also a PhD candidate at the LSE Cities programme, focusing on ideas about architecture and urbanism in relation to political authority, media and circulation. He is the London coordinator for the NYLON seminars and conferences, a transatlantic intellectual working group between universities in and around London and New York, and teaches in the sociology department at the LSE.

Sharif S Kahatt is an architect and urban designer, founder of K-M Arquitectura y Urbanismo and professor in the Faculty of Architecture at the Catholic University of Peru. A graduate from Ricardo Palma University in Lima, he holds a Master of Architecture in Urban Design from Harvard GSD. He has taught studios and courses, published articles, given lectures and worked on projects in Peru, Spain, Mexico and the US. He is currently finishing his doctoral dissertation at the ETSAB, Barcelona, and works in Lima.

Gary Leggett is a designer currently based in New Haven, Connecticut. He received his BA in architecture from Princeton University and a master’s in urban planning from the Harvard GSD. In 2008 he received the Drucker Traveling Fellowship and travelled extensively in the Amazon, documenting his travels through film and photography. He is a former researcher of the Jan Van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, the Netherlands.

Enrique Peñalosa has lectured internationally in numerous environmental, governmental, urban design and policy and university forums, and has advised governments in Asia, Africa, Australia, Latin America and the US. His vision and proposals have significantly influenced policies in numerous cities throughout the world. He is currently president of the board of the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) of New York. He is a consultant on urban vision, strategy and policy. As mayor of Bogotá, he profoundly transformed the city, turning it from one with neither bearings, self-esteem or hope into an international example for improvements in quality of life, mobility and equity in developing world cities. He created the TransMilenio bus-based transit system; a network of bicycle paths; slum improvement projects; a land bank to provide low-income housing with quality urbanism; greenways and pedestrian promenades for low-income neighborhoods; radical improvements to the city centre; daily car-use restrictions during peak hours and an annual Car Free Day; formidable libraries and parks; and dozens of high-quality public schools, nurseries and community centres. He holds a BA in economics and history from Duke University, a master's degree in government from the National School of Administration (IAIP) in Paris, and a DESS in public administration from the University of Paris II.

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Adriana Navarro-Sertich is a graduate student in architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is also pursuing a master's degree in city and regional planning. Born and raised in Colombia, she received a BS Arch (Honours) from the University of Virginia in 2004. As a 2010 John K Branner Fellow, she has been travelling the world, focusing her research on sociocultural aspects of design, and specifically analysing the relationship between architecture, planning and informality.

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Patricio del Real is a PhD candidate in architectural history and theory at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP). His current research focuses on the construction of a Latin American imaginary through modern architecture during the early years of the Cold War. His second area of research engages contemporary vernacular practices, focusing on Havana, where he has also participated in the construction of informal structures. He has taught architecture since 1991 in the US and Latin America. He was previously the director of the Clemson University Architecture Center in Barcelona.

Fernando de Mello Franco obtained his PhD from the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at the University of São Paulo. He is principal at MMBB Arquitetos and a professor at São Judas Tadeu University, and was previously a visiting professor at Harvard GSD. His Watery Voids (2007) project received the Best Entry Award at the 3rd International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR). He is currently a co-curator of the 5th IABR (2012).

Sharif S Kahatt is an architect and urban designer, founder of K-M Arquitectura y Urbanismo and professor in the Faculty of Architecture at the Catholic University of Peru. A graduate from Ricardo Palma University in Lima, he holds a Master of Architecture in Urban Design from Harvard GSD. He has taught studios and courses, published articles, given lectures and worked on projects in Peru, Spain, Mexico and the US. He is currently finishing his doctoral dissertation at the ETSAB, Barcelona, and works in Lima.

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Hernando de Soto is currently president of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy, an internationally recognised think tank headquartered in Lima, which is committed to creating legal systems to help the poor access property and business rights. Named as one of the leading innovators in the world by Time and Forbes magazines, more than 20,000 readers of Prospect and Foreign Policy ranked him as one of the world's top 13 'public intellectuals'. He has served as president of the executive committee of the Copper Exporting Countries Organization, as CEO of Universal Engineering Corporation, as a principal of the Swiss Bank Corporation Consultant Group and as a governor of Peru's Central Reserve Bank. He has advised heads of state in several countries on property and business reform programmes, and is the author of The Other Path (1986), and his seminal work, The Mystery of Capital (Basic Books, 2000).

Supersudaca is a network of architects formed in 2001. Its nodes are based in Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Curacao, the Netherlands, Peru and Uruguay. Supersudaca's profile is increasingly diverse in subjects affecting the environment. Caribbean tourism, China's influence, direct action in public space and collective housing are some of its recurrent themes explored from Tokyo to Talca, from Cancun to Cambodia. It was reorganized with the support of the Ministry of Interior and the Rotterdam Biennale of Architecture Rotterdam (2005), the best research project at the Fourth Ibero-American Biennale (2004) and 'among the 20 architects that will change the future' by Icon magazine (2009). In the design realm, Supersudaca has obtained first prize in the international competition for the experimental social housing project in Ceuta, Spain (2006) and the Museum of Modern Art of Medellín (2010).

Patricia Romero-Lankao is a social scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in the US. She has developed a considerable body of work on urbanisation and the environment, and in particular on how urban development impacts our climate and water; what societal factors explain cities’ resilience to heat waves, atmospheric pollution, floods and sea-level rise; and more specifically on how particular cities manage and can better meet the challenges of reducing emissions while improving resilience to environmental impacts. She is one of the coordinating convening authors of the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s ‘Fourth Assessment Report’.
LATIN AMERICA AT THE CROSSROADS